SHORT REPORT

AAFS ANTHROPOLOGY SECTION
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (D&I) COMMITTEE

Goals, Initiatives, and Statements associated with the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) 71st Annual Scientific Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland

REPORT PREPARED BY
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Co-Chairs of the AAFS Anthropology Section D&I Committee

2019
INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, the AAFS Anthropology Section’s Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Committee has been actively attempting to address issues of diversity and inclusion in the forensic community. This short report provides a brief history of the D&I Committee, as well as the primary objectives, past activities, and future directions of the committee. The report also provides statements submitted to the D&I Committee by AAFS members regarding their personal experiences at the AAFS 71st Annual Scientific Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland.

HISTORY

The Anthropology Section’s D&I Committee was introduced as an ad hoc committee at the AAFS (2017) meeting by Anthropology Section President, Gregory Berg. The committee was comprised of two co-chairs and six committee members representing graduate students and professionals from academia, government agencies, and humanitarian organizations. This initial step importantly paralleled committees formed by closely aligned professional organizations, such as the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPAs).

During the AAFS (2018) Anthropology business meeting, the ad hoc D&I Committee successfully became a permanent standing committee under Anthropology Section President, Kate Spradley, with the overwhelming support of the Anthropology Section. This transition was paramount to legitimizing and supporting the work performed by the D&I Committee and its future activities.

At the AAFS (2019) Anthropology business meeting, the D&I Committee proposed two important agenda items for the Anthropology Section: adoption of a Diversity and Inclusion Statement and creation of a D&I Travel Award. With the support of the Anthropology Section President, Jennifer Love, the D&I statement was unanimously adopted into the Anthropology Policy and Procedures Manual (PPM).
The D&I Committee also proposed that the Anthropology Section allocate $500.00 of its annual budget to create a Diversity & Inclusion Travel Award in order to support a historically underrepresented Student Member to attend the AAFS annual meetings. Not only did the Anthropology Section unanimously vote to fund at least $500.00 annually for the travel award, but an individual section member, Peer H. Moore-Jansen, volunteered to donate an additional $500.00 of his personal funds to increase the award to $1000.00. We are incredibly humbled at our Section’s generosity and their support of the D&I Committee’s initiatives.

GOALS

The motivation to increase diversity and inclusion in various contexts results from strong evidence that indicates this combination not only positively encourages individuals and groups, but also fosters creativity, innovation, and problem-solving in addition to increasing performance, productivity and cooperation. Today, diversity and inclusion initiatives are supported widely throughout academia, businesses, sport associations, government organizations, and scientific societies. A call to increase diversity and inclusion in the forensic
sciences has even been published by the National Institute of Justice\textsuperscript{1}. We believe that increasing diversity and fostering inclusion in forensic anthropology will help us reflect the greater population whom we serve, and encourage us to challenge our own assumptions and inherent biases in order to perform better forensic science.

The D&I Committee critically explores and purposely develops diversity and inclusion within the field of forensic anthropology. Primary objectives of the committee include assessing diversity-related concerns of the Anthropology Section, promoting inclusion, acting as an advocate for underrepresented groups in forensic science, and promoting diversity-related resources for all Anthropology Section members. Specific goals of the committee include:

- **Promote Critical Self-Reflection**: to critically reflect on the current state of the Anthropology Section practices and membership, listening to our Section members and consciously creating a culture of diversity that is welcoming to all;
- **Increase Recruitment, Participation and Retention**: to actively increase the recruitment and retention of individuals from underrepresented groups through outreach and mentorship programs, and to encourage the participation of Anthropology Section members at all levels;
- **Develop Educational and Practical Resources**: to explore diversity and inclusion-related concerns, to develop concrete recommendations for change, and to promote practical resources for Section members;
- **Serve as a Liaison**: to act as an advocate and intermediary for Anthropology Section members, communicating concerns and recommendations to leadership in the Section, the AAFS Officers and Directors, the AAFS Diversity and Outreach Committee, and other allied organizations.

**ACTIVITIES**

The committee has pursued a number of other activities in addition to successfully proposing the D&I Statement and Travel Award. These include examining Section demographics through a membership survey, sponsoring forums, developing a social media platform for outreach, organizing a symposium, and contributing to a culture of inclusion through the distribution of Celebrate Diversity ribbons.

