

2024 REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

This report was jointly written by Past-President Steve Leigh and President Leslea Hlusko. From July 1, 2023, until February 1, 2024, Leslea Hlusko was on medical leave and could not serve effectively as President of AABA. As per AABA by-laws, the Past-President stepped in as Acting President. Consequently, most of the past year of AABA activities were under Steve Leigh's leadership through his role as Acting President.

Please accept our appreciation and thanks to you, our members, for your involvement and dedication to the Association. As usual, during our annual business meeting, we'll engage in the routine business of our association and celebrate the accomplishments of our colleagues with awards. The business meeting will be broadcast live and recorded for those who are participating virtually this year.

The AABA has pursued numerous initiatives this year to address issues specific to the association as well as more general issues. Several initiatives have been substantial in their scope, involving tremendous commitment and hard work of many members. We thank all for their efforts and dedication to the discipline and to the AABA.

1. Annual Conference

1.1. Los Angeles planning and registration fees

The 2023 conference in Reno was well-received by attendees, and while we had fewer presentations and registrations than recent pre-pandemic conferences, our time in Reno was productive and engaging.

This year, registration fees were increased over 2023 levels, partly because of relatively higher anticipated expenses in Los Angeles (for example, early registration increased from \$215 to \$230 for regular members, \$176 to \$190 for postdoc/contingent members, from \$88 to \$90 for student members, and there was no increase in registration cost for members who are retired (\$90) or from any registering from a Qualifying or Tribal Nation (\$25-50). We have continued to work to minimize conference costs and registration fees. Registration fees were held at 2019 levels through 2022, despite some inflationary cost pressures, followed by a modest increase in 2023.

It should be noted that the Association subsidizes conference costs through investment income with the goal of keeping our member costs as low as possible. In fact, our registration fees remain remarkably low relative to peer organizations. Post-pandemic meetings have had reduced attendance, highlighting scaling effects with our conferences. Specifically, high attendance results in lower marginal costs, better overall

revenue and thus both less risk and cost pressure for the Association. Given that the three post-pandemic meetings have had about 80% of the attendance of pre-2020 conferences, we may need to plan for smaller conferences in the future. This will be discussed during the 2024 Presidential Panel in Los Angeles.

Our Vice President and Program Chair, Dr. Kristi Lewton skillfully organized our 2024 conference, beginning with receipt of symposium proposals in July. She has continued to innovate and update our annual conference. This year offers many new features that attendees will appreciate. It is with deep gratitude that we thank her for her incredible service to the Association. Along with Dr. Lewton, we thank our colleagues on the Program Committee for their work in several areas, including abstract review and composing scientific sessions. Our Local Arrangements Committee, Drs. Kristi Lewton, Stephanie Merdith, and David Raichlen collaborated with our Advance Team to plan the conference. Additional Advance Team members included Dr. Amy Rector, Dr. Eduardo Amorim, and, from Burke and Associates, Lori Strong. The team was assisted by student volunteers Katie Beachem, Chloe Coulter, Cassie Croasmun, Alexandria Koedel, and Anamika Nanda

1.2. Concerns regarding labor actions

Hotel workers' union actions complicated planning for this year's conference. Beginning in June, union workers engaged in actions against hotels, including our conference hotel. The Local Arrangements Committee carefully monitored the situation, and we issued a statement in support of the union and called for a resolution. During our Advance Team visit, we provided the hotel with a letter emphasizing aspects of our contract that would apply to this situation and calling for a resolution. Fortunately, the issue was settled in late 2023 and early 2024.

1.3. Meeting sites for 2027-2029

The Executive Committee selected conference venues for 2027-2029 in December. The committee received information from Burk and Associates regarding twenty-three venues in numerous cities. The committee decided to select venues in states that have not passed legislation intended to limit individual and intellectual freedom along lines of gender, race, class, or other dimensions.

