Places for Practitioners in AAA Sections

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The Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology (CoPAPIA) is one of the AAA’s newest committees, created to foster the reciprocal relationship between anthropological theory and practice, establish collaborative relationships with a range of sections, and develop recommendations for training and professional development. At the 2008 AAA Annual Meeting, CoPAPIA met with leaders from nine AAA sections to begin a conversation about how the committee can effectively partner with them. This special forum was intended as a means to build on previous efforts and begin a new dialogue. Presidents from nine sections were invited to briefly speak on their groups’ needs and interests, articulating how AAA sections can engage with CoPAPIA over the short-term (1–2 years) and long-term (3–5 years) to create partnerships that enable us to progress toward common goals.

The section leaders who attended were: Madelaine Adelman (Association for Political and Legal Anthropology), Janis Alcorn (Anthropology and the Environment), Catherine Fowler (Council on Museum Anthropology), Janet Levy (Archaeology Division), Lenore Manderson (Society for Medical Anthropology), Vilma Santiago-Irizarry (Association of Latina and Latino Anthropologists), Kimberly Simmons (Association of Black Anthropologists), Susan Buck Sutton (General Anthropology Division), and Dennis Wiedman (National Association for the Practice of Anthropology). CoPAPIA discussants included: Linda A Bennett, Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Shirley Fiske, Robert Hahn and Nathaniel Tashima. After the meeting, the committee also contacted Marcy Hessling, president of the National Association of Student Anthropologists, who will join our efforts in 2009. It is our goal to invite participation from all AAA sections in the coming months and years.

A vigorous and healthy discussion followed in which participants shared their perspectives on how the individual sections and the AAA as a whole can become more open and relevant to practitioners. The following ideas were offered by section leaders:

- Make the AAA Annual Meeting more accessible for practitioners, including special one-day registration rates and alternative formats for AAA sessions.
- Expand the annual NAPA/AAA Employer Expo, which allows non-academic employers of anthropologists to meet practitioners and talk about non-academic career paths.
- Support students who wish to pursue non-university based careers and organize sector-based mentoring.
- Encourage section boards to have at least one anthropologist not based in a university.
- Encourage sections to co-sponsor symposia with NAPA or establish distinguished lectures on practicing anthropology.
- Create awards or grants specifically for practicing anthropologists in particular sections.
- Integrate “gray literature” in sections’ journals.
- Ensure that journal boards include scholars not based in a university.

In sum, the group seemed to come to consensus that there are three key problems to address: (1) practicing anthropologists are sometimes seen as outside the professional mainstream; (2) practicing anthropologists do not always view AAA as relevant, welcoming or important for meeting their needs; and (3) sections may not necessarily know their practicing members’ needs or if/how AAA is fulfilling them. In response to these issues, CoPAPIA is working with section leaders and appropriate AAA staff on the following projects: (1) creating a “practicing checklist” that will enable each section to consider how it could become more welcoming and relevant to non-university affiliated practicing anthropologists; (2) participating in a tenure and promotion study to investigate how universities evaluate the work of practicing anthropologists; (3) and public interest anthropologists in our association. What sections do you belong to and how do you see your section participating in these efforts? Where and how do you envision the AAA creating more “places and spaces” for practicing anthropologists? We want to hear your voice. Please email your thoughts and ideas to CoPAPIA Chair Linda A Bennett (lbennett@memphis.edu).

Calling All Anthropology Master’s Alumni

How have you been since graduation? Where are you working today? Do you have advice to give MA students or master’s programs? How can AAA serve your needs?

AAA and the Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology (CoPAPIA) seek the answers to these questions, using a highly networked survey approach to reach as many anthropology master’s alumni as possible. We would like to know where your career has taken you, whether you continue to identify with anthropology, and what feedback you have about your career path. We invite participants from all specialties of anthropology and related fields: archaeology, cultural resource management, historic preservation, museum work, cultural and applied anthropology, linguistics, consumer research, physical anthropology and more.

For a link to our 20-minute anonymous online survey, please email MASurvey2009@aaanet.org. For more information, visit the CoPAPIA webpage: www.aaanet.org/cmtes/copapia.