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SUBJECT: Annual Meeting Report, 105th Annual Meeting, San Jose McEnery
Convention Center, San Jose, CA

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This report is organized in two sections. Section I is formatted in response to selected items from the 2005 Annual Report of the Long Range Planning Committee (LRP). Information comes from the statement I submitted to the LRP in April 2006 and also includes actions taken by that committee and by the Executive Program Committee (EPC) in late 2005 and 2006. Section II offers brief additional recommendations, comments and information about the 105th Annual Meeting and the program planning process in general.

Section I

Responses to Selected Items in 2005 LRP Objective VII: Scholarly Communications/Annual Meeting

To serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas, for the dissemination of research within and across subdisciplines and for discussion and debate on key topical and theoretical issues.

1. The 2006 meeting theme, “Critical Intersections/Dangerous Issues,” was crafted with the explicit intention of engaging scholars from across the subdisciplines in dialogue on interrelated topics. Response was strong and broad-based. For example, organizers of most of the 27 presidential and executive panels succeeded in including presenters from more than one subdiscipline; some panels represent several. Many session organizers who sought EPC sponsorship or other assistance during the organizing process identified inclusion of multiple subdisciplines as a merit point.
2. With regard to discussion and debate, the most recent AAA membership survey identified interest in more discussion-based panels. As an experiment in this direction, the 2006 presidential/executive platform included five High Table Discussions (experimental panels with the status of invited sessions) on “key topical and theoretical issues.” These included formal presentations followed by roundtable-style discussion. Organizers of these panels reported that they were very successful and expressed strong enthusiasm for repeating the format in 2007.
3. The searchable on-line program provided full abstracts of sessions and papers in advance of the meeting. This enhanced access to the scientific program across subdisciplines and the response was very positive.

To provide the broadest possible access to the Annual Meeting to all member constituencies, and to increase participation in the meeting by community college, undergraduate and Masters students (in order to contribute to Objective V) as well as by anthropologists from other countries (Objective XII).

1. The EPC invited a graduate student to organize a presidential session for the 2006 meeting. The presenters in “Speaking With/For Nature: Conversations with Biologists and Their Non-Human Others” were students or recent PhDs; the chair and discussant were established scholars. UC Santa Cruz supported this session by providing bus transportation and conference facilities for a salon-style discussion linked to the panel. This off-site initiative was listed as a subscription event on the AAA meeting web page and was fully subscribed. The session and “salon” demonstrated AAA/local institution cooperation and provided a way for graduate students and very young scholars to host interested scholars from across the sub-disciplines.

2. The 2006 annual meeting included both undergraduate and graduate poster sessions sponsored by the EPC. The EPC and Meetings Director Lucille Horn worked with undergrad and graduate poster session organizers to develop two executive sessions with twenty-three undergraduates and ten graduate students.

Some students were full members of AAA and paid the registration fee for the meeting; in other cases, the EPC provided students with an extended deadline so that they could pay their registration fees in May.

3. A student orientation meeting was offered for those attending the meeting for the first time. Lucille Horn set aside a space at the San Jose meeting as a “Student Lounge,” designed to provide new opportunities for students to network with peers and to host faculty for informal discussions. It is recognized that many students cannot afford to stay at meeting site hotels; offering a space to call their own is one way to help students establish a base at the meeting.

The National Association of Student Anthropologists has identified the price of attending the meetings as a real concern. The Association must continue to find creative ways to subsidize student participation in the annual scientific program.

I invited a graduate student committee to organize Saturday night entertainment for the San Jose meeting. The committee included three California-based students and one new Ph.D. based in the UK. This committee negotiated actively with the agent of the band they selected, reducing the cost of the entertainment by more than ½ of the band’s usual fee. This committee was a way to engage students in the Annual Meeting planning process beyond the scientific program, and, hopefully, to interest more young members in AAA-wide social events. The event was well attended and there were many positive comments about the music.

To provide a venue for informal networking and interaction both within and across sections and interest groups, for all members at all stages of their careers.