After coordination between Lori Strong from BAI, and following legal review of contracts, we signed the hotel contracts for AABA's conferences in 2027, 2028, and 2029:

Philadelphia Marriott Downtown, March 31 - April 3, 2027

Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile, April 19-22, 2028

1.4. Cognate organization cost shares

Our annual conference involves logistical and other kinds of support for related organizations, including the American Association of Anthropological Genetics (AAAG), Dental Anthropology Association (DAA), Human Biology Association (HBA), Paleopathology Association (PPA) and, in alternating years, the Paleoanthropology Society (PAS). Of these groups, the HBA, PPA, and PAS offer programs supported by registration fees. Close evaluation of AABA conference budgets indicated that the AABA subsidizes elements of these programs. Therefore, the AABA initiated discussions with leadership of HBA, PPA, and PAS regarding program costs and strategies to offset the subsidies from AABA registrations that support these programs. Discussions among the associations are ongoing and may involve future changes to registrations, including “bundling” registrations for AABA and related programs.

1.5. Harassment-Avoidance training

Starting in 2021, AABA began contracting with an outside firm to provide anti-harassment and active by-stander training to conference session chairs and members of the Executive Committee. This was initially contracted with Sherry Marts at S*Marts Consulting. Paula Brantner provided this training for the 2023 conference. However, for 2024, AABA needed another option due to contract requirements with Paula Brantner that would have included services AABA does not need. For 2024, Vice President Kristi Lewton identified ADVANCEGeo (<https://serc.carleton.edu/advancegeo/index.html>), a multi-institutional partnership funded in part by the National Science Foundation. This organization was hired to provide a 2.5 hour workshop for AABA session chairs and Executive Committee on March 5, 2024.

1.6. Expansion of qualifying nations

Early Career Liaison Justin Lund initiated a proposal in collaboration with the Committee on Diversity and Student Programs Chair Chelsea Juarez to expand “Qualifying Nations” registration fees to include members of Native American Tribal Nations. The AABA has, for many years, discounted registration fees based on a World Bank classification of Middle- and Low-income countries. The new registration system applies these fees to Tribal Members as well.

1.7. Changes to *in memoriam*

Over the years, the number of AABA community members who pass away each year has reached the point where the Executive Committee felt like we could no longer adequately pay our respects given the time limitations of the annual Business Meeting. Therefore, for 2024, we are implementing a new approach to this important part of our annual meeting. The names of colleagues who have passed since our last annual meeting will be listed during the Business Meeting. Everyone is then invited to attend a poster session on Saturday afternoon, where each lost colleague will have a poster that provides an overview of their professional contributions.

2. AABA Award Winners

We are, once again, recognizing a remarkable group of scholars and colleagues who continue to make important contributions to our discipline. This year, Dr. Laurie R. Godfrey received the Charles R. Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award. Our Gabriel Lasker Service Distinguished Service Award goes to Dr. Steven R. Leigh. Dr. Tina Lasisi received the AABA and Leakey Foundation Communication and Outreach Award in Honor of Camilla M. Smith. We also extend a hearty congratulations to this year's Cobb Professional Development Awards and the Student Presentation Prize and Pollitzer Travel Award winners.

3. Constitution and By-Laws amendment

In 2022, a proposal was submitted in accordance with our *Constitution and By-Laws* to change the AABA *Constitution and By-Laws* to align the roles and responsibilities of Local Arrangements Committees with current practices. More specifically, the document stipulates major responsibilities for the Local Arrangements Committee, including contractual and financial responsibilities, along with logistics, accounting and other tasks. These responsibilities are now handled by Burk and Associates in close collaboration with Association officers (President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary)

During the Annual Business Meeting in 2023, Regular Members approved amendment to the text of the AABA *Constitution and By-Laws* regarding Article III *Committees, Section 2b, Ad Hoc Committees*.

The current text states:

Section 2b. Ad Hoc Committees. Each annual meeting of the Association shall be managed by a Local Arrangements Chair appointed by the President, with approval of the Executive Committee, to serve for a term determined by the President. The Local Arrangements Chair is responsible for planning the meeting, overseeing and managing its operations and finances and bringing them to a conclusion, giving a final accounting,

and reporting on these activities to the President, the Executive Committee, and the business meeting of the Association. Each Local Arrangements Chair is empowered to appoint an *ad hoc* Local Arrangements Committee to assist in carrying out these duties. Since each meeting will ordinarily have its own Local Arrangements Chair, there may be several such Chairs serving concurrently. The President may, when necessary and with the consent of a majority of the members of the Executive Committee, appoint other *ad hoc* committees to deal with specific issues. *Ad hoc* committees exist for a period of up to three years. Additional years may be added by the President and Executive Committee.

