

**Report on the 106th Annual Meeting:
“Difference, (In)Equality & Justice”**

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Accomplishments

At the spring 2006 meeting of the AAA Long Range Planning Committee, the annual meeting was voted to be the association’s second highest priority. The annual meeting is integral to the American Anthropological Association’s over all mission and efficacy. The Executive Program Committee and the more inclusive Program Committee, which comprises the program editors from all the sections, have taken their charge seriously and, as a consequence, have successfully undertaken their responsibility of organizing this year’s annual meeting. The 106th Annual Meeting, whose thematic focus is “Difference, (In)Equality and Justice,” has more sessions (561) scheduled than ever before in the history of the AAA. The response to the call for participation, which was circulated informally during last year’s meeting and then made public officially in the January issue of *Anthropology News (AN)*, was clearly enthusiastic, resulting in an unprecedented 583 sessions being submitted by the end of March deadline. Only thirty-one or a little more than 5% of the proposals were rejected, and 121 sessions were created from papers submitted independently of organized sessions. Another precedent was set with special events. This year there will be 278 compared to the 240 special events scheduled the last time the meeting was held in Washington, DC (2005). The number of special events (including plenaries, panels, workshops, business meetings, and a Saturday evening one-woman show) this year also exceeds the 254 scheduled at the 2003 Chicago meeting, which set the record that will be broken this year.

More modest is the number of poster sessions organized: 23. There were 28 at last year’s meeting, 29 at the 2005 meeting in Washington, DC, and 39 originally scheduled for the 2004 meeting that was to be in San Francisco before the hotel strike compelled the association to shift the meeting venue to Atlanta. The 2003 Chicago meeting had 37 poster sessions, which was the highest number in the history of the annual meetings.

The Executive Program Committee committed itself to organizing an outstanding Presidential & Executive Platform that is inclusive and engages the discipline’s rich intellectual diversity. The committee worked hard to meet one of the AAA Long Range Plan’s most important objectives: that of providing “the broadest possible access to the Annual Meeting to all member constituencies, and to increase participation in the meeting” (AAA LRP, VIIA).

Compared to 2002 when the New Orleans meeting featured 19 Presidential & Executive Sessions (only 7 of which were designated as “presidential”), this year’s Presidential & Executive Platform is more robust with 34 highly visible sessions addressing the meeting’s theme in particularly compelling ways from a broad range of perspectives. All of the subfields and many of the sectional interests responsible for the vitality of the AAA are represented. The platform addresses many significant issues in an array of

formats—from traditional paper presentations to high table discussions and student posters. The topics addressed include: the social impact of journalistic and ethnographic writing, substantive and theoretical benefits of engendering the discipline, legislation and food enterprise, collaborative research on social movements, the effects of U.S. military policy on local communities, transnational migration and neoliberalism, health disparities and social inequalities' negative impact on health, affirmation action outside the U.S., white supremacy at home and in contexts of empire, anthropological work in global arenas (e.g., UN, USAID, and international death penalty activism), and American Indian legal activism.

To stimulate and also sustain interest in the annual meeting, the Executive Program Chair and three members of the Executive Program Committee contributed to a monthly column in *Anthropology News*, “Justice for All?” The Executive Program Chair wrote all but two of the columns (published in March and May), which were crafted from the perspectives of biological anthropology and archaeology. The column extended and diversified the conversation on the annual theme beyond the basic parameters outlined in the call for papers that appeared in the January *AN*. Also addressed were ideas on alternative presentation formats, the importance of including community leaders in our discussions, the dramaturgical and activist context for “Capers,” the solo-play that will be performed at the meeting, and the concerns that the AAA meeting shares with other anthropological conferences in other parts of the world (e.g., a University of Cape Town conference on transcending postcolonial conditions and the forthcoming congress of the International Union of Anthropological & Ethnological Sciences).

Continuing Challenges

The Five-Year Report on the AAA's Executive Program Committee that was submitted in the spring of this year discussed nine continuing challenges and made suggested changes to meet them more effectively. The following subset of those challenges are especially relevant for this year's report:

Executive Program Committee Membership

It is important that the Executive Program Committee represent the AAA's diverse constituencies. This means that some effort must continue to be made to ensure that small sections such as the Society for Linguistic Anthropology (SLA) be represented. Although efforts were made to recruit an anthropological linguist for the 2005 and 2006 Executive Program Committees, the response from the SLA was not what was expected or hoped for. This year the Executive Program Chair went beyond the formal leadership of that section to enlist a linguist. As a consequence, there is a Presidential Session that focuses on language endangerment and features prominent linguists who have been important conversants in anthropological studies of language. It is also important to enlist practicing anthropologists and to include a student representative from the National Association of Student Anthropologists (NASA). At last year's meeting of the Program Committee, the program editor for NASA made this suggestion. Unfortunately, this year's committee, which is made up of 12 individuals, does not include a student.

