

## Assessing the Ethics Needs & Interests of the AAPA Membership Survey

Submitted by Tisa Loewen (2017-2018 and 2018-2019 AAPA Ethics Fellows Program),  
January 2019

### Introduction and Purpose

The goal of this survey was to identify current ethical issues in biological anthropology; both those that researchers think are important and those faced in the field, in the classroom, or in the lab. Its purpose is to enable the AAPA Ethics Committee to address the most up-to-date ethical needs of the organization's constituents.

### Key findings

While the low number of responses (N=53) limits the generalizability of these survey findings, the findings indicate that most respondents were aware of the Ethics Committee (80.95%) and its Code of Ethics (88.1%). Only 16.67% were aware of the consultations the committee provides and 4.76% were aware of none of these. Roughly only 1/3 of respondents were aware of the Ethics Fellows Program, the Ethics Case Studies, or the Ethics Committee Webpage.

Used to analyze open-ended questions, KWIC Concordance is a freeware analytical tool for making word frequency lists, concordances and collocation tables<sup>1</sup>. The most commonly mentioned words (excluding determiners, conjunctions, and prepositions) in the open-ended answers for the question, "*What is the most pressing ethical challenge or issue facing biological anthropology today?*" were: "sexism" and "remains" (each instance meant in terms of the noun phrase meaning "a remaining part or trace"<sup>2</sup>, such as in the phrase "human remains").

In addition:

- Of the options proposed in the survey, respondents indicated their prioritized needs from the Ethics Committee were, first and foremost, "Formal guidance and policies," followed closely by both "Case studies with sample syllabi to integrate ethics into the classroom," and "Position statements on controversial topics."
- From a list of potential ethics-related workshops or symposia, over 40% of respondents indicated they were extremely interested in ones focused topically on "Data Access and Use," "Ethical Issues in Fieldwork," and "Human Skeletal Collections."

### Background Details

This report developed out of a survey I designed as an AAPA Ethics Fellow, with guidance, assistance, edits, and facilitation from Jen Wagner and Graciela Cabana as my Fellow mentors. The goal of this project was to identify current ethical issues in biological anthropology. Its purpose is to enable the AAPA Ethics Committee to address the most up to date ethical needs of the organization's constituents. The mixed format questions (fill in the blank, ranking etc.) for

---

<sup>1</sup> Tsukamoto, S. (n.d.). KWIC Concordance (Version Windows Ver. 5.1.0) [Computer software]. Retrieved from [http://dep.chs.nihon-u.ac.jp/english\\_lang/tukamoto/kwic\\_e.html](http://dep.chs.nihon-u.ac.jp/english_lang/tukamoto/kwic_e.html)

<sup>2</sup> Webster, M. (2005). Online dictionary. Available on <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary>.

the Ethics Committee were merged with others for the AAPA Science Policy Committee resulting in the survey, “Assessing the Ethics and Science Policy Needs & Interests of the AAPA Membership.” An exemption determination was provided by Geisinger IRB prior to administration of the survey. The survey was approved for administration to membership by the Executive Committee, emailed to approximately 2,400 members<sup>3</sup>, and posted on the AAPA social media accounts from July 12 – October 12, 2018 with many reminders. However, we only received 53 responses (i.e., resulting in a mere 2% response rate). Respondents included undergraduates through late career professionals (see figure 1).

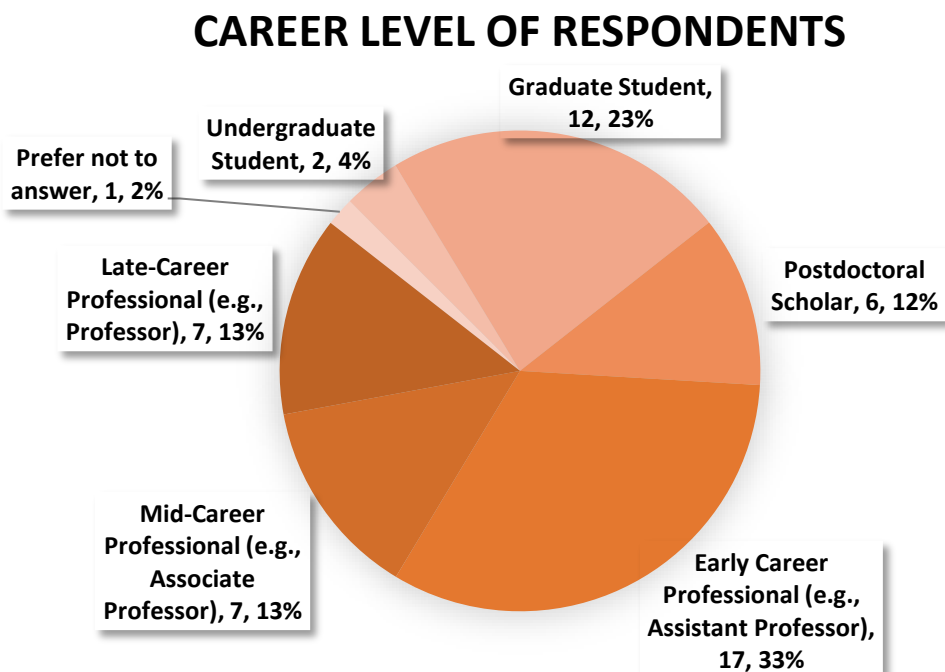


Figure 1: Career level of respondents, N=52

### Additional Insights

Participants were asked to rank which ethics-related issues have affected their work directly in the most recent 3 years. Whether considered together or separated in three groups (undergraduate students; graduate students and post-docs; or beyond post-doc varied career levels), the top two issues were (see figure 2) as follows:

- Data sharing (data and database access, use, and reuse)
- Power differentials (e.g., researchers and participants; mentors and mentees)

<sup>3</sup> Aiello, L. (2018, December 8). *Results of the Non-Binding Name Change Survey* (Rep.). Retrieved from American Association of Physical Anthropologists website: <http://physanth.org/news/results-non-binding-name-change-survey/>

Issues which may be referred to collectively as those involving stewardship of materials and media (e.g., those involving databases, skeletal collections, storage, and sharing of imagery), were chosen 58 times out of 186 options (31%). Other categorical combinatory analyses might also provide insight.