The proposal to amend this text was approved via voice vote by Regular Members during the Annual Business Meeting, with a member request to consider a slight change to the wording of the proposed text. The Executive Committee unanimously approved the request for a minor change to the wording of the document, shown in italics:

From: “The Local Arrangements Committee is responsible for *supporting* the Vice President and Program Chair *with* local matters related to the annual meetings.”

To: “The Local Arrangements Committee is responsible for *collaborating with* the Vice President and Program Chair *on* local matters related to the annual meetings”

The proposed text offered for a vote during the 2024 Annual Business Meeting states:

Section 2b. Ad Hoc Committees. Each annual meeting of the Association shall be supported by a Local Arrangements Committee appointed by the President to serve until the conclusion of the annual meeting. The Local Arrangements Committee is responsible for collaborating with the Vice President and Program Chair on local matters related to the annual meetings. The President may, when necessary and with the consent of a majority of the members of the Executive Committee, appoint other *ad hoc* committees to deal with specific issues. *Ad hoc* committees exist for a period of up to three years. Additional years may be added by the President and Executive Committee.

An affirmative vote will result in this text being incorporated into the *Constitution and By-Laws*.

4. Committees

4.1. Executive Committee

4.1.1. Activities

The Executive Committee continued its work on behalf of the Association and its members. This included routine tasks, such as award selections, committee appointments, website and data infrastructure updates, and conference planning. Beyond standard duties and responsibilities, the committee was involved in developing a number of public statements this year, covering a wide range of issues (see

“Statements”). In addition, the group undertook deliberations on future conference venues, evaluated cost share proposals (see “Cost Share” section), and made decisions regarding web and conference resources. All of this work will benefit the Association well into the future.

4.1.2. Elected membership changes

The 2024 annual conference brings substantial changes to the membership of our Executive Committee, with members rotating out of positions and newly-elected colleagues joining the group. This year, five members will either be departing leadership roles or moving to new roles. All of these colleagues have served the association with distinction. Past and Acting President Steve Leigh will be leaving the committee after serving consecutively as Vice President and Program Chair, President Elect, President, and Past and Acting President (since 2018). Dr. Leigh is being recognized at the annual Business Meeting with the Gabriel W. Lasker Service Award for his incredible dedication to the Association over the last six years, leading AABA through a number of unprecedented situations with immense grace and adeptness.

Vice President and Program Chair, Dr. Kristi Lewton will be taking on a role as Secretary. Dr. Lewton produced our 2023 and 2024 meetings with careful attention to scientific rigor and with a keen eye on the highest scientific standards. In addition, Dr. Lewton has been deeply involved in restructuring our web presence and in moving towards a new electronic conference platform, preparing the Association well for the future.

Dr. Amy Rector completes her term as Secretary and will go on to serve as our new Vice President and Program Chair. Dr. Rector has made significant contributions to the association through committee work on the web and conference system committee. She has meticulously conducted her work as Secretary while aiding the Association with social media and communication efforts.

History and Honors Chair, Dr. Julienne Rutherford has worked diligently and with immense attention to transparency to support our colleagues who have been nominated for awards as well as those who have won these awards. In addition, she led efforts to preserve and celebrate the history of our discipline.

Dr. Chelsey Juarez, Student Programs Chair, has worked tirelessly on behalf of our student members. She and her committee have worked to expand opportunities for all students, including evaluation of Pollitzer Travel Awards and conferral of student

awards. Her efforts have helped our remarkable students begin their careers as professionals in our field.

We thank these wonderful colleagues who have worked so hard for the benefit of the Association, and hope that they continue their involvement with the AABA in the future.

Newly elected members include Dr. Anne Stone as President-elect, Dr. Ashley Hammond as Chair of History and Honors, and Dr. Kevin Hatala as Chair of Student Programs. See the Nominations Committee report for more information. These newly elected members to the Executive Committee were verified by the Executive Committee during their February 26, 2024, meeting.

