

REASSESSING THE PRESENT FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FUTURE

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND CHANGE

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In recent years, there have been various initiatives, discussions, and efforts toward creating a more equitable, intellectually diverse, and inclusive archaeology. Within the SAA, this commitment is illustrated by the Executive Committee's Subcommittee on Diversity and the resulting *Statement on Diversity* passed in 2006,¹ the cosponsored session by the Native American Relations Committee and the Committee on Ethics on Indigenous Inclusion (2006), COSWA's forums on Equity Issues (2005 and 2006), and our focus of discussion here, the collaborative forum on Diversity and Change (2007), which included members from the Executive Committee, COSWA, Committee on Curriculum, Committee on Ethics, Native American Relations Committee, Repatriation Committee, and Student Affairs Committee. Out of these forums and reports, our organization has begun a shift from discussions about differences in thought and practice into creative, innovative, and constructive debates that force us to question how we formulate and understand the system of practice within which we operate. This article explores the interrelated issues of equity and diversity and the changing nature of archaeology within the membership and organization. We examine this, with the input of the participants of the forum on Diversity and Change, simultaneously self-reflexively, critically, and with a look toward the future potential of our discipline.

Considering issues of equity to be interlinked to those of identity, it becomes necessary to question diversity within the discipline and how, given its increasingly shifting demographics and needs, change could be implemented. The goal of the 2007 SAA forum "Diversity & Change: Discussions on Future Needs and Challenges for Archaeology" was to seek people with experience in various aspects of the SAA and archaeological practice. As part of this, members from many of the SAA's standing committees were invited to participate, not as direct representation from those committees, but

rather as possible liaisons, who might take back to each committee the discussions that took place in this forum as a means of enriching committee-based work. In addition to committee members, SAA members at large were invited to participate in order to increase the diversity of opinion in the forum. The forum was open to all SAA members during the meetings. An unanticipated benefit of this expansive approach was that we also had people from a variety of different institutional backgrounds, which provided a component to the discussion for which we had not originally planned.

Diversity and Change

Oftentimes "diversity" is framed within a historical perspective within United States institutions. As with the constantly evolving nature of affirmative action, this is done as a means of righting historical wrongs. It is done as an act that is meant to empower those who have had their voice silenced, or were denied a voice in the first place. The concept of diversity, when stripped of this historical baggage, can be recognized as including not just peoples of differing "color" or "culture," but differing ethical principles, intellectual standpoints, and opposing political ideas. For the purposes of this article, we want to couch diversity within a framework that recognizes that traditional, or stereotyped, concepts of the term are inadequate when we examine what constitutes unequal access to resources, such as education and salary, and unreasonable expectations, such as with students with families or for peoples of color, within the discipline. Accordingly, one of the goals of the forum was to collect perspectives that would aid in identifying and addressing the forms of persisting structural, including historical, expectations within our organization that inhibit productive discourse that would allow for the recognition and development of new practices.

The issue of “change” as a concept was more appropriately framed by one of our discussants as a change from “what to what”? As such, we must consider and evaluate the current state of our organization and its constituents in terms of the general expectations and standards we have established.² As with diversity, traditional structures on which our organization is founded are limited in their contemporary perspective. In particular, one of the key areas of change identified was in the area of curricular development. In a changing world and field, new curricular guidelines and professional training for private and government sector work are necessary. The split between institutions that focus on theory versus those that recognize applied aspects of archaeology is no longer viable given the pressures of an increasingly growing field in the face of a limited pool of academic positions. Consequently, the change that must occur needs to be considered across training institutions in order to provide students the broadest possible series of opportunities once they complete their degrees. At the same time, professional expectations remain. The corpus of knowledge on which the discipline has been built and the rigor with which it is expected to be applied are both standards that are the result of over a century’s practice. As such, changes in professional expectations need to be considered in both additive as well as collaborative terms. It was within this structure that the forum discussed this issue.

Diversification and Changing

The results of these discussions are summarized within the action points noted below, but it is useful to provide additional context. The forum, it should be noted, was a starting point and not a conclusion. It was not a goal of the forum to come up with guidelines, but to provide observations and recommendations based on the broad experiences of the people in attendance. As such, there was a blend of both enduring and new issues that came to light as participants brought their personal and observed understandings to the table.

Regarding diversity, it was recognized that historical circumstances remained a driving force in much of the current practice within institutions. Within the academy one of the critical issues remained the recruiting and retention of faculty of color within the discipline. Some of the key issues that surround retention have to do with the reward system for service. Oftentimes faculty of color, which must also include female faculty as part of the discussion, are over-committed to service committees, particularly those dealing with issues of diversity. Tokenism within the educational system remains a consistent problem at many institutions

where people are hired to address “those” issues that are considered to be inherent to the group they “represent,” whether it be people of color, a given culture, a particular social or religious background, or women. The pressure on these individuals to perform in roles outside of the generic academic norm represents a consistent problem for an equitable future within the discipline as they often end up not achieving the same recognition as traditional practitioners (i.e., those who focus primarily on research) in their departments and, as a result, leave.