1. The 2006 meeting program included two membership-wide cash bar receptions, a welcoming event on Thursday evening hosted by President Alan Goodman and another reception on Saturday evening preceding the Awards Ceremony and Business Meeting. These innovations were designed to bring the membership together, provide new opportunities for networking, and create continuity with surrounding events. Response was very positive. The structure was as follows:

Thursday: Welcome Reception (6:15-7:30), Distinguished Lecture (7:30-9), Performances in Honor of Katherine Dunham (9:30-11)

Saturday: Presidential session celebrating the work of Bea Medicine (1:45-5:30), cash bar reception in honor of Bea Medicine (6:15-7:30), AAA Awards Ceremony and Annual Business Meeting (7:30-9:30), musical entertainment and dance (9:30-11:30)

In thinking about the structure of the meetings the EPC decided to concentrate membership-wide social events on Thursday and Saturday evenings, leaving Friday free for section, interest group and affiliated-organization receptions. We spread the word about this to section program editors early in the meeting planning process, and the feedback from sections was positive.

2. To further facilitate social interaction, Lucille Horn worked to organize seating groups throughout the convention center area. This was very successful. A room was also designated as a “member lounge.” There were information tables for section literature, and section program chairs were encouraged to develop flyers that identified and showcased their invited and reviewed sessions. These tables were crowded with flyers and people checked there frequently.

To disseminate information and ideas about the teaching of Anthropology.

The 2006 program included workshops and sessions devoted to the teaching of anthropology. These were developed by the sections without direct assistance from the EPC, with the exception of an innovative proposal to pair 15 public school teachers from the San Jose area with 15 AAA members and enable them to attend the meeting. **The EPC encouraged and worked to facilitate this plan by offering registration waivers for the public school teachers.** I believe that such initiatives should be encouraged and expanded. A current initiative to promote dialogue in *AN* about the teaching of anthropology should yield interesting new proposals for 2007.

To engage the media and other publics in order to demonstrate both the general relevance of Anthropology to the understanding of the human condition and to promote the relevance of anthropological research and perspectives on specific, contemporary ethical, social, cultural and policy issues.

The EPC chair should work closely with AAA staff in furthering the goal of public outreach. That said, **it should be acknowledged that scientific findings presented at the annual meeting are often difficult to promote to the media in their original form. It is important to separate the evaluation of press initiatives from an overall evaluation of the annual meeting.**

Proposals

At the April 2006 meeting I proposed a set of linked initiatives that could more effectively target issues identified by the 2005 LRP. They are prioritized here for clarity:

1. **Appropriate computer software is the most effective way to address issues two and three: organization/format of the program and proliferation of overlapping sessions and papers.** Everyone concerned with the meeting has proposed this as a mandatory first step toward addressing the frustrations of scholars who participate in the meeting. As EPC chair I have found that most complaints are tied to these issues, which cannot be addressed by a committee. These are technical, mechanical problems that can be solved and have been solved by other organizations. I strongly recommend that the Long Range Planning Committee commit the financial resources needed to purchase the appropriate software and the staff resources needed to make it fully operational in advance of the 2007 proposal submission process.
2. **Designated training for Section Program Editors, perhaps even a pre-conference training session.** Section Program Editors are the key to increasing participation at all levels of underserved members. However, many section editors simply are not prepared to assume their duties and the overall program suffers as a result. As EPC chair I have been very surprised to find how little most section program chairs know about their roles and responsibilities in advance of assuming the job. This results in over-commitment to invited sessions, misinformation, confusion, and inaccurate assumptions, all of which contribute to frustration and hard feelings on the part of members. This could be fixed, and fixed dramatically, by training in which the power and responsibilities of program chairs are made clear, session networking opportunities are facilitated, and program chairs are rewarded—if only through recognition, moral support and perhaps a meal—for their hard work.
3. **A member of the EPC could be designated to identify and facilitate inclusion of international presenters in executive platform sessions.** This would be the first step toward building a bank of contacts and funding opportunities for future years. Over time, this information could be included in the Section Program Manual, disseminating information that would be useful to all sections in cultivating international members and making it possible for them to attend the meetings. It has already been established that many international presenters need registration waivers; what we don't know is the price tag for help with airfare and lodging. They ask, and all we can say is we don't offer anything. Once we have a year or two of experience with this issue, we can begin to put individuals together with appropriate funding sources.