4.1.3. Liaisons

Early Career Liaison, Dr. Justin Lund's term on the Executive Committee ends after a year dedicated to supporting Tribal Members. He introduced and pushed through the revision of conference registration fees and the establishment of a new sub-committee of the Committee on Diversity: Native American and Indigenous Biological Anthropologists (NIBA). Student Liaison, Elise Adams completes her term after efforts to support students. Like Dr. Lund, she has been a valuable member of our group. We thank our junior colleagues for their hard work and look forward to continued engagement with both individuals.

Our new Early Career Liaison, Dr. Nicole Torres-Tamayo, brings interests in open data and data sharing to the Association. In addition, incoming Student Liaison, Lucas Fannin, will be leading efforts to support student professionalization and communication between students and other AABA members. We are delighted to be joined by these remarkable early career colleagues.

4.2. Ethics

The President, with concurrence of the Executive Committee, appointed a new Ethics Committee Chair, Dr. Yohannes Haile-Selassie, to lead the committee in the coming years. Dr. Haile-Selassie has been joined by newly appointed committee members Drs. Carlina de la Cova and Cecil Lewis. Additional members may be added in the near future.

4.3. Science Policy (The use of legacy data from skeletal collections)

The new, reformed Science Policy Committee is tasked with developing conversations around the use of historical datasets collected from legacy skeletal collections. The chair of this ad hoc committee is Dr. Lumilla Menendez. Nominations are under consideration for additional committee members.

4.4 Task Force on the Ethical Study of Human Materials

This Task Force was initiated by then-President Steve Leigh in 2022. Co-Chairs Fatimah Jackson and Ben Auerbach report that the Task Force is moving towards completing its charge this year. Recommendations will be presented to AABA leadership this spring and the Executive Committee will work on how to implement the recommendations.

5. Web resources upgrades

The AABA has made significant progress on revising web and conference resources. Our website, bioanth.org, was developed many years ago and is administered by Dr. Ed Hagen. The website includes conference resources to handle submission and review of abstracts, along with program and abstract issue production. These resources have served very well in the past. However, as we have moved towards a wider range of formatting for the annual meeting, we have begun to lean on commercially available platforms. These platforms offer new resources and provide flexibility beyond our traditional conference systems.

In 2022 and 2023, a committee chaired by Dr. Anne Grauer carefully evaluated our resources and recommended revision of both bioanth.org and conference capabilities. Soon thereafter, President Leslea Hlusko charged a committee to continue the work of Dr. Grauer's committee, with the goal of implementing new web and conference resources by the end of April, 2024 so that our 2025 conference cycle can utilize new resources. The committee is chaired by Past and Acting President Steve Leigh, with members Anne Grauer, Ed Hagen, Catherine Taylor, Kristi Lewton, Amy Rector, along with Heide Rohland and Lori Strong (Burk and Associates).

This committee identified several priorities, including updating and improving our current web presence for users, taking advantage of commercial conference software, and developing resources for membership administration. Membership administration is currently managed by a third-party vendor who will soon retire. The group met virtually through the year discussing and evaluating options, including retaining or substantially revising our current resources. We consulted with two comparable associations (e.g., the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology and the Semiconductor,

Environmental, Safety, and Health Association), both of which had recently undertaken similar initiatives.

After evaluating proposals from multiple vendors for our website, conference software, and membership administration, the committee moved forward with proposals from two companies to complete this work. Specifically, the committee accepted proposals from Knockmedia to develop a new version of bioanth.org. We chose X-CD to handle conference tasks and membership administration. It is important to note that we worked with X-CD for our 2023 conference in Reno to handle virtual components. X-CD is also presenting our 2024 program, both for LA and virtual components.

Contract costs were \$36,000 for Knockmedia and \$10,500 for X-CD. Costs for Knockmedia are one-time only, with the option to pay for future consulting and services. The X-CD contract includes per capita costs for membership administration, which we expect will total about \$1250 per year. In addition, the X-CD contract for 2025 will be \$18,000, with AABA using the system beginning immediately after our 2024 conference. Our current costs for these services are approximately \$6,000 per year, so the change to a commercial conference software brings a cost increase. We are on track to complete the move to new web resources as our 2024 conference concludes.

