

Section Assembly of the American Anthropological Association Mentoring Task Force Report

Draft 3 for Review

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Introduction

The charge of the Mentoring Task Force (MTF) was to collect and critically assess the Section Assembly's "best practices" in mentoring student anthropologists and nurturing their participation and leadership in AAA sections, and to consider how to creatively improve on these practices to enhance existing mentoring strategies, particularly support for underrepresented groups in the discipline.¹ To accomplish these goals, MTF members were asked to poll their members and report back on the 5 questions below; a call to other SA leaders was also disseminated.

1. What are current mentoring initiatives in your section?
2. What mentoring challenges do your section and AAA face?
3. How can we nurture student and emerging scholars – in particular, those from underrepresented groups?
4. How might we intertwine our efforts in mentorship and membership? Are there cross-sectional and organizational synergies we can tap?
5. What are your section's recommendations for "best practices" that we should recommend to the AAA membership as a whole?

It was suggested that MTF members seek additional input from their department listservs, SIGs, etc.

As the responses came in, it became evident that mentorship and membership (the charge of a separate task force) are integrally linked. The recommendations here thus have implications for the work of both task forces and for future AAA activity in both areas.

¹ Email from Mary L. Gray to Mentoring Task Force members, February 11, 2009.

Current Mentoring Activities

1. On the individual level, most members are regularly involved in mentoring students. However, much of this work is done as individuals rather than as part of an organized section activity.
2. The Student Representative Forum consists of student representatives from each section, along with all NASA officers, and is headed by the student representative on the Executive Board. The Forum convenes at the Annual Meeting.
3. Most sections have student board positions. In some cases, this involves a collective or team process whereby “authority and decision-making are delegated [to] foster a sense of ownership and active involvement amongst members” (APLA).
4. Many sections have links on their Web sites for graduate student support. For example, CAE’s Web site includes information on how to become involved with the section through its standing committees, descriptions of student events at the Annual Meeting, and links to the student listserv and Facebook group.
5. Some sections include information on their Web sites of senior scholars who are willing to serve as professional mentors (APLA, SAW).
6. Sections host workshops, work-in-progress mentoring sessions, poster sessions, forums, mentoring dinners, luncheons, and receptions to support and encourage graduate students and new scholars.
7. Sections offer travel stipends, scholarships, fellowships, paper prizes, and other awards as incentives to recruit students to the Annual Meeting.
8. Some sections provide “how-to” guides for organizing Annual Meeting panels and papers for the first time; SPA has a “buy-a-student-a-drink” practice at the Annual Meeting.
9. Some sections (e.g., CAE) have mentoring committees.
10. The Graduate Students of Color Mentorship Program (CAE and ALLA) convened a successful session at the 2008 AAA Meeting; 15 people attended, half of whom were professors from different universities, and a similar session is planned for the 2009 Annual Meeting.
11. The SfAA sponsors a past-presidents/student luncheon at the SfAA Annual Meeting; inspired by one such luncheon, NASA will convene a joint roundtable of student and senior anthropologists at the 2009 Annual Meeting.
12. The AAA, with input from NASA, has recently launched the *AAA Student e-News*.

Mentoring Challenges

1. Students face financial pressures, especially at less well-funded schools, that constrain their involvement in AAA and hence opportunities for mentorship into the discipline and organization.
2. The Annual Meeting is the primary venue for section and cross-section mentoring activities; there are few mechanisms for extending or expanding this, and the cost of attending the meeting is prohibitive for many students.
3. There is a need to mentor anthropologists as teachers (GAD).

4. Some sections (e.g., CAE, NAPA) seek to bring more practitioners (e.g., K-12 teachers) into the organization.
 - How can we be more effective in outreach to these constituencies?
5. Some respondents expressed concern that definitions of “minority” should be broadened to include a range of underrepresented groups in our recruitment and mentoring initiatives.
6. The Annual Meeting program is overcrowded with competing sessions, which leads to under-attendance at students’ and new scholars’ sessions (and discouragement from further involvement).
7. There are concerns about lack of follow-through and sustained involvement in mentoring new scholars:
 - How can we create mechanisms, resources, and incentives to keep mentors and mentees connected and involved – as one young scholar said, “to walk the talk and talk the talk much more” –?
8. It is difficult for members of ASA – arguably the most knowledgeable and experienced mentors – to contact prospective students.
9. A challenge specific to NASA: Because NASA members are students, officers also need mentoring as much as other members. When members progress through the system, they leave the section at the point when they have the most to offer fellow students.
 - How can this resource (“graduating” student members) be tapped?
10. How can we build a vision of mentoring as something necessary at multiple levels of one’s career (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, early career)?