4. **A member of the EPC could be designated to coordinate poster sessions.** As mentioned above, the EPC is sponsoring two major student poster sessions this year. Currently, each section is allotted one invited poster session, but this opportunity is sorely underutilized. In 2002, there were only 142 poster presenters, 134 in 2003, 172 in 2004, and last year 130. An EPC member who demonstrates leadership in initiating poster sessions and who can serve as a “go to” person for section program chairs who would like to sponsor a session but don’t know how. Posters provide entre and outlets for students and a wide range of individually volunteered presentations.
5. **An electronic message center should be made available to members during the annual meeting.** The most recent membership survey identifies this as a desirable option.
6. **An evaluative survey emailed only to registered participants immediately after the meeting is already in place and has been a useful practice.** The questions should be specific and practical. New meeting software could create a running index of topics, which would help in future planning. For example, the EPC could be provided with very useful information about who presents, who is underrepresented, and how topics are clustered around larger themes.

Recommendations

During the April 2006 session LRP voted the annual meeting its second highest priority. Here is the list of action items recommended for immediate attention:

1. computer software by 2007
2. training for section program editors
3. electronic message center
4. abstracts on line
5. creative subsidies of student participation
6. identify and facilitate inclusion of international presence
7. hotel/unions
8. poster sessions

It was agreed that having computer software in place to handle scheduling of the 2007 meeting is the number one priority for ensuring that the meeting remains a highly valued member benefit. Most membership complaints about the meeting seem tied to scheduling. In addition to solving overlap problems, the right program would allow us to track information which could be used to discern patterns in participation, focus equitable attention on themes, and trace many other issues that affect the intellectual integrity of the scientific program.

Training for section program chairs. With even a small budget for materials and food, we could get them together for a couple of hours during the meeting, perhaps at the same time as the Section Assembly. I would be willing to work with Lucille and a future program chair to put this together.

As mentioned above, item #4 was made available with this year's on-line program. After further discussion it was generally agreed that items 5, 6, and 8 were being addressed or could be addressed through Executive Program Committee initiatives. **However, I am personally in strong support of increased spending to facilitate international participation.** Otherwise, on a practical level, we are just giving lip service to the idea.

The electronic message board was not be available at the 2006 meeting; I was told that cost was the reason. I recommend that this benefit be pursued again in 2007; it would generate membership interest and promote networking.

The hotel/union item is being addressed and will requiring ongoing monitoring and attention. The topic had a formal place on the 2006 Presidential/Executive program as a panel chaired by Louise Lamphere: "High Table Discussion on Labor Issues: Organizing Service Workers in an Era of Globalization."

Section II: General Discussion

It was an honor and a pleasure to serve as Executive Program Chair for 2006 under the direction of AAA President Alan Goodman. The EPC functioned well as a membership committee; it brought diverse issues to the planning table and reached out to a wide range of constituencies. The changing composition of this annually appointed group ensures fresh perspectives and balanced representation over time.

That said, AAA staff are the backbone of this endeavor. Lucille Horn and Khara Minter work incredibly hard, and Lucille's institutional memory will not be easily replaced when she retires. I doubt that most people realize how much of the meeting's success rests with this one highly competent individual. From my vantage point as Executive Program Chair, I got a first-hand look at how central to the intellectual and financial success of the Association the annual meeting really is. I feel we did a good job with the materials submitted to us by the deadline but space, time and staffing constraints made it difficult to accommodate last-minute initiatives of merit. Additional staff resources in the Meetings Department would allow us to do more.

Stacy Lathrop did a wonderful job of promoting and showcasing the meeting in *AN*. She asked me to write a monthly column for the newsletter during my term as Program Chair and I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity. That might not be an ideal arrangement for everyone in the chair position but I am confident that Stacy will continue to make the most of every opportunity to advance dialogue about the meeting.

Currently, section program editors can see all of the submissions once the materials are submitted to the AAA website. Those who choose to do so can select their invited sessions after the submission deadline, and they can change a volunteered session to invited status. Those who took advantage of this option in 2006 reported that the process worked. Again, however, not all editors are pro-active about their duties or about taking advantage of information made available to them by the EPC and AAA staff.

Planning for “Critical Intersections/Dangerous Issues” was an 18-month process, and the feedback since November, 2006 has been gratifying and positive. It has been my experience that the Annual Meeting is alive and well, and that our membership is eager to participate far beyond the institutionalized commitment to paper sessions.