As it happens, I can report on the operations of the Nomination Committee in 2008 both as its current chair and as someone who also served on the committee for the first four years of its operation after it took its current form (back in 1998, if my memory serves me). What is clear is that the AAA now has a nominations process in place that works quite well, in terms of drawing in a broad cross-section of our membership and producing effective leadership for the organization. At the same time, it is important for us to keep in mind that it is a process that works as a result of (i) considerable input from individual members and sections, (ii) the excellent work of the professional staff that supports the committee (Kim Baker), and (iii) an intense bout of work by the Nominations Committee itself.

As chair of the Committee in 2008, I benefited from having committee members who were diligent in doing their homework (reading the copious materials the Committee receives from potential nominees and their supporters) and collegial in their face-to-face deliberations. I could not have asked to work with a finer group of colleagues.

Starting with a pool of 76 potential candidates, the Committee in 2008 filled a slate of 36 nominations for 18 positions, in accord with the AAA By-Laws. Given the lengths of terms of AAA offices, and the ways they are staggered, it happens that once every six years, the positions of both president-elect and secretary are open in the same year; 2008 was such a year. In this context, the Committee was particularly pleased that the nominations process attracted such deep and diverse pools for these two AAA leadership positions.

One important practice that has emerged and been established for the Nomination Committee is that toward the end of its meeting, it takes stock of the whole slate, and often makes adjustments to it, before finalizing it as a recommendation to the Executive Board. Particularly important in this internal review of the slate is to examine the provisional slate of candidates for diversity, in terms of (i) minoritized social statuses, (ii) the discipline’s myriad quadrants and dimensions, and (iii) the institutional homes of candidates. In no one year are we ever able to be as successful in pursuing these complex dimensions of diversity as we would like, and I, as Chair, would have wished in particular to see us recruit more colleagues for the slate from Community Colleges. Yet overall, the Committee judged that it exercised due diligence in its pursuit of the unified goals of excellence-diversity, in filling the slate of 36 open slots for the 2009 AAA ballot.

If I have one concern as Chair of the Committee, it continues to be with the issue of insuring the confidentiality of the Nomination process. My own view, in this regard, is that the Secretary, as Chair of the Nominations Committee, needs to be the singular point person for communication with potential candidates and designated candidates, throughout the nominations and ballot process.
I also would stress the importance of maintaining the careful and effective balance that now exists in the roles of the Nominations Committee and the Executive Board. The Executive Board should continue to review robustly the Committee’s recommendations, but equally important is that the EB not displace (or put itself in the place of) the Nominations Committee, given that the Executive Board does not (and from a practical point of view, cannot) duplicate the work of the members of the Nominations Committee, in terms of reviewing all of the materials about potential candidates in the weeks before the Nomination Committee and then the Executive Board meets.

The bottom line of my report is then this: the Committee and the nominations process run very well, and we should not try to fix what has been working so well, in terms of our goals of pursuing excellence-diversity for AAA leadership. And finally: the one area where the process would benefit from even greater diligence is in maintaining the role of the Secretary as the singular point person for communicating with potential candidates and candidates, at all stages in the nominations and ballot process.