\textsuperscript{1} Wagstaff IR and LaPorte G. 2017. The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in the Forensic Sciences. NIJ Journal, Issue 279.
Currently, the AAFS does not collect demographic information from its members (apart from age), which precludes any analysis of diversity (or lack thereof). To begin to address this issue in the Anthropology Section, the D&I Committee disseminated an IRB-approved survey of Section membership in 2017-2018 which was presented at the AAFS (2019) meeting. Nearly half of the Anthropology Section responded, and provided important information regarding membership demographics and experiences in the Section. Major results from the survey indicate that the Anthropology Section exhibits reduced levels of diversity with increased advancement from student to professional. Specifically, the Section struggles with recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups, and this attrition through advancement is likely due, in part, to discrimination. It is clear that we in the Anthropology Section can do more at both the individual and group levels to increase diversity and make the Section more inclusive. However, we also strongly encourage the AAFS to better understand variation in its membership by conducting an annual census (similar to other professional societies), in order to track demographic trends over time and to identify potential areas of outreach and recruitment.

### Membership Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee Member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Year(s) Active</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Bethard</td>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>2017 - 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cate Bird</td>
<td>Committee Co-Chair</td>
<td>2017 - present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha Diaz</td>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>2017 - present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Davette Gadison</td>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>2017 - present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesse Goliath</td>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>2019 - present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicolette Parr</td>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>2017 - present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sean Tallman</td>
<td>Committee Co-Chair</td>
<td>2017 - present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denise To</td>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>2017 - present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa Wilson</td>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>2019 - present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allysha Winburn</td>
<td>Committee Member</td>
<td>2017 - present</td>
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Forums

Starting in 2018, the D&I Committee sponsored both student and professional forums for Anthropology Section members at the AAFS meetings. During the AAFS (2019) meeting, the student members of the committee (Martha Diaz and Davette Gadison) assembled a panel of three professionals to discuss their successful transition from graduate school to professional spheres. Approximately 50 students attended the panel and asked questions related to professional development (e.g. research, publishing, etc.), advising and mentorship, preparation for the job search, and handling rejection. Also during the AAFS (2019) meeting, members of the committee (Nicolette Parr, Denise To, Cate Bird, and Sean Tallman) moderated a professional forum. Approximately 50 Anthropology members discussed avenues for increasing interactions between students and professionals (e.g. research collaborations, mentorship programs, etc.), implementing membership census surveys, developing a D&I budget, creating topical subcommittees, and providing specific trainings/workshops for continuing professional development. The D&I Committee appreciates the open discussion by participants and will continue to provide a space for such open dialogues in the future.
Social Media Outreach

During the 2018-2019 year, committee members (Jonathan Bethard and Martha Diaz) created and managed a social media page, which aims to serve as a neutral clearinghouse for information related to forensic anthropology. Through this platform, the committee can share news and opportunities related to our field for both students and professionals, including job postings, regional conferences, short courses, workshops, field schools, internships, major announcements, awards, and diversity and inclusion resources. The D&I Committee intends to continue developing its social media outreach to maximize the involvement and participation of all Anthropology Section members.

D&I Symposium at the AAFS (2019) Meeting

At the AAFS (2019) meeting, committee member, Allysha Winburn, organized and moderated a reflective and long overdue invited symposium on diversity and inclusion in forensic anthropology. The symposium consisted of the following podium presentations:

- Diversity and Inclusion in Forensic Anthropology: Where We Stand and Prospects for the Future (A143) by Sean D. Tallman and Cate E. Bird
- Increasing Graduate Student Diversity in Forensic Anthropology Through Research (A144) by Kate Spradley and Olivia A. Jones
- Perspectives on Diversity in Skeletal Collections (A145) by Allysha P. Winburn, Antaya L. Jennings, Dawnie W. Steadman, and Elizabeth A. DiGangi
- Why Are There So Many Women in Forensic Anthropology? A Critical Evaluation of Gender Politics in Forensic Anthropology (A146) by Marin A. Pilloud and Nicholas V. Passalacqua
- Recruitment Strategies From the Increasing Diversity in Evolutionary Anthropological Sciences (IDEAS) Program of the American Association of Physical Anthropology (AAPA) (A147) by Phoebe R. Stubblefield and Susan C. Anton
- The Morphology of Intersectionality: Discordance Between Ancestry Estimates and Social Identifiers (A148) by Chaunesey Clemmons
- A Push for Trans-Inclusive Language in Forensic Sciences (A149) by Fatimah Bouderdaben