At the same time, there was a recognition that diversity not only emerged from the people within the discipline, but in the ways that our organization approached the practice of archaeology. Consistent with the ethical principles of the organization,³ many people emphasized the importance of local communities as active agents in the process of how we engage the archaeological record. In particular, descendant communities, or indigenous communities, were a prominent focus. These types of engaged archaeologies present the discipline as a tool and resource to communities to be negotiated rather than accepted as a *fait accompli* that communities must be convinced to accept. Within this process, communities become a source of direction for archaeological research rather than a potential impediment.

Regarding changing from “what to what,” the majority of discussions focused on standards and curriculum. It was clear from discussions that there was a significant disjuncture between what academics considered to be suitable standards and those of the private and governmental heritage management sectors. The point was made that much of the theoretical and methodological innovation came from academic research, and, as a result, there needed to be greater communication between these typically disparate groups. This observation was further explored in terms of how private and governmental organizations could develop relationships with academic institutions in terms of developing coursework that could be used for accreditation of individuals in order to promote the developing standards within academia to the cultural resource management audience.

Additional points of discussion that were focused on were the accessibility and expectations for graduate education for students from differing backgrounds. Class and family situation were the emphases in these cases. With the increasing cost of graduate education comes the sacrifice of potential within the discipline. Many gifted students are unable to consider suitable programs due to an increasing lack of funding opportunities that they need in order to achieve their academic goals. At the same time, many students in

programs within the past decade, if not longer, come into graduate programs and must divide their time between family commitments and graduate education. The result is often a longer time to degree, which is a significant challenge to programs that are under pressure from their institutions to reduce the amount of time to completion.

Along with these general observations, the forum provided a series of additional recommendations and observations. These include the following and should be considered in tandem with the recommendations as outlined by the Subcommittee on Diversity:

1. All SAA Committees should report annually on how they enhance the larger goal of diversity.
2. In conjunction with point 1, there should be a standing forum that brings together members of each of these committees, hosted by a different committee each year, that discusses issues related to diversity and change.
3. Create liaisons with sister organizations, such as AIA, RPA, ACRA, and AAA, that would serve to bring these same discussions either to the attention of, or drawn from, the experiences of these other organizations.
4. Create themed meetings like the AAAs—and have diversity as one of the initial themes.
5. Provide more options and acceptance of different types of academic and lifestyle choices.
6. SAA summer institutes for minority students should be conducted in collaboration with minority institutions and programs at colleges and universities.
7. Focus on the retention of students, which includes creating friendly/safe spaces for them to interact with mentors.
8. On the level of the individual, mentor students and encourage them to join various organizations, such as the Association of American University Professors, etc., in order to foster linkages between organizations.
9. On the level of educational institutions, the SAA can lobby to standardize maternity/paternity leave, extending tenure clocks as several institutions already do.
10. Work with parks and services to diversify the work force.
11. Take United States policy (domestically and internationally) into account as it changes funding for archaeological research—creating change that is not chosen by us, but forced upon us—and rather than accept those changes passively, debate them and engage them as other organizations have done, such as the AIA, SHA, etc.
12. Determine the ramifications of the Spellings Commission report (<http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/final-report.pdf>) in conjunction with other organizations such as the AAA, AIA, etc.

Concluding Thoughts

Our great fortune in this forum was to be able to have access to an exceptional group of individuals who provided their time and input into this discussion. What we began with in this forum, we hope will continue. The importance of these discussions is a continual process that requires the attention of our organization. Whether the issues are focused on either the frequently nebulous concept of diversity or what we understand fundamentally as change, the two cannot be considered in separation and must be a focus for how the SAA structures itself in the immediate future.

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Notes

1. The Board approved the following Statement on Diversity developed by the Subcommittee on Diversity Initiatives of the SAA Board of Directors:

SAA believes that the study and preservation of the archaeological record can enrich our appreciation for diverse communities, foster respect for difference, and encourage the celebration of individual and collective achievement. SAA is committed to promoting diversity in our membership, in our practice, and in the audiences we seek to reach through the dissemination of our research. Moreover, SAA aims to cultivate an inclusive environment that promotes understanding and values diversity in ethnic origin, national origin, gender, race, age, economic status, lifestyle, physical and/or cognitive abilities, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, work background, family structure, and other perceived differences. Passed April 26, 2006.

2. See SAA Strategic Plan Outline at <http://www.saa.org/aboutSAA/103strat.html> and Principles of Archaeological Ethics at <http://www.saa.org/ABOUTSAA/COMMITTEES/ethics/principles.html>.

3. See Principles of Archaeological Ethics at <http://www.saa.org/ABOUTSAA/COMMITTEES/ethics/principles.html>.