

2023 SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY ANNUAL MEETING OMBUDS REPORT

Submitted April 10, 2023 by Kathleen Canul, SAA Meeting Ombuds

Kathleen Canul served as the Ombuds for the 2023 Society for American Archaeology (SAA) Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon from March 29th through April 2, 2023. Prior to the Annual Meeting, the Ombuds met with Executive Director, Oona Schmid, to discuss communicating with stakeholders, identifying potential concerns and coordinating a schedule for in-person office hours.

To best serve the SAA participants and enhance visibility of the Ombuds role, a short video describing services and conflict management strategies was created and the Ombuds resource was highlighted in the Meeting program, website and mobile app detailing office hours and how to reach the Ombuds at any time outside of the hours. Participants were able to share their concerns confidentially via an email address and phone number not affiliated with the Meeting, or stop by in-person at a private room located in the Oregon Convention Center, where the Meeting was being held.

Office Hours were as follows:

Wednesday, March 29th 2:00pm-10:00pm

Thursday, March 30th 8:00am-6:00pm

Friday, March 31st 8:00am-6:30pm

Saturday, April 1st 8:00am-5:00pm

Sunday, April 2nd 8:00am-12:00pm

SAA Ombuds Program Utilization

Ombuds Cases

The SAA Ombuds received 20 contacts from Annual Meeting participants. Anonymous data on the cases is as follows:

- Demographics: 18 of the contacts came from females, 1 from a male, 1 gender not identified.
- Subject of Concern: (total issues are greater than the number of cases since some cases had more than one issue.)

- 11 cases involved incidents of perceived sexual harassment, either experienced, witnessed, or had concerns about possible harassment at the Meeting
- 8 cases involved questions about Meeting resources (e.g. access to quiet room, speaker-ready room, lost and found, etc.)
- 2 cases involved professional ethics concerns
- 1 case involved referral to policy on presentation content restrictions

Academic scholars, professionals, graduate and undergraduate students all were represented in the cases addressed.

Case Dispositions

- All sexual harassment cases, except one, where the incident occurred over 50 years ago and not at an SAA event, were referred to SAA leadership with permission from the Meeting participants. The individual reporting the decades-old incident was referred to other resources.
- All participants seeking answers to Meeting resources received answers that resolved their issues.
- 4 individuals contacted the Ombuds days prior to the commencement of the Meeting.
- 9 participants met with the Ombuds in the designated private room during office hours.
- 7 Ombuds contacts were made outside of the stated office hours.
- 10 participants initiated contact with the Ombuds via e-mail.
- 3 participants called the Ombuds directly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Concerns related to sexual harassment were the most common issues shared with the Ombuds. Two participants reported receiving unwelcome comments at the Meeting. Two participants questioned whether an individual who was found responsible for violating sexual harassment should be allowed to participate in the Meeting. One questioned whether an individual who is a respondent in a sexual harassment investigation should be allowed to attend. Two participants were witnesses to perceived sexual harassment and two participants expressed concern of possible disrespectful and unwelcome behavior from a peer attending the Meeting. It appears that sexual harassment related matters are a cause for concern for some participants. It does seem that the Ombuds resource was accessible to these individuals and all appeared satisfied with the manner in which the complaints were addressed, including referral for formal action, enhanced feelings of safety and quick resolution by SAA leadership. Continued visibility of the Ombuds role, in addition to further highlighting sexual harassment policies may allow for additional reporting of policy violations.
- Executive Director Oona Schmid was exceptionally responsive to all queries and requests for involvement in those choosing a formal route to address concerns.

- The Ombuds serves as a customer service agent often receiving requests for directions, registration issues, presenter resources, vendor questions, lost and found, etc. Obtaining a map of the Meeting venue and contact numbers for resource associated roles would be helpful in being more responsive to participants. For example, a presenter wanted to use the quiet room to focus and prepare further but it was locked and it took some time to find the right person to get it open.
- As conferences return to in-person attendance, it would be ideal for the Ombuds, in addition to sitting-in on sessions, be introduced to various segments within SAA, (e.g. welcome events, student receptions) to increase visibility of this role.
- The location of the Ombuds resource was adequately private yet also in a space where there was considerable foot traffic allowing for participants to stop by and ask questions. Those coming to the office reported no trouble in finding it.

In sum, the Ombuds role can be a useful resource for those seeking a place to share concerns about their Meeting perceptions and experiences. Additionally, participants may help change both the climate and culture of an organization by speaking up and getting connected with SAA leadership to directly address and hold accountable responsible parties.