

Education Committee 2024-2025 Activities Report

Submitted by Drs. Kate McGrath and Rob O'Malley, co-chairs
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Our committee's goal is to facilitate engagement of K-12 students and teachers, and public audiences of all ages, with biological anthropology.

2024-2025 Activities

AABA Meeting Programming and Activities. Building on the successes and feedback from prior years, the committee sponsored several events at the meeting with generous support from AABA as well as The Leakey Foundation. This included:

- **Local Engagement.** As part of the AABA 2024 Annual Meeting, 8 members of the Education committee staffed engagement tables at the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum on the afternoon of Wednesday, March 20th. After the AABA meeting, the committee's cast collection was left with the AABA local arrangements committee for use by local educators who may wish to use it in classrooms or other science learning activities. Our engagement table was part of the Museum's "Homeschool Day" event under the theme "Plants and People." The committee interacted with >700 museum visitors, and received very positive feedback from attendees and our hosts.
- **Committee-Sponsored Art, Culture, and Science Communication ("SciComm") Exhibition.** In lieu of a committee-workshop, we developed (in collaboration with the late Dr. Michelle Bezanson) an exhibition to highlight all forms of artistic expression and science engagement by AABA members. The 23 entries included board game prototypes, coloring pages, posters on podcasts and youtube content creation, a VR exhibit, sculpture, photography, painting, jewelry, and free informal science education resources. >60 AABA attendees visited the exhibition.
- **Exhibitor booth.** An exhibitor booth provided an opportunity for many AABA attendees to learn of the committee's existence for the first time. In addition to encouraging attendees to check out the exhibition and join us for the networking breakfast at the meeting, we directed attendees to the website to learn about existing resources to support their own engagement.
- **Networking breakfast.** In a departure from previous years, rather than hold a formal committee meeting at AABA, we chose instead to host a networking breakfast with AABA support. This was an opportunity for attendees interested in K-12 and public engagement to share and learn with each other in a relaxed and informal setting. >36 people attended, including a high school student who had registered for the meeting specifically to learn about career paths in the field.



(L to R): Engagement at the LACNHM; Signage for the art/culture/sci-comm expo; The expo in full swing

Other Activities.

- **Presentation to The Leakey Foundation Board.** In September of 2024, co-chairs Rob O'Malley and Kate McGrath were invited to virtually present on the committee's work (some of which is supported by the Foundation). Board members expressed interest and enthusiasm for the committee's continued activities.
- **Regular Committee Meetings.** The committee has held three virtual committee meetings and four subcommittee meetings (2 for workshop planning, 2 with The Leakey Foundation) since the 2024 AABA meeting in Los Angeles. Meeting agendas focused on ideas for workshops and other activities at the AABA meeting and website content, as well as discussing challenges facing us as individuals and as a field in the current US social and political environment.
- **Traveling Cast Collection.** The committee's traveling collection of hominin and primate skeletal casts was put to good use by AABA members at two California universities this year. It will be made available to members and educators in the MD/DC/VA area in 2025-2026. One user of the cast collection shared this feedback (shared with permission):
 - "The AABA Ed Comm casts allowed my very small, underfunded department to use anatomical and fossil casts in our larger lecture and seminar courses, serving over 500 students. Many times in these courses that don't have "lab sections" or "TAs" and are around 50 students each, having one cast (if we have one at all) is just not enough for students to actually interact with materials we are learning about. Having the Ed Comm casts allowed me and other instructors to actually share materials with students in these settings and not just show them from afar! These casts were also used at high school recruitment and outreach events on campus that included local students and their families who were trying to decide if college (and anthropology) were right for them."
- **Needs and Opportunities Survey.** We have chosen to leave the survey instrument we launched in 2023 open, to capture additional responses about what members would like to see from the Education Committee. We will promote this again at the Baltimore AABA meeting.

2025 Meeting Activities

- **Local Engagement.** The committee will host an exhibitor table at [Port Discovery](#) (a local children's museum) in Baltimore on the afternoon of March 12th.
- **Exhibitor booth.** The Committee will again staff an exhibitor booth to highlight the committee's existence, activities, and resources for meeting attendees.
- **Art, Culture, and Science Engagement Exhibition.** We will again hold an exhibition at AABA to highlight science-themed art, engagement and informal science learning activities by members.
- **Networking breakfast.** We will again host an education and engagement networking breakfast on Saturday morning to facilitate sharing and learning among attendees. All AABA meeting attendees are welcome. The breakfast will immediately precede our sponsored workshop.
- **Workshop.** Our committee-sponsored workshop this year was co-organized by Dr. Briana Pobiner and a local documentary filmmaker J.C. Faulk, on 'Teaching about race, racism and human variation: video and related teaching resources.' It will include remarks from Dr. Tina Lasisi, and representatives from science video producers such as AAAS and HHMI will attend.
- **Community Event.** As an experiment in broadening our approaches to community engagement, we are hosting an off-site event with community voices, families, and educators. This event is very similar to the sponsored workshop in scope and content. It will be held off-site on Saturday March 15th at [OpenWorks Baltimore](#), with support from both AABA and The Leakey Foundation.

Future Plans

Our committee will prioritize creating a more streamlined process for website content for the committee website to ensure that we are providing regular updates. With the AABA website migration now complete, building out our content will be a priority this year. We are particularly mindful of the challenging social and political environment for K-12 science education and scientific research around topics like sex, sexuality and gender, human diversity, and human origins. We will look for ways to promote use of the traveling cast collection by committee members, local educators and others over the coming year. Finally, will explore informal ways to support connection and community building within the committee (e.g., establishing a slack or discord channel).

This year, the committee has determined that it is probably unrealistic for us