NASA 2001 Annual Report

The NASA Section represents approximately four thousand student members of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), and is the nation’s premiere anthropology organization run by and for students. NASA currently holds approximately 660 Members and is considered to be a mid-sized Section of the AAA. Over the last two years, I have served as NASA President and have contributed, with a team of student leaders, to increasing the number of active student members by offering quality academic programs, merit awards, scholarship benefits and additional kinds of student support. I will address some of these items below for my end-of-the-year report for the NASA Section.

NASA has started developing stronger leadership liaisons with other Sections in the AAA and has started working closer with our student communities at university institutions nationwide. Students can now report to NASA their school events, and students will soon be able to publish their scholarship and opinions on-line NASA’s upcoming e-journal. Despite the lowered Dues rate set at $1 (or $10 per year depending on individual AAA student status), NASA has still been able to offer our Membership an increase in academic and financial opportunities more so than in previous years through our “Carrie Hunter Tate Award” ($250 x 4 for under/grad), the “NASA Travel Grant” ($100 for qualified applicants), two invited panel sessions at the annual meetings and one special student-mentor workshop event. Furthermore, we are making great strides at informing our Membership and the public at large of our NASA activities and history, of some internal affairs and of pertinent outside opportunities through developing a presence on the Web in conjunction with an effective use of the monthly AN column publications. Our use of two listserves also helps us reach out to our Membership in a reliable fashion, although we are still searching for solutions to do so with greater time efficiency.

Several administrative things have worked very well over the past two years. The use of on-line ad hoc committees whereby three members and two backup members volunteer to commit to particular NASA issues/activities while implementing standard evaluation and decision procedures, generating final reports and following up on behalf of the NASA President and Executive Board. Voting within an ad hoc committee might involve giving each item for group consideration a 1, 2 or 3 score, or a green light or red light. The third person forms the tie-breaker. Backup members have no vote (unless it is yielded) but may participate fully in the online discussions and planning process. The President was kept up to date on each ad hoc committee’s progress and helped to coordinate how and when their reports/decisions could be presented to the public though the appropriate channels. These committees have been closed to Officers only.

When I noticed a growing request for volunteer opportunities with NASA from our Membership, I decided to create a Volunteer Coordinator (VC) position that was approved by the Officers and voted into the Bylaws in 2001, by the NASA Membership. I first tested this position out with Adam Fish who had been very active during my tenure and was wanting something to do with NASA leadership. The goal is to have an elected Officer coordinate a limited number of volunteers on renewable six-month rotations to participate effectively with the workload of NASA Officers, however without necessarily crossing into the high level of service expectations.
or responsibilities associated with elected/appointed NASA Officers who typically receive voting privileges and some annual travel reimbursement for annual meetings. I thought that reducing Officer workload and answering to student needs would also provide a basis under which each volunteer could later run for NASA Office. The results proved to be more difficult than I had imagined. A solution that might benefit the VC position is to be in tune with all of NASA’s activities and to be participating on several ad hoc committees herself/himself so as to know best how to integrate students into the fabric of the NASA leadership team while yet maintaining the confidentiality of NASA affairs.

I have experienced a team of student leaders who have worked through a rough two-year period of transition. I am the last NASA President to be elected into office and had no Vice President for support and a lot of officers that were unable to fulfill their duties. Furthermore, we were all working with no standardized documentation of NASA procedures and affairs (except for the NASA Bylaws) or feedback from former NASA Officers, and suddenly this year have switched to a President-elect (2-year term) leadership arrangement.

Carla Guerron-Montero appointed to Office as Nominations Chair by Jonathan Reed in 2000, has been responsible for chairing the ad hoc committee that oversees the development and administration of the NASA “Carrie Hunter Tate Award” for the last two years. Two awards were offered during 2000, at $200.00 for one graduate and one undergraduate. This year the committee (including the same members: Jonathan Reed, Lori Johns) offered 4 awards (two for each level) in the amount of $250.00, however only one graduate student applied and was qualified to receive the award. NASA should strive to secure a greater pool of applicants in future years. Student photos at NASA’s award ceremonies and short features on successful applicants are to be exhibited on-line our Web site with permission.

Carla was also responsible for putting together NASA’s spring elections slate whereby we had two candidates run for separate offices and whereby two amendments made it into the NASA Bylaws (VI.1, redefining the list of NASA Officers to include President-Elect and Volunteer Coordinator, and; VI.5 defining the duties and role of the new Volunteer Coordinator position). It is ideal for NASA to present a complete and full slate every year in time for the AAA’s Spring Ballots. At this point, however, NASA has yet to secure its second President-Elect Officer who will serve the next two-year term (from November 2001 to November 2003); no appointment for this Seat has been made.

During the NASA Board Meeting in 2001, I raised the issue of tenure duration for our new President-Elect Seat, but I did not push this issue so as to avoid any confusion or create any unnecessary tension. The fact is that NASA needs to appoint and have in Office at this time, the next President-Elect if these are indeed to be 2-year positions (as has been posted in the AAA’s Spring Ballot). Eric Haanstad is currently serving his second (and last?) year in the elected position but has no Vice President or trainee (who is to help with consistency in leadership).

Eric Haanstad as the President-Elect (elected for the November 2000-2002 term) for NASA worked with Sharon Minchuk (Treasurer) to develop the 2001-2002 Budget. Unfortunately this year, Sharon did not attend the annual meetings and the budget was not presented before the NASA Board Members in print nor to our Members at the NASA Business Meeting. I suggest
that it may be a good idea to have this information published and handed out at each Business Meeting for the simple sake of being transparent about how Officers handle Section funds.