Recommendations for “Best Practices” In Mentoring Student Anthropologists and New/Emerging Scholars, Particularly from Underrepresented Groups

In addition to the activities already in place, members offered these recommendations to enhance individual section and AAA-wide mentoring:

1. Set aside funds to create an AAA staff position (full- or part-time) focusing on student affairs. Such a position could encompass many of the recommended activities below. It is anticipated that such a position would pay for itself in increased student memberships and improved retention of graduated students as regular members.
2. As a complement to #1, create within each section a “steward” or ombudsperson to network with other sections and AAA on student mentoring.
3. Reduce student membership fees and offer more stipends to attend the Annual Meeting.
4. Offer a “guest pass” for first conference registration.
5. Challenge each AAA member to bring at least one student advisee to the Annual Meeting.
6. Solicit funds from Departments with strong student funding to support students at less well-endowed institutions to attend the AAA meetings.
7. Create opportunities for outreach to “new” scholar-practitioners working outside academe:

- Offer incentives (e.g., fee waivers) for their participation in the Annual Meeting.
 - Establish Web-based opportunities for greater involvement, dialogue, and collaboration with university-based scholars and community- and school-based practitioners.
8. Include a specific section or index in the Annual Meeting Program on mentoring sessions.
 9. Create Web-linked mechanisms for mentees and mentors to connect. For example:
 - Maintain an AAA-wide list of senior scholars who are willing to serve as professional mentors, particularly to students of color, and their areas of interest and expertise; this list could be accessed through the Web site.
 - Sponsor videoconferences and Web-based sessions on publishing and working with foundations to engage scholars of color and underrepresented groups.
 - Establish a forum for ongoing distance mentoring, possibly by assigning a few emerging and mid-career scholars with a veteran scholar.
 10. Create an Alumni Association (student members who have graduated to regular member status) to connect with new student members in relevant sections and areas of expertise.
 11. Drawing upon the mentoring networks and resources established through #9 and #10 above, establish regional or statewide networks of mentors within each AAA section. These networks could be listed on section Web sites.
 12. Within each section and/or the organization as a whole, offer lifetime mentoring awards to encourage and recognize the mentoring contributions of senior anthropologists.
 13. Increase and enhance Annual Meeting sessions and workshops on dissertation writing, preparing for the job market, and academic publishing.
 14. In line with #13 above, ensure that mentoring activities focus on mentoring and not solely networking. Having student-selected and student-led graduate student workshops has been a successful mechanism for this in some sections (e.g., APLA, CAE).
 15. Provide concrete support for the Student Representative Forum, which, at its last meeting (2008 AAA) identified mentoring as one of its most significant needs. For example, section leaders could participate in the Forum's annual meeting to identify section and cross-section mechanisms for support.
 16. Within each section, create a form or flyer inviting students to the Annual Meeting (highlighting mentoring events and other activities of particular interest to students); senior members can distribute flyers through their courses and other work with students.
 17. "Grow our own" scholars of color by recruiting from minority-serving institutions such as HBCUs and tribal colleges.
 18. Schedule more student-organized roundtables at the Annual Meeting so that all members have the opportunity to get to know students' areas of interest, expertise, and concerns.

19. Develop stronger ties with student anthropologists (via NASA) and practicing anthropologists (e.g., through NAPA, SfAA, and the Committee on Practicing, Applied, and Public Interest Anthropology [CoPAPIA]).
20. Collaborate more closely with other professional organizations to “cross-network” mentoring initiatives (e.g., for CAE, most students are also members of the American Educational Research Association [AERA]; CAE could intertwine its mentoring initiatives with those of AERA).
21. Establish an AAA-wide undergraduate initiative to recruit student anthropologists at that level.
22. Devote a section of the AAA home page to links to each section’s mentoring initiatives.
23. Increase opportunities and mechanisms (through recommended activities above) to work across sections on mentoring activities year-round rather than solely at the Annual Meeting.
24. Make AAA’s Leadership Mentoring Shadow Award Program more inclusive to encompass applicants with interdisciplinary expertise (i.e., not only those with a terminal degree in anthropology).

Closing Thoughts

Perhaps the most instructive mentorship lessons come from students themselves. In their own words:

- *Continue* to invite students, emerging scholars, and members of underrepresented groups to events and activities.
- Be patient with students and emerging scholars. Some of us haven’t been convinced that our voices are ready to be heard. ...Some of us are still looking for jobs and may not feel “legitimized” until we have landed a position.
- Mentoring is an activity still best conducted in person....
- Don’t drop the ball.