

Committee on Public Policy, AAA  
Annual Report for 2006

1. Activities

In 2006 the Committee on Public Policy (COPP) produced a public policy center proposal that grew out of a long-term AAA initiative that began in 1993 and led to a request in 2001 from the Long-Range Planning Committee to develop the proposal. The proposal for a public policy center (as developed by Kendall Thu and Pete Brosius of COPP) received initial support from AAA sections and the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA). The SfAA eventually withdrew its support, but support from the AAA remained steady, so COPP continued with its efforts. In 2005 an informal survey of anthropology departments in the Washington, D.C., area indicated that several were interested in a public policy center. Based on feedback from the survey, COPP proceeded to develop a final proposal. Details of the history are in the proposal that was submitted to the Long-Range Planning Committee in 2006.

The proposal submitted by the Committee on Public Policy offered a two-tiered strategy for an RFP for strengthening public policy research within the AAA. At the lower level of commitment, departments could designate an anthropologist or group of anthropologists with an interest in public policy, and departments could contribute to a consortium that would hold conferences and colloquia on a rotating basis within the Washington, D.C., area. This level of commitment seemed consistent with the response that we received in the 2005 survey from regional anthropology departments. At the higher level of commitment, departments across the country could submit a bid to become the official AAA Public Policy Research Center. The university would provide initial start-up funds and some ongoing support, but the center would eventually generate revenue and significant overhead from research and other forms of extramural sponsorship. The decision in favor of a two-tiered strategy was based on the assessment that the universities in the D.C. area may not have the resources to invest in a center, but they did have substantial interest in developing a public policy initiative. In contrast, the COPP members believed that some of the larger anthropology departments at wealthier universities would conceivably be able to bring the funding opportunity to fruition. If the second part of the proposal failed to materialize, then the first part would still be likely to go forward. From the perspective of the COPP committee chair, the proposal seemed well thought out, in line with historical discussions with the AAA, and quite realistic.

In the end, the AAA Long-Range Planning Committee rejected the proposal. The reason for the rejection appeared to be that there were competing priorities.

Meanwhile, during 2006 COPP continued with its two other major responsibilities: organizing columns on public policy from AAA members for the *Anthropology Newsletter* and organizing public policy fora for the AAA annual meeting. (The fora are unique events that bring in public policy participants from NGOs and the government to discuss policy issues with anthropologists; they are not academic sessions.) Another major goal, developing the public policy web page, was not achieved due to delays in the

planned redesign of the AAA web site. As a result, a crucial means of communication between COPP and the AAA awaits realization, even though COPP now has a plan for generating new content.

Another significant activity during 2006 was defining the relationship with the new “Interest Group for the Anthropology of Public Policy” (IGAPP). COPP and IGAPP members met and held several phone conversations to determine if there was overlap, opportunity for a merger, or a significant difference in mission. IGAPP consistently articulated its goal as promoting anthropological research on public policy issues, and it opposed developing public policy positions or involvement of anthropologists in policymaking positions. In contrast, COPP has a broader mandate of fostering involvement by anthropologists in the policy process and communication of anthropological research to policymakers. As a result, it soon became clear that the two organizations had complementary missions. There were two main outcomes from the discussions: COPP and the *Anthropology News* agreed to share some column space with IGAPP, so that both types of approaches to public policy would be represented in the newsletter; and COPP developed a new, post-public policy center initiative for 2007 that was complementary to the IGAPP approach to developing research on public policy.

## 2. Activities Planned for 2007 and Change in Responsibilities and Objectives

The COPP committee is quite small and needs to strategize carefully how to utilize its limited resources. At the November 2006 business meeting, the committee rethought priorities and developed a new set of goals for 2007. COPP will continue to develop columns for the *Anthropology News*. The columns have been widely praised, and they continue to put public policy issues before the AAA membership. Rather than develop additional public policy fora for the AAA annual meeting on specific policy topics, COPP will experiment with a different series of events at the meeting:

a lunch for former AAA Congressional fellows to discuss the career impact of the fellowship and desirability and feasibility of reviving the program;

a reception on Capital Hill to create a networking opportunity for anthropologists interested in public policy, interest Congressional staff in the association, and showcase anthropology’s contributions to policy work, probably with a featured speaker to attract an audience;

a public policy forum on information dissemination in the policy arena (how anthropologists can communicate their research effectively so that it circulates in policy contexts).

In addition, COPP will develop the following:

contacts with Wenner-Grenn and other possible funders for a revitalized Congressional fellows program;

a series of two-page policy documents that demonstrate how anthropology informs specific issues to be circulated to policymakers and used as the basis of press releases by Paul Nuti and staff.

Notwithstanding the demise of the public policy center proposal, the mood of the November 2006 meeting was quite upbeat. There was a sense that COPP was developing a new direction that would *not* require additional resources from the AAA (other than some minor support for the reception and lunch), that COPP was developing in a direction that would work well with Paul Nuti and his staff, and that COPP was developing initiatives that were complementary to and distinct from those of IGAPP.

At the November 2006 meeting COPP decided not to spend additional time developing a new mission statement. Rather, we decided to move ahead with the new initiatives, then develop a mission statement after we have piloted the new approach.

### 3. Issues and Recommendations

Some issues worthy of consideration are as follows: clarify the process for developing and modifying web site content and consider expanding the size of the COPP board to about 10 members in order to allow for greater outreach and activities as well as absences of members. It would also be helpful to determine from the Long-Range Planning Committee if there is any interest in supporting a revitalized Congressional fellows program from the AAA budget (even at a limited level of \$30,000 to \$70,000 per year). However, the intention of COPP is to explore other sources of funding.

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