Eric undertook the responsibilities of appointing interim Seats for the 2001-2002 tenure. A Call was made for the following positions: Secretary-Treasurer (filled by Chad Morris); Editor (Tara Hefferan); Undergraduate At-Large Representative (Kathy Mancuso). He also appointed Margaret Dorsey and Valerie Yavornitzky as the Nominations Committee Undesignated Seats in the same call. At the 2001 Board Meeting, the Executive Committee agreed that a specific appointee be sought to serve as NASA Webmaster (Kathy Mancuso volunteered for that responsibility). Although not advertised in the Call that was sent out to Members via the NASA listserve, Lori Johns and Carla Guerron-Montero were re-appointed to serve in the 2001-2002 Seats again as Program Editor and Nominations Chair respectively. The potential for the upcoming fiscal year looks very positive as a mixture of seasoned Officers will fit in well with fresh ones. NASA Officers may want to review how and whom should appoint Seats (e.g., Do Bylaws suggest Nominations Committee be appointed by the Nominations Chair?) and clarify whether appointing experienced students for a Seat takes precedence over offering non-incumbents new opportunities to serve in NASA leadership positions.

An ad hoc committee of peer reviewers (Jonathan Reed as chair, Carla Guerron-Montero and Jason Gonzales) was created to review and address a student’s request to publish academic research on-line NASA’s Web site. Upon thorough review, the committee voted not approve the submitted article for publication on-line NASA’s Web site. As a result, a call was made to establish set standards for reviewing and handling student requests for publishing their scholarship or having their scholarship reviewed by NASA Officers. Action that later ensued was the formation of a committee for the “NASA On-line Student Journal” that is now being spearheaded by Eric Haanstad.

Lori Johns appointed to Office as Program Editor by Jonathan Reed in 2000, was trained for her position under Jeanie Mobley-Tanaka (a former Officer who volunteered to help out NASA for a year after her tenure), but organized a high caliber academic program for the NASA Section at the 2001 annual meetings. She formed an ad hoc committee consisting of Carla Guerron-Montero, Jonathan Reed, and Eric Haanstad. One of our invited paper sessions that Lori edited this year offered a student’s point of view to an inspirational session that took place the preceding year (in 2000). The second paper session develop the theme Generation NeXt that meshed with the AAA annual meetings theme and provided an invited forum for the presentation of cutting edge student research. NASA was also able to cosponsor a session with the medical anthropologists’ section.

I helped NASA organize its first student-mentor workshop event in 2001 that was co-sponsored by the AAA Executive Office (in name only, without financial support) in response to years of student requests for the need of mentorship and new avenues for academic advice. (The workshop call and other documentation distributed to professors and students is available elsewhere for further details.) Unofficial results: 13 students, 7 mentors, and 4 volunteer workshop counselors participated to make this event a successful two-hour learning endeavor. Evaluations and follow up are to occur after the annual meetings. Student-mentor workshop ad hoc committee was Jonathan Reed, Lori Johns, Carla Guerron-Montero and Desiree
Martinez. Anticipated expense was to include catering only, however, hotel copy services were required at the last second (I paid and am requesting reimbursement). Holding this co-sponsored event (with AAA or some other Section) again will require a more efficient use of time and planning since the cooperation of a large network of individuals is involved. Furthermore the organizer should own her/his own laptop and printer on the premises. I am very pleased with the final results as it was one of my short-term pet projects, however, the actual process needs to be ironed out for greater participation. This workshop may be an ideal event to host on an annual basis; not only does it service our membership, but it also is the only form of revenues generated for NASA by its student leadership. On behalf of NASA, I would like to especially thank the AAA Executive Office, Jan Meir and Mrs. Horne, as well as the NAPA, SOLGA and ABA Sections among other sections and individuals for their significant contributions of literature and mentors to assist and advise our student enrollees.

This year’s ad hoc committee for the “NASA Travel Grant” (Lori Johns as chair, Jonathan Reed, Carla Montero, and Eric Haanstaad) received six applications from its Membership. The total amount that was budgeted for the FY 2001 awards was set at $100.00 per grant at a certain limit (specified in 2000, although the award was not actually conducted that year). However, details about eligibility and qualifications or details about the amount for each grant were not listed on the call that went out via the NASA listserve or that was posted on our Web site. The first of such awards issued by NASA (for November 1999’s annual meetings) were simply in response to students who wrote into NASA expressing need based on participation at the annual meetings. At that time, the Grant was designed to be a simple way to attract new Membership (to free money) while helping to defray travel expenses. However this year (2001), the Travel Grant was based upon an essay contest that was to elicit suggestions from our Membership on the direction NASA should take in supporting students in the ever-changing discipline of anthropology. I think this shows the creative flexibility of a team of NASA student leaders who developed additional benefits for an active Membership.

Anne Irwin was appointed last year (2000) to be the Executive Secretary for NASA, a position on the Executive Board that was shared with the Treasurer-Secretary position (a position created at that time because the Treasurer Sharon Minchuk redefined her own duties to exclude this important aspect of student leadership). Anne defined her role as being the person who keeps the e-board organized, and as the central person for keeping the paper chain in order. She also was in charge of all note taking. Also important throughout the last two years was her function at controlling and keeping record on all motions and matters that required a vote (on-line); she tallied results and announced verdicts. She also was the person to report to before going on vacation from e-mail; she also shot out periodic reports that echoed NASA activities and the up-to-date whereabouts and contact information of all Officers.

In closing, I would like to see notes from all Business Meetings placed on-line and a stronger emphasis be made about the importance of NASA’s role to both undergraduate and graduate students thus encouraging the participation of more students at NASA Business Meetings. Furthermore, I think that notes pertaining to all resolutions, motions and matters that require a quorum vote or majority vote by the NASA Officers and by the NASA Membership should be posted on-line so as to keep Membership informed of their Section’s affairs.