2008 Annual Report, Society for the Anthropology of Work
Prepared by Ann Kingsolver

Section officers in 2008: Ann Kingsolver, President (aekingso@mailbox.sc.edu); Sam Collins, Treasurer (scollins@towson.edu); Anru Lee, Secretary (alee@jjay.cuny.edu) until AAA meetings, Lynne Milgram, Secretary after AAA meetings (lmilgram@faculty.ocad.ca); Jim Weil, Past-President (jweil@smm.org).

Executive Board members in 2008: Michael Chibnik, AWR General Editor; Susanne Cohen, Student Representative; Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, Program Co-Editor; Eve Hochwald, SAW Representative to Forsythe Committee; Angela Jancius, Anthropology News SAW Column Editor; Csilla Kalocsai, Student Representative; Carrie Lane, AWR Reviews Editor; Charles Menzies, Program Editor; June Nash, Member at Large. After the 2008 AAA meetings, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera became Program Editor and Bianet Castellanos became Program Co-Editor.

Status, Activities, and Accomplishments this year
1. The SAW membership fluctuated between 235 and 266 in 2008. The Executive Board has discussed the decrease in membership as related to the availability of the journal on AnthroSource, and we have discussed other benefits of membership – the main one being our active mentoring of graduate students.

2. As of November, 2008, the revenues generated through membership totaled $6,676.98; the publishing royalty was $5,408. In 2008, we spent $250 on student awards and travel (not counting some checks pending in 2009), and the publishing expense for AWR was $2,704. The AnthroSource revenue sharing has meant that our budget has been stable, and we have been able to support the activities of our organization.

3. SAW sessions at the 2008 AAA meetings:
   “Exploring Work and Worksapes through New Media,” co-invited with the SVA
   “Sound Business: Music Matters in Contemporary Urban Political Economies,”
   co-invited with the Society for Cultural Anthropology
   “Unions in the Global Economy,” co-invited with the Central States Anthropological Society
   “Locating Labor: Anthropologists Engage Service Workers’ Struggles,”
   co-invited with SUNTA
   “Writing for Social Change: Using Writing Strategies to Bridge Scholarship and Activism,” invited session
   “Work, Gender, and Identity in a Global Context”
   “Architecting Contingency: Knowledge, Power, and Chance in Virtual Worlds”
   “Labour, Workers and Corporate Organization in the Neoliberal Age”
   SAW also sponsored one poster session at the AAAs.
   We sponsored a reception and discussion after the Arensberg Lecture by Marietta Baba, also sponsored by the SAW, on Friday evening. Her lecture title was “Anthropologies of Work in Late Capitalism: Constructing a Discipline for ‘Warner’s Quadrant’.”

4. Spring meeting activities: we had none in 2008, but will hold joint meetings with the SfAA in Santa Fe in March 2009, and organized the sessions
for that meeting in 2008. We will hold a SAW business meeting, as well as two sessions, at the SfAA meetings; this is part of our strategy to build and better serve a diverse membership in SAW.

5. Mentorship is a major activity of the SAW. The student representatives to the executive board developed a mentoring project several years ago, and SAW professional members serve as individual mentors to any student member of SAW requesting mentorship. Every other year, the SAW student representatives organize a mentoring roundtable on careers that is attended by SAW and non-SAW AAA student members. These have been very productive conversations, and our next roundtable will be in 2009. During the 2008 meetings, the SAW Executive Board voted to provide travel assistance to the student board members and to initiate the June Nash Student Travel Award to fund student travel to the AAAs to give papers submitted through the SAW.

