PRESIDENT’S REPORT 2019

It is my pleasure to present this, my final AAA President’s report, and I hope you enjoy ambiguity as much as I do.

Overall AAA has enjoyed a rewarding and successful year, and I will touch on many of those successes and accomplishments. At the same time we face new challenges and increasing demands on existing resources.

Publications

The publications program remains strong and active. We’re nearing the end of our search for a new Editor-in-Chief for our flagship journal, American Anthropologist, replacing the irreplaceable Deb Thomas. The more than 20 peer-reviewed scholarly journals in our AnthroSource portfolio remain vibrant and successful, and that portfolio is being enriched by the addition of a new title, Feminist Anthropology: The AFA Journal, and by the growing success of the redesigned, award-winning Anthropology News.

In April I joined other AAA volunteer leaders and publishing staff in discussions at MIT regarding the potential for financially viable models for open access publishing (Open Access for Anthropology: A Model for Universal OA). The meeting proposed a revised funding model combining aspects of the Libraria scheme (in which libraries as a group rededicated the entirety of their serials budget to exclusively supporting open access titles) with additional monies provided by funders based on whether that foundation or agency was acknowledged in the publication. While funders have not yet embraced the model we continue to monitor these and other efforts to support open access publishing—in addition to continuing the OA titles already published by AAA (Open Anthropology) and the Society for Cultural Anthropology.

We’ve also launched the Open Anthropology Research Repository (OARR), a community server established by the American Anthropological Association to improve and accelerate the discovery and dissemination of anthropological work, including preprints, teaching materials, and papers and posters presented at disciplinary meetings worldwide in any language. OARR is an open access platform available to all anthropologists around the world without charges of any kind, with an advisory group including representatives of the American Anthropological Association, the American Association of Applied Linguistics, American Association of Physical Anthropologists, Linguistic Society of America, Royal Anthropological Institute, Society for American Archaeology, Society for Applied Anthropology, and numerous representatives of the World Anthropological Union. In launching this platform our goal is to level the playing field for all anthropologists, and provide a resource that different anthropologists can use in different ways to best serve differing regions, topics and communities of practice, and I urge you all to add your own papers, preprints, teaching materials, or other kinds of media and documents.

The success of our publications programs depends in part on the quality of the work submitted, but in the end everything depends on the ongoing efforts and considerable talents of AAA publications staff and the editorial staffs of all of our journals, and I want to acknowledge and thank them for their contributions to our Association.

Meetings
This year’s annual meeting has roughly 6000 participants, including 1,059 separate sessions and 3,861 papers; AAA meetings staff also assist in the organization of 7-10 section meetings per year, plus special conferences, retreats and other meetings for AAA and its constituent units. I’m grateful for their efforts, and we all benefit from them.

Our current meeting is organized jointly with our colleagues in CASCA, the Canadian Anthropology Society/ Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie, and I want to thank both CASCA leadership and their meetings and local arrangements team for their assistance, support and collegiality. I’d like to remind everyone that we will be doing it again in 2023, when we meet in Toronto. And since I’m acknowledging our hosts, I also wish to note that we are meeting on unceded territory of Squamish and Stó:lō, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam nations, and we are grateful for their welcome.

The annual meeting co-chairs, Nicole Peterson of AAA and Martha Radice and Pamela Downe of CASCA, have done an outstanding job, and I want to thank them, the Executive Program Committee and the AAA meetings staff for their efforts.

We’ve been asked about the possibility of virtual meetings, and have listened. This year we’re piloting a virtual meeting program including six sessions. The intent is to simultaneously broaden access to the annual meeting, decrease the Annual Meeting’s carbon footprint, and use the pilot as a test-bed to identify both the promises and the problems of virtual attendance. I’d like to thank MPAAC for their recommendations in this regard.

**Public Engagement and Education**

AAA’s extremely successful *RACE: Are We So Different?* exhibition has traveled to venues across the nation, and as it reaches the end of its capacity to travel we have arranged for the sale of the last traveling replica to the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Meanwhile, the Science Museum of Minnesota, which has another replica of the exhibition, is updating its content in collaboration with the exhibition’s co-curators, the website has been updated and revised, and a second edition of the book co-authored by Yolanda Moses, Alan Goodman, and Joseph Jones is forthcoming.

AAA is working with multiple partners to develop its new *World on the Move: 100,000 Years of Human Migration* exhibition. Smithsonian Exhibits is doing the design / fabrication, and a multidisciplinary team of advisors and curators from the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, National Geographic Society, and AAA are providing the subject matter expertise to generate exhibition content. Ed Liebow has negotiated an agreement with the American Library Association’s well-established Public Program Office traveling exhibition services, which will assure that the exhibition hits up to 50 or so public libraries across the US. These partnerships also offer opportunities for local synergy through collaboration between local libraries and Smithsonian affiliate institutions across the US, with the goal of increasing local programming associated with the larger exhibition, and rooting the programs in the unique histories, concerns and dynamics of each community.

