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AAA Executive Board Continues Efforts to Address Ethics of Secret Research

The American Anthropological Association Executive Board voted January 22 to adopt all seven recommendations stated in the final report by the Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with US Security and Intelligence Communities (Security-Intelligence Commission), the nine-person group charged to investigate the opportunities and perils of practicing anthropology with US military, security and intelligence organizations.

The adoption of these recommendations signals the executive board's ongoing efforts to address the complex ethical issues encountered by anthropologists who may be asked to conduct potentially unethical research for their work.

Many of these issues were brought to the public eye last fall through media coverage on the US military's Human Terrain System (HTS) project—a \$40 million program which embeds anthropologists in combat brigades in Iraq and Afghanistan. The ethics of engagement with military and security communities was discussed at several sessions during the association's annual meeting last November.

Key among the adopted recommendations is a charge to the AAA Committee on Ethics to revise the association's ethics code so that it will more stridently affirm the importance of transparency and openness in anthropological research and guard against the ethical perils that may be encountered through certain positions with US military, intelligence and security organizations.

As authorized by the executive board, four additional AAA colleagues will serve as temporary members of the Committee on Ethics and assist the committee in drafting changes to the ethics code. These members are: Jeff Altschul, a practicing/applied anthropologist-chairman of Statistical Research, Inc. and former President of the Register of Professional Archaeologists; Merrill Singer, a practicing/applied medical anthropologist and previous Committee on Ethics member; Agustin Fuentes, a biological anthropologist and active AAA committee member; and David Price, a cultural anthropologist and member of the Security-Intelligence Commission.

Additionally, by motion of the executive board, the Security-Intelligence Commission—which fulfilled its charge by delivering its final report to the executive board in late November—has been reconstituted for an additional two years. The commission will continue to work to develop modes of dialogue with security, intelligence and military agencies in order to communicate the AAA's perspectives on ethics.

Other adopted recommendations encourage the development of 1) a member counseling service to assist members with personal ethical dilemmas and 2) a system for vetting potentially problematic recruitment advertisements submitted to the association Web site and newsletter.

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