6. The SAW program committee works to co-invite sessions widely across a diversity of AAA sections, encouraging convergent conversations. We will be having a joint reception with the ABA and other sections at the 2009 AAA meetings. We have worked in the past with UNITE/HERE, the hotel and restaurant workers’ union, to hold joint sessions, and will be working with them again at the New Orleans AAA meetings to discuss post-Katrina labor conditions in the region. Each year at the AAAs, we sell SAW t-shirts in the book exhibit room, mostly to raise the visibility of SAW with the general AAA membership. At the 2008 AAA meetings, we invited a non-anthropologist, scholar and labor activist Dana Frank (who has published, among many others, a book coauthored with Howard Zinn and Robin D.G. Kelley), to talk about writing for a broad public. That session was very well attended, with an active discussion. Our joint meetings with the SfAA in 2009 are also an attempt to communicate with a broader group of scholar/activists in and beyond anthropology. We are initiating a “worker stories” section on our website that will link to many documentary projects with narratives coming directly from workers in many contexts (since Studs Terkel is no longer here to do this work!), in the interest of participating in much broader national and transnational conversations about people’s experiences in these hard times. SAW members also plan to participate in government conversations about green jobs, etc., and bring those conversations into the AAA meetings.

7. The Conrad Arensberg Award was presented to Marietta Baba on Nov. 21, 2008. She is Dean of the College of Social Science at Michigan State University. The 2008 Eric R. Wolf Prize (given annually to a graduate student) was awarded to Kedron Thomas, a doctoral student at Harvard University, for her paper on “modern pirates” in the informal textile sector in Guatemala. The Forsythe Prize, awarded jointly by SAW and CASTAC, was awarded (also at the 2008 AAA meetings) to João Biehl, Professor of Anthropology at Princeton University, for his book Will to Live: AIDS Therapies and the Politics of Survival.

8. The SAW does not have a newsletter. When we have messages to get to our membership, we coordinate with the AAA office in having a message sent to the list of SAW members. There has been a proposal to start a list-serve, and we will be discussing that at the SAW business meeting at the 2009 AAA meetings.
9. The by-laws were changed in 2007, and we have been following the changes we made (mostly in elected positions and terms of office) throughout 2008. The changes (having a president-elect, a past president, and a program co-editor on the board, for example) have improved institutional memory and leadership in the section.

Future plans or activities in the next 3-5 years

1. As mentioned above, we are working in a number of ways to broaden our membership; examples include holding joint meetings with the Society for Applied Anthropology (beginning in March 2009), cosponsoring a reception with the ABA at the AAA meetings, and offering a small travel stipend (the June Nash Student Travel Award) to all students whose abstract, submitted through the SAW, is accepted for presentation at the AAA meetings.

2. Following the legacies of the WPA writers’ project and Studs Terkel, we have decided that our section’s most cogent contribution to discussions of the current economic crisis is to set up a clearinghouse, on our website, for links to documentation of workers’ stories (nationally and internationally). This may bring attention to the AAA, as well as the SAW, as people find their way to that website through Internet searches.

3. At our business meeting at the 2008 AAA meetings, we also decided to institute a SAW Book Prize. Michael Chibnik, the General Editor of the Anthropology of Work Review, would also like to institute some changes in the format and production schedule of the section’s journal. We are discussing those changes in 2009 with the AAA publications staff.

4. As noted in several ways above (esp. in #3 in the previous section and #1 above), we are collaborating with quite a few other sections within the AAA and with another organization, the Society for Applied Anthropology.

Chief Concerns

A chief concern of our section members have been about the section’s viability within the AAA through the AnthroSource transition, which we have weathered just fine. (Our section was constituted in 1980, so we are nearing our 30th anniversary.) Other major concerns of our members have been with reaching out to student members, the public, and international anthropologists more. We have addressed each of those goals in a variety of ways.

Between 2004 and 2007, 50% of the content of our journal (the Anthropology of Work Review) was by authors outside the U.S. This meant the editor (myself, at the time) had to do a lot of translation. It would be helpful if the AAA could support such translation services, facilitating our national anthropological organization’s journals getting up to speed with the rest of the world and out of our linguistic isolation. We are very encouraged by the steps the AAA has taken to collaborate with world anthropology organizations.

Our most active constituency is students. We have the mentorship program, student-focused events at the AAAs, and student prizes (the Eric R. Wolf Prize, the winner of which has an essay published in the AWR, and the new June Nash Student Travel Award). Our section’s vibrancy and relevance is largely due to the contributions of graduate students, who then remain active in the organization.