Anthro Day continues to grow; this year the 340 groups registered to participate represented 14 countries and 46 states plus Puerto Rico (so folks in North Dakota, Maine, Nebraska and Wyoming, we’re counting on you for next year).
Advocacy

Initial training for AAA’s Op-Ed project has now been completed, and the first direct outcome—in the form of an op-ed (“The Fight for Immigrant Rights Is About Elevating Racial Justice, Too”) published in The Baltimore Sun by Thurka Sangaramoorthy.

When we launched the Members Programmatic Advisory and Advocacy Committee a couple of years ago, we knew there’d be a need for revision and rethinking once it had established its own path and identified its needs and opportunities. A full internal review by MPAAC was scheduled for this year, and is moving forward. To allow time for MPAAC members to discuss their recommendation face-to-face at these meetings we’ve pushed back the date for the review until early in the new year, and look forward to their recommendations and observations.

Several Task Forces continue their important work, and will provide reports in the coming year. Most notable among these are the Anthropology and the Proliferation of Border and Security Walls Task Force (chaired by Joe Heyman of UT-El Paso) and the Working Group on Racialized Police Brutality and Extrajudicial Violence in the United States (co-chaired by David Simmons of the University of South Carolina and Marla Frederick of Harvard University).

We continue to work with a range of partners in advocacy efforts. Here I will mention one—the Coalition for American Heritage, which works on cultural heritage issues here and abroad, but with a special focus on domestic legislative issues. Currently the primary issues being addressed involve senatorial efforts to expand the ability of presidents to use emergency powers to circumvent environmental and cultural heritage protections at a broad scale, and revisions to the regulations implementing the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Membership, Operations and Budget

A priority I’d hoped to address was a revision of AAA dues, with the goal of making membership more affordable for our most vulnerable members. This has been done, with membership rates for next year beginning at $49. Yes, those of us with more available resources continue to pay more, so we’ve managed to keep revenues more or less neutral but it’s crucial that AAA become increasingly accessible for a broader range of members.

We also hope to do a better job of assessing our efforts at inclusion and equity. Beginning in 2020 members and contributors to AAA journals will be asked to provide information regarding how they identify themselves with respect to gender and race/ethnicity. Some response will be expected, although one of the possible responses will be “prefer not to answer.” This information will help us determine whether our efforts are having measurable effects, and help us be more accountable over time.

I’m happy to announce two new awards—the Carole H. Browner Latin American Studies Travel Award, and the Conrad Arensberg Award recognizing individuals who have furthered Anthropology as a natural science.

We’ve successfully completed our second Departmental Leaders Summer Institute, bringing together departmental chairs and administrative leaders in our Departmental Services Program to share experiences, develop best practices, and brainstorm problems; registration is free for DSP partners. The next Institute will be held in 2021, and I urge you to participate. Let me also add that students who receive their doctorate from a DSP member school, or who receive a masters if that is the highest degree offered, are eligible for a free year of AAA membership—all that’s needed is for the chair to forward the information to the AAA membership staff.
At the same time, the Executive Board established a working group to help make AAA a more welcoming home to anthropologists working in private practice, and ensure that the Association meets the needs and reflects the interests of all of its members. We’ll be continuing to discuss its findings and to implement changes based on its recommendations in the year to come.

One of the realities facing member-based organizations like ours is that fewer people join organizations, and those that do want more member services for less money. They want more content, finding aids, discoverability and seamless access for publications, but lower subscription costs or free access, and they want more amenities at more desirable meeting destinations for lower registration costs. Small wonder that AAA budgets are tightening every year. One practical impact is that we have less flexibility to accommodate unexpected requests, surprises and opportunities; Executive Director Ed Liebow describes it as the most challenging budget has assembled in the past 15 years. At a practical level we need to continue to increase the services and benefits we offer our members and the discipline at large, but cannot meaningfully and conscientiously do so by increasing costs to our members. So...

Advancement

AAA has launched a major fundraising campaign to increase contributed revenues. In part the goal is to raise funds for important initiatives and projects, and in part the goal is to lay the foundations for increased institutional capacity to conduct significant fundraising in the future. In the nearer term we’re making an investment which we believe will reap future dividends. Akhil Gupta and Ed Liebow will lead this initiative, and I look forward to seeing their success and watching their efforts come to fruition.

Conclusions

Leading the American Anthropological Association for the past two years has been an honor, a challenge, a pleasure, and a remarkable experience in all ways. I am grateful to all of you for the opportunity, for your occasional patience and constant passion, and for all you do.

Finally, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteer leaders of the Association, from the Executive Board, the committee chairs and members, to members of working groups and task forces, for their efforts on behalf of their colleague, and acknowledge the outstanding efforts of the AAA staff, who work tirelessly to advance both the Association and Anthropology as a discipline.