To ensure continuity in knowledge and best practices, there is an advantage to past-Executive Program Chairs serving on the next year's Executive Program Committees. To this end, it is important that the AAA President and/or President-Elect appoint their Executive Program Chairs early enough (i.e., a year in advance) so that future Program Chairs have the experience of serving on their predecessor's committee. This has been the case for at least the past three years, but it should be a routine practice.

Enhanced Orientation & Training for Annual Meeting Program Committee

To promote the efficiency and coordination of the larger Program Committee, the meeting of all program editors that is scheduled on the Friday afternoon of the annual meeting should provide a fuller orientation to prepare section program editors to perform their duties. The meeting should be more of a training session in which detailed explanations are offered on the procedures for navigating, reviewing and ranking the online paper and session abstracts that are earmarked for their sections' consideration. This would reduce much of the confusion that new program editors may have if they are unfamiliar with the online system. The orientation should be facilitated by Executive Program Chairs from 2, or perhaps even 3, successive years, so that the committee can benefit from their synergy and cumulative experience. At this year's meeting, Executive Program Chairs for 2006, 2007 and 2008 will work together in this endeavor.

Communication with Public Policy and Human Rights Committees

The Executive Program Committee should cultivate more direct lines of communication with the AAA standing committees on Public Policy and Human Rights. These committees also invite highly visible sessions that should be linked to the Presidential & Executive Platform. Representatives from these committees might be invited to attend the meeting/orientation for program editors, which is discussed in the previous section of this report.

Balancing Demand and Limits on Space & Time

Given the growing demand for more discussion-centered sessions and the serious limit on meeting space and time, there is a need to find creative ways to respond to this tension. For instance, an earlier report suggested that the problem be addressed by converting surplus papers and sessions into poster sessions whose spatial requirements can be more easily accommodated. The responsibility of cultivating a constituency for posters among both students and professional anthropologists might be included in the charge to the Executive Program Committee. One or two members could be assigned the coordinating task. This year the Executive Program Chair re-assigned a past Executive Program Committee member along with a collaborator the task of organizing undergraduate and graduate student poster sessions that were invited by the AAA Executive Program Committee.

Public Outreach

A number of sessions on the Presidential & Executive Platform as well as in the general program attempt to engage various publics. As earlier reports have pointed out, the Executive Program Chair needs to work closely with the AAA staff to further this goal. They need to find more effective ways to facilitate the participation of anthropology's

community partners as well as government officials in annual meetings. The engagement of public outreach is delineated as an important objective in the Long Range Plan.

Expanded Participation Requires More Funding

The Long Range Plan identifies increased participation of community partners and international colleagues as highly desirable. To facilitate this expanded involvement requires more registration and membership waivers and the availability of grants-in-aid for travel and hotel accommodations. A larger fund for the annual meeting would also be advantageous to defray the costs of inviting highly visible interlocutors and increasing the number of students able to attend meetings.

Scheduling

Ironically, although the AAA has developed a system of online submission and registration, scheduling is characterized by low-technology labor intensity. For several years now, annual reports on the program underscore the need for computer software that will take scheduling into the 21st century. Manually implemented scheduling, no matter how carefully executed and coordinated in teamwork, leaves ample room for schedule conflicts and disproportionate assignments of some sections to the least desirable days and time slots. For instance, this June, despite the best intentions of being fair, most of the sessions for a couple of small sections ended up being assigned to Wednesday or Sunday time slots. By the time the schedulers reached the index cards for those sections, the choice time slots and rooms were already occupied. Next year's schedulers need to be aware of this problem and figure out a better strategy for distributing times and spaces more equitably.

Acknowledging Cooperation and Synergy

Annual meetings require a great deal of cooperative work and synergy to be "pulled off" successfully. The experience and competence of Lucille Horn and Khara Minter in the AAA's Annual Meetings Department are invaluable. Their warm cooperative spirit helps to temper the stress that this kind of organizational work invariably engenders.

Working with AAA President Alan Goodman this year has been a truly rewarding experience. His vision, collaborative impulse, and willingness to pull up his sleeves and get to work are admirable. It is an honor to have been invited to serve as Executive Program Chair with the privilege of setting the intellectual tone for the meeting by selecting the theme. "Difference, (In)Equality and Justice" turned out to be a provocative and compelling focus that many anthropologists are eager to address.

Most of the members of the Executive Program Committee were a pleasure to work with as colleagues and team players. Special appreciation should be expressed to those who organized presidential sessions as well as to Robert Paynter and Joe Watkins who along with Alan Goodman contributed to the "Justice for All?" series. The program editors from all the sections, the men and women who organized sessions, regardless of their status as invited or not, and all the individuals who submitted abstracts for papers and sessions, and who organized workshops and special events, are collectively responsible for the vibrant ideas, presentations, and lively discussions (whether in formal sessions or

dimly lit bars over drinks) that will make this year's meeting such a dynamic and rewarding experience.