

SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY (SAA) **ANNUAL MEETING OMBUDS REPORT**

May 2022

SAA Meeting Ombuds - David Rasch and Kathy Canul

SAA Meeting Ombuds program

Planning for the SAA Annual Meeting Ombuds

Kathy Canul and David Rasch served as co-ombuds for the 2022 SAA Annual Meeting in Chicago. In preparation for providing in-person ombuds services for the first time, we worked closely with SAA Executive Director Oona Schmid and other SAA members leaders to create a conference ombuds program that would best serve the SAA. Individuals and groups that might be likely to utilize the service were identified, and we each met with several key stakeholders to learn about the history, structure, membership, and current challenges facing the SAA.

This process also included identifying and planning the communication channels for informing the membership about this new program, and about the confidential, neutral, informal, and independent services an ombuds would provide. We updated an informational video for the SAA website and reviewed and edited descriptions for publicity emails and the web.

A separate ombuds email address and phone number were created to ensure the confidentiality of contacts with the ombuds. Several additional communications with the Executive Director and others took place in preparation for launching and providing the service.

In addition to ombuds services provided during the conference, we also agreed to monitor the SAA ombuds email and phone line and respond to concerns that could come in within the two weeks following the conference, and to provide a summary report to give non-identifying aggregate and demographic information connected with the ombuds services provided during the conference.

SAA Ombuds Program Utilization - 2022

The SAA Ombuds were invited and attended a number of Annual Meeting sessions. The Ombuds had multiple opportunities to observe and share in the discussion of important topics at sessions including: Women in the SAA; Curation, Human Remains Policy: Vital Ethical Conversations; The Ethics Bowl; Archaeology, Diverse Expertise, Inclusion in Archaeology. Participating in this way allowed us to see and be seen by meeting attendees and we think this reflects well on the SAA Board's decision to establish an SAA Annual Meeting Ombuds program and promote it in this way.

Ombuds Cases

The SAA Ombuds received 10 contacts from the Annual Meeting participants. De-identified data on the cases is as follows:

- **Demographics:** *7 of the contacts came from women, 3 from men*
- **Subject of Concern:** *(total issues is greater than the number of cases since some cases had more than one issue.)*
 - *4 cases concerned policies and practices of the SAA*
 - *2 cases involved peer conflicts*
 - *2 cases involved professional ethics concerns*
 - *2 cases were connected to the death of an attendee*
 - *2 cases involved technical issues with conference participation*
 - *One case involved a sexual harassment concern*
- **Employment Sector:**
 - *Academic: 8 cases*
 - *Professional: 2 cases*
- **Ombuds Actions:** *(total % is greater than 100% since some cases had more than one ombuds action.)*
 - *40% (4/10) – Ombuds provided information to the SAA staff or Executive Director with Visitors' permission to resolve an issue.*
 - *50% (4/10) – Ombuds referred visitor to the appropriate resource*
 - *10% (1/10) - Ombuds informed Visitor about SAA's formal reporting process*
 - *70% Ombuds consulted and discussed options*
 - *20% (2/10) contacted the ombuds within the two weeks after the end of the Annual Meeting*

In addition, the ombuds consulted with Oona Schmid re: the handling of unwelcome visitors at the Annual Meeting, and regarding providing support to those who wished to discuss reactions to the unexpected death of an attendee.

RECOMMENDATIONS / FEEDBACK

Here is the feedback we heard from the visitors:

- *It appears that Meeting attendees were able to adjust back to in-person session events without too much difficulty. Many greetings, hugs and joyous reunions were witnessed. Session participants demonstrated respect even when sensitive topics were addressed.*
- *A concern was expressed that social justice issues are too prominent in determining SAA policy; possibly connected to a generational divide within the membership on this issue*
- *Membership is perceived to be diminishing among SAA membership, especially among CRM members, perhaps due in part to issues that emerged at last year's meeting regarding a controversial speaker.*
- *There is a split between the interests of CRM and academic members and new approaches are needed to better integrate both in the organization. A concern was raised about the fact that the SAA leadership is primarily academic archeologists.*
- *Prior to the Meeting, the Ombuds discussed with leadership the possible management of a participant who might create a disruption or become belligerent. This did not occur however an attendee did contact the Ombuds with fear that an acquaintance would disrupt her session. These concerns suggest that it may be helpful, pre-Meeting, to further discuss and plan for the actuality of these events occurring.*
- *As conferences return to in-person attendance, it would be ideal for the Ombuds, in addition to sitting-in on sessions, also be introduced to various segments within SAA, (e.g. welcome events or sessions at the Meeting where ombuds could be introduced) in order to increase visibility of this role.*