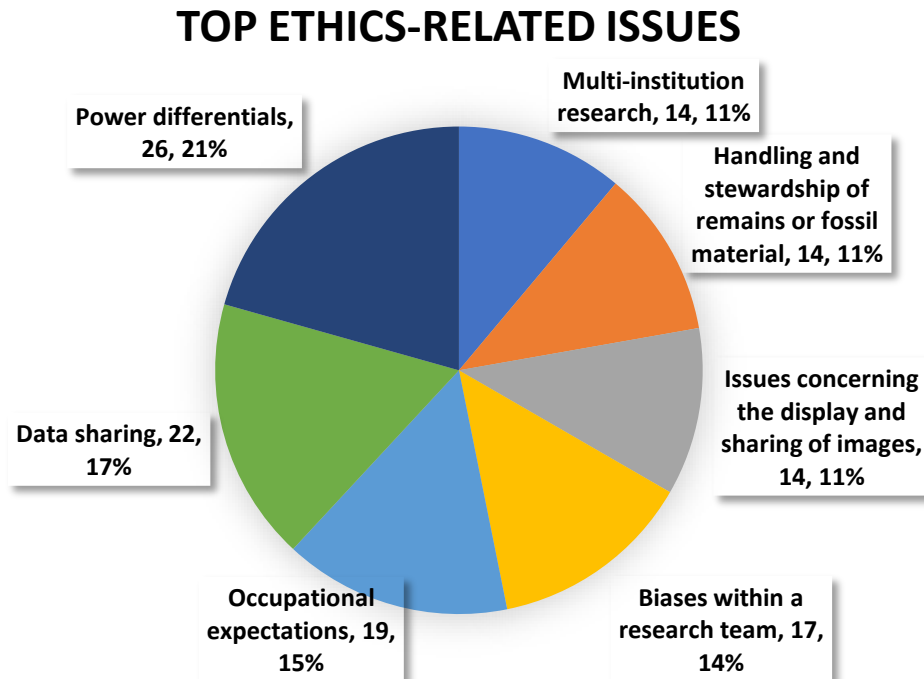


Figure 2: Top ethics-related issues that have affected the respondent or their work directly in the most recent three years, ranked from a list of 19. Percentages are based on the total number of times an answer was used in a ranking sequence. See table 1 in the appendix for a full list. n=186

For Example:

- Combined issues involving animal trafficking, non-human primates, and their habitats were chosen 21 times, (11%).
- Combined issues involving DNA, ancestry, and genetics were chosen 23 times, (12%).
- Combined issues involving bias, power, and occupational expectations were chosen 62 times, (33%). This is at least 1 out of every 3, and since ranking allowed up to three choices to be selected, it is possible that this category of issues was ranked in every answer.
- Combined issues involving research design, consent, permits, and multiple institutions were chosen 30 times, (16%).

When asked how interested respondents were in having ethics coverage identified from their own work or from other authors' abstracts in the AAPA annual meetings' program or digital

application, 59.53% indicated that they would definitely or probably utilize an ethics keyword, hashtag, or tracking option at the annual meeting.

### **Recommendations**

In a recent 2018 publication Turner, Wagner, and Cabana<sup>4</sup> review the current AAPA Code of Ethics as well as professional codes and regulations that have guided how members have dealt with ethical choices in their professional lives and research agendas. The authors remark that ethics in the discipline is an ongoing process and that we should continue to examine these issues. As a part of this process, the results of this study support the call for more attention to these matters, advising that the members are concerned with ethically difficult situations in the practice of biological anthropology, are little aware of the services the AAPA Ethics Committee provides, and are looking for guidance and resources.

---

<sup>4</sup> Turner, T. R., Wagner, J. K., & Cabana, G. S. (2018). Ethics in biological anthropology. *American journal of physical anthropology*, 165(4), 939-951.

## Appendix

Table 1: Ethics-related issues provided for ranked list. Topics acquired from *Biological Anthropology and Ethics: From Repatriation to Genetic Identity*,<sup>5</sup> a KWIC Concordance analysis of the AAPA Annual Meeting 2017 Conference Program abstracts, and notable current issues in public and social media.

### ISSUES THAT HAVE AFFECTED RESPONDENTS DIRECTLY

Ancestry & DNA
Ancient DNA
Behavioral data
Biases within a research team (e.g., racial/gendered/sexual identity/ability/class) within a research team
Capture and transport of animals, including Bushmeat and/or Animal trafficking
Changing nature of consent (e.g., group consent; consent with families of deceased individuals; broad and blanket consent)
Data sharing (data and database access, use, and reuse)
Genetics, Affiliations, & NAGPRA
Habitat destruction
Handling and stewardship of remains or fossil material (including excavation, casting, etc.)
Human and non-human primate interactions (such as habituation of non-human primates)
Issues concerning the display and sharing of images
Long-term biosample storage
Multi-institution research
Nonhuman Primate Conservation
Non-human primates in labs and zoos
Occupational expectations (e.g., competing roles of research, teaching, publishing, outreach, and service)
Permit areas and fossil finds
Power differentials (e.g., researchers and participants; mentors and mentees)

---

<sup>5</sup> Turner, T. R. (Ed.). (2005). *Biological anthropology and ethics: From repatriation to genetic identity*. SUNY Press.