

January 19, 2006

To: Stacy Lathrop and Kim Baker

From: Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, outgoing Chair of the Committee on Ethics

Re: Annual Report, January 1, 2005-December 31, 2005

ANNUAL REPORT: COMMITTEE on ETHICS 2005

CoE Members in 2005 included: Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (Chair), Rachel Caspari, Larry Zimmerman, Merrill Singer, Anita Spring, Arthur Joyce, Joseph Errington, Karen Nakamura, SOLGA liaison to the CoE and Stacy Lathrop, AAA staff.

1. The **Final Draft of the Response to Gregor-Gross Referendum** from CoE was submitted to President Elizabeth Brumfiel on April 15, 2005 and was included in the AAA 2005 President's Report. Two summary statements from the report capture its essence.

“We acknowledge that the controversy over Darkness in El Dorado led to consequences that were unsatisfactory to everyone at some level, not the least of which is a negative portrayal of anthropologists and of anthropology. Sustained critical discussion about ethics within professional circles, in advising sessions, and most especially in the classroom remains the most effective device for responding to this and future controversies.”

2. The Committee on Ethics **established an “Ethics Textbook Award”** for the best coverage of ethics and anthropology in an introductory anthropology textbook. The award is primarily viewed as both incentive and reward to publishers for including discussion of anthropology and ethics. The proposed award is pending approval by the AAA executive board, and final details will be worked out in advance of the drafting of the first call for nominations.

3. The **“Friends of the Committee on Ethics” was established** at the December 1, 2005 meeting of the CoE. The idea of a “Friends of the CoE” was raised during the 2003 annual meeting of the CoE, and has been discussed for the past two years. Proposed as a consultative listserv and comprised of former members of the CoE, this new *ad hoc* committee is intended to provide expertise and commentary from ‘friends’ derived from their experience with the CoE. Membership is open to all former CoE members and service is primarily, but not exclusively, for the purpose of assisting with the response to queries that come before the sitting committee on ethics. A mission statement is in preparation, and it is understood that the work of the new committee will evolve as the ‘friends’ begin to shape the new committee.

4. The Committee on Ethics continues to work closely with Stacy Lathrop in the development of “Ethical Currents” columns for regular publication in *Anthropology News*. In 2005 three columns were published in collaboration with members of the CoE.

5. A September 2005 *AN* column and “Ethics Case” posted on the Ethics page of the AAA website dealt with an inquiry to the CoE about an ethical dilemma that arose in June 2005 at DePaul University over the disposition of an investigator’s ethnographic data in compliance to local IRB policy. DePaul University’s IRB attempted to enforce a local rule that anthropological investigators destroy their data where the identity of participants is known, or lock the same data in a secure location. The anthropology department raised concern with this policy; these concerns about the IRB were successfully aired to the CoE, other association leadership and to other anthropology departments through the Department Services Program listserv. A broad discussion of the preservation/destruction of ethnographic data resulted, and communication with the IRB in a more anthropologically sensitive way was the positive outcome.
6. The CoE drafted a response in June 2005 to a proposal addressed to President Brumfiel by Leslie Sponsel regarding greater commitment to ethical discourse within the AAA. CoE members agreed to the suggestion that a **future annual meeting theme be devoted to ethics and anthropology as part of the AAA’s Long-Range Plan objective on ethics education.**
7. The production of a **Handbook on “IRBs and Ethnography,”** intended for an audience of both anthropologists and IRB personnel, is a task that was to be completed in 2005, but was not. This is probably due to two already overburdened persons being asked to write a 25-page document intended to inform and guide two very important audiences. This remains an important task and CoE members suggested to the AAA executive board the formation of a group to locate funding through a proposal, perhaps to Wenner-Gren, for a weekend mini-conference to draft the Handbook. An IRBs and Ethnography Handbook will be a document that can be cited by anthropologists going before an IRB, and for IRB members to understand better anthropological methods, especially the core ethnographic method of participant observation and effective means of obtaining informed consent without legal forms. **This is a key area of support that the AAA leadership and executive board can provide to the CoE for 2006.**
8. The CoE committed itself to the **continued updating of Briefing Papers currently available on the AAA website**, especially through use of the newly formed “Friends of the CoE” listserv to recruit volunteers to take primary authorship responsibility. The committee will continue to review its online presence in collaboration with relevant AAA staff.
9. The CoE noted the AAA decision to provisionally decline placement of advertisements for CIA recruitment and **welcomes the establishment of a new Commission on Anthropology and US National Security.** The CoE seeks to be a part of this new commission through invited membership, an advisory role, and active participation in Invited Sessions at the next AAA annual meeting. The CoE adopted the following motion on this matter:

The Committee on Ethics welcomes the commission to review issues related to the engagement of anthropology with the US national security/intelligence communities, and because of the complexity of these issues and their potential divisiveness within the profession, the committee would like to be a part of the process of shaping the commission's charge and the constitution of its membership.

10. Anita Spring accepted to serve as Chair of the CoE, and Alex Barker agreed to serve as Chair-elect.