A special thank-you is extended to Acting President Steve Leigh for chairing this extraordinary committee, ushering in the new web-based infrastructure for AABA's annual meeting and membership needs, and the massive redesign of the Association's website.

6. Contract renegotiation with Burk

The Association will continue to work with our business partner, Burk and Associates (BAI), following contract negotiations in the late spring of 2023. The association has realized substantial benefits from our partnership with Burk and Associates over the last 7 years. The main benefit has been to relieve Local Arrangements Committees from risks, liabilities, and the large time commitments involved in negotiating contracts with venues and organizing the annual conference. In addition, we have benefitted by taking advantage of resources BAI offers to clients, such as webinar infrastructure, a more advantageous position from which to negotiate contracts, accounting and financial support, and deep knowledge of academic association best-practices. The company also facilitates communication and interaction among clients, enabling us to take advantage of resources, ideas, and best practices from peer associations.

The cost of BAI's services will rise moderately from \$126,000 to \$150,000 per year. This will be the first price increase since the initial contract in 2017. The new contract will involve annual adjustments in line with the cost-of-living increase index published by the Federal Government for the preceding twelve months (CPI-U), so the costs will likely increase each year. The contract also stipulates that changes in the size or complexity of the AABA (in either direction) can serve as a basis for altering fees. The contract is open-ended, and can be terminated by either party at any time with a one-year notification, and will continue until terminated by either party, modified by an addendum as needed. The contract will be signed in-person during the Los Angeles meeting and be effective as of January 1, 2023.

7. Statements

The Association either published or co-signed a number of statements over the past year with the objectives of maintaining high scientific standards, supporting members and departments, and in addressing social and political issues that directly relate to the research conducted within biological anthropology.

7.1. National Anthropological Archives support letter (co-signatory)

The AABA cosigned a letter in support of additional resources for the National Anthropological Archives (Smithsonian Institution) led by the Society for American Archaeology and joined by eight other professional anthropological associations and societies. The letter requests greater allocations of staff and resources to preserve the archives in accordance with professional standards. A copy is available upon request.

7.2. Fossils in space

The Executive Committee wrote a statement questioning the act of launching original fossil materials into space as an apparent publicity event.

<https://bioanth.org/about/position-statements/aaba-statement-concerning-the-hominin-fossils-carried-on-virgin-galactic-spaceflight/>

7.3. Trans lives support statement

We joined AAAG, DAA, HBA, PPA, PAS, and the Biological Anthropology Section of the AAA in a statement in support of trans lives individuals.

<https://bioanth.org/about/position-statements/aaba-statement-in-support-of-trans-lives/>

7.4. Position statement to Marriott regarding labor dispute covered in Section 1.2

A copy is available upon request.

7.5. President's correspondence with University of North Carolina Greensboro

President Hlusko, in collaboration with AABA officers, submitted a support letter (dated Jan 22, 2024) to the Chancellor and Provost of the University of North Carolina Greensboro contesting the closure of the Department of Anthropology at the UNCG. Unfortunately, the department was discontinued as of February 1, 2024. A copy is available upon request.

8. Acknowledgements and Appreciation

This past year was an unusual one for the AABA presidency, with Leslea Hlusko's extended medical leave. The entire Executive Committee carried more work than would normally have been theirs in order to compensate for the absence. By far, Steve Leigh carried an especially heavy load. He dedicated an immense amount of time and energy to the Association, serving in both the roles of Past President and President simultaneously. On behalf of the entire AABA, Leslea Hlusko extends a huge thank-you to Steve Leigh and to the Executive Committee for so graciously taking on so much more work than they signed up for.

Both Steve Leigh and Leslea Hlusko want to express immense gratitude to the entire Executive Committee for their dedicated service over the last year. It is an honor and a joy to work with such a talented group of colleagues, all of whom are dedicated to making AABA be its best.

We also extend a huge thank-you to our colleagues at Burk Associates, Inc. (BAI) who provide AABA with unfailing administrative support and guidance. We especially thank Lori Strong for her incredible dedication and hard work on all aspects of our complicated annual meeting planning. A special thank-you also to Brett Burk, Jill Drupa, Lauri Mullins, and so many others at BAI who have proven to be highly valuable partners in carrying out the aims of AABA.