As the invited discussant, Susan Antón provided thoughtful observations and conclusions regarding the presentations, which covered a range of topics, including race, sex, trans-inclusive language, power, and mentorship. The D&I Committee is incredibly encouraged by the high turnout of Section members to this event, as well as the insightful and personal presentations by the authors and the considerate discussions following the presentations.
'Celebrate Diversity’ Ribbons

Since 2015, Co-Chairs of the D&I Committee, Cate Bird and Sean Tallman, have purchased and distributed ‘Celebrate Diversity’ ribbons to Anthropology Section members. While a seemingly minor gesture, the overwhelming appeal and demand for these ribbons visibly demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion at AAFS, and the need to continue these initiatives in the Section, in the Academy, and in forensic science. These ribbons will continue to be distributed at the AAFS annual meetings.
The following statements were submitted to the Anthropology Section D&I Committee by attendees of the 71st AAFS Annual Scientific Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland.

“I would like to express my gratitude for the great work the D&I Committee has done and is committed to do for the members of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. The D&I Committee has put into practice the foundations of the term “belonging” and have been able to bring together individuals who have been historically marginalized or gone unnoticed through our annual meetings. The activities promoted by the D&I are not only important to highlight the issues and challenges these communities face, but it is allowing us to be the voices of our own communities. The meeting between graduate students and professionals created a much needed space for us to ask and answer questions and comments in a safe and inclusive space, and the open session provided the space for the scientific relevance of an inclusive and diverse community. I am very grateful for the changes the Anthropology Section approved during the business meeting and I believe the D&I is one of advancements most of us wanted to see in our section. I hope the Academy understands that these are only first steps, but imperative to all of us, as we need to be representative of the people we serve. Seeing people with the “Celebrate Diversity” tag might seem like nothing to some, but it means the world to those who needed to feel like they are among people who accept them. Thank you to all involved in the D&I Committee creation, maintenance and proposed activities. I can't wait to see what the future holds for us.”

-Melina Calmon Silva, Graduate Student at Tulane University

“I have been employed in academia for 12 years. I strive to foster a classroom environment where students feel comfortable participating in discussion, asking questions, and making comments. It's not easy. Professional conferences such as AAFS are intimidating for students and often the environment is not conducive to discussion or questions. I have noticed that students don't feel comfortable speaking up, rather they sit in the back of the room and observe. During the Diversity and Inclusion symposium in the Anthropology section, I witnessed for the first time, an environment that made students, the next generation of forensic scientists, feel comfortable going to the microphone and making comments and asking questions. To me, this represents change within our section and within the Academy and is a positive step forward to make all feel welcome.”

-Kate Spradley, Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Texas State University

"I have been a Student Affiliate of the Academy's Anthropology Section since 2015 and recently attended the 71st Annual Scientific Meeting in Baltimore, MD. I wanted to reach out regarding the incredible efforts made by the Anthropology Section's Diversity and Inclusion Committee at this year's meeting. In particular, the Diversity and Inclusion Symposium on Friday, February 22nd that was moderated by Drs. Allysha Winburn and Susan Antón presented inspiring and important works that I feel represent the
future direction of forensic research. Each presentation reflected on the current state of the field and suggested numerous avenues of academic and professional improvement without lamenting on the status quo. In doing so, they created a clear opportunity for productive conversation, debate, and growth that, in my experience, is unique to the Academy’s meeting format. Moreover, this event empowered students to actively engage with and question established professionals about important topics in our field. From what I saw, students left this session with a stronger understanding of the progress the Academy is making on this front and feeling excited about future research possibilities they could pursue. As a student, I was encouraged by the way these presentations integrated established methodologies in relevant social contexts. I hope that the Academy continues to support similar efforts for students and professionals to confront difficult questions in a positive academic environment. I look forward to attending next year’s meeting and seeing the Academy’s continual growth.”

-Justin Goldstein, Graduate Student at the University of Nevada

They were both thoughtful and emotional in what is generally a stoic and callus conference. I found the symposium not only informative, but timely and necessary. The Anthropology Section at AAFS has a troubled history with a number of issues including sexual misconduct and discrimination. While this symposium did not solve those deep-seated issues, it took the essential first step by addressing them. It is important for everyone (in anthropology and otherwise) to know that they have allies that will listen and help spark the changes necessary to combat the problems that have plagued our section for too long.”

-Justin Maiers, Graduate Student at the University of South Florida

“I recently attended the AAFS 2019 annual meeting in Baltimore. In addition to the regular conference proceedings, I was also able to attend several events hosted by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee including a panel discussion about career opportunities, a symposium on diversity and inclusion, and a social mixer. All of these events were incredibly helpful to me as a developing academic. I would like to take a moment to talk specifically about the symposium. I have been attending AAFS meetings for nearly a decade now, and this symposium was unquestionably the best group of talks that I have ever seen. “I am writing in support of the D&I Committee within AAFS. Not only are the events that you organize at the meetings incredibly important for opening up a dialogue about inclusion and diversity within the forensic community, but it helps move the entire Academy forward into a world where diversity is celebrated, not fought against. Given some of the public comments that have been made in our business meetings regarding diversity and inclusion, as well as the more global conversations regarding immigration and minority populations in today’s current events, it is more important now than ever to continue this committee. Having specific events aimed at discussing and embracing diversity, such as the D&I forum, are imperative to keeping the narrative going. In addition to vital conversations and spaces to discuss these matters, the committee will now provide student travel grants for those from underrepresented backgrounds. The committee is an irreplaceable facet of creating a more inclusive and diverse scientific community. These events make me feel more comfortable and safe during meetings—
knowing that there is an initiative to have conversations about and promote inclusion. I feel proud that the Anthropology Section of AAFS has such a committee and I hope to see it continue and expand its work in years to come.”

-Helen Alesbury, Student Member of the Anthropology Section

“As a woman of color and a first year graduate student, the Diversity and Inclusion activities of the 2019 AAFS meetings were a highlight of the conference for me. As it was my first time attending the meeting, it was encouraging to be able to experience presentations and attend meetings that pertained to me as an individual and my presence in the field. As a graduate student, it was very informative to have attended the panel on the transition from student to professional because it gave me a sense of what to expect as I move forward with this career path. As a black woman in the field of anthropology, the presentations at the Diversity and Inclusion symposium were very impactful for me. To see that individuals of similar backgrounds and experiences as myself were given a platform to express themselves and present data from their own point of view was a unique and empowering experience that I hope to continue encountering in future AAFS meetings.”

-Alba Craig, Graduate Student at the University of Indianapolis

“Months prior to receiving the advance conference program, I had talked with my academic advisor (with decades of work as a toxicologist and crime lab director under his belt) about the use of trans-exclusionary language in forensic science simply due to personal interest—he didn’t know much about it. Thus, when I saw ‘A Push for Trans-Inclusive Language’ in the program, I was immediately invested. However, being a new student affiliate in the criminalistics section doing DNA research, as well as a first-time AAFS conference attendee, I didn’t know what to expect from an anthropology session—I was not disappointed with my experience there. For me, the D&I session was easily the highlight of my time at this year’s conference. Of course I appreciated the talk regarding trans-inclusive language, but I was captivated by the other talks I heard as well, and I genuinely appreciated the speakers’ perspectives and their candidness. I personally believe that other forensic sections would benefit from the kinds of dialogue offered at the Anthropology D&I session, at least in professional and personal development even if not in direct application to the science (as I’m sure drug chemists would find trans-inclusivity of little relevance to GC/MS operation). After the session, I was lucky enough to meet other student affiliates in criminalistics, as well as Cate Bird of the Anthropology Diversity and Inclusion Committee, with whom I was able to discuss my interest in promoting inclusivity in my own section. As of now, a criminalistics-specific D&I committee is being discussed and is in the works—I hope that this committee can serve as a platform to discuss D&I issues and concerns unique to criminalistics such that we can promote inclusivity in our field as a whole, as well as best practice for a truly objective forensic science. Had it not been for the D&I session as a diversity-specific gathering space, I likely would never have met other like-minded individuals and would have gone about my business only dreaming of greater inclusivity.”
Kevin Kim, Graduate Student at the University of Illinois at Chicago

“As a first time AAFS goer, I was nervous to dive into a brand new academic arena. My flight got in on Tuesday afternoon, and the only set plan I had for the rest of the day was to go to the Diversity and Inclusion Student Panel. This panel ended up being a perfect transition into the rest of the conference: relaxed, informative, and real. The panelists were honest about their journeys through academia, which provided a fresh insight into the highs and lows that come with pursuing an academic career. Through this panel I was able to make various connections with other students as well as established professionals. These connections were reinforced with every meetup, forum, business meeting, and symposium the Diversity and Inclusion Committee hosted or in which they took part. I am beyond grateful for the work the committee has done and will continue to do, and I am excited to watch them thrive.”

Sidney Thompson, Graduate Student at the University of Indianapolis

Krista Latham, Associate Professor at the University of Indianapolis

“As a Fellow of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences I appreciate the focus of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee to engage members in discussions of diversity and inclusion in our section of the Academy and to provide resources to members and prospective members that were not readily available in the past. The Student Panel had a direct and positive impact on my students, as I’ve heard them discussing the information from the session on multiple occasions. I attended the Professional Forum and appreciate the initiatives to engage diverse members of all kinds, ranging from racial minorities to single parents. The third annual Anthropology Section LGBTQ+ Community and Allies’ meetup provided an opportunity for professionals and students to meet and communicate in a more relaxed and informal setting, which promotes conversation and stimulates ideas regarding research and other scientific and forensic endeavors. Perhaps the most impactful event at the 2019 meeting was the Diversity Symposium. Not only did it give a voice to those who might not have been heard in the past, but it also introduced important concepts that need to be considered in our field, which functions at the intersection of science and culture. I look forward to more amazing events from the committee and am eager to participate in their new mentoring initiative.”

“... I just wanted to thank you for your contributions to the Anthropology Section at this year’s Academy meeting in Baltimore, MD. In my opinion, the various activities planned by the D&I Committee, including the professional forum and the D & I Symposium, made this year’s meeting more accessible and engaging than any previous meetings I have attended in the past 15 years. Based on my conversations with other AAFS members, I am not the only one who appreciated the valuable discussions and overall energy generated by the D&I Committee activities. I was particularly affected by the D&I Symposium held on Friday afternoon. The various perspectives of the symposium speakers provided an opportunity for self-reflection as forensic anthropologists, the research that we engage in, and how the way we approach our casework impacts the communities we serve. Regardless of where we are employed, our role...”
as forensic scientists is to serve the public, and to provide unbiased, objective, and scientifically verifiable truths to affected families and the greater community. However, as the D&I Symposium so eloquently emphasized, we are unable to best serve our communities if our professional ranks do not adequately reflect the diversity of people, thoughts, and experiences of the communities we are tasked with serving. The future of our field lies not only in technological advances and innovative science, but also in addressing the discrepancies between our current membership and our lived experiences and the diversity of the people that we serve. True innovation occurs when various peoples and perspectives are welcomed and thoroughly encouraged. The entire Symposium demonstrated the strengths of fostering diversity in the Anthropology Section and the greater Academy, as well as the overall significance of the D&I Committee efforts. As the D&I Committee has argued, I agree that we must do more to address the lack of diversity in the forensic sciences. Attracting diverse people and perspectives to the field creates a more representative group of forensic scientists who can better serve their communities. Thank you very much for all of your hard work on our section’s behalf and I look forward to the various Diversity and Inclusion Committee activities planned at future Academy meetings.

-Angela Soler, Fellow of the Anthropology Section

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**FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

During the 2019-2020 year, the D&I Committee plans to explore several new initiatives. Based on discussions held at the D&I forums and symposium in Baltimore, Anthropology Section members expressed their interest for the D&I Committee to form topical subcommittees that address various diversity and inclusion-related issues. Such issues include developing a formal Section mentorship program, supporting working parents in forensic science, weighing diversity in student acceptance into forensic anthropology graduate programs, and clarifying mechanisms for reporting discrimination and harassment in the Section. These subcommittees will be comprised of interested Section members who will meet remotely several times during the year to discuss these issues and to provide recommendations to the greater Section. In addition to forming topical subcommittees, the D&I committee intends to continue holding student and professional forums at the AAFS conference, providing ‘Celebrate Diversity’ ribbons, and developing resources for Section members.
CONCLUSION

As dedicated members of the Anthropology Section and the forensic science community, the D&I Committee wishes to grow our Section and the Academy through concerted recruitment and retention strategies to increase and support members of underrepresented groups. It is our hope that this endeavor will result in membership that reflects the diverse populations whom we serve and will ultimately produce better science. But diversity initiatives must go hand-in-hand with thoughtful inclusion mechanisms that foster democratic, equitable, and socially-responsible environments, where all individuals feel they belong in this professional forensic community. Given the outpouring of support from the Anthropology Section, the D&I Committee is excited to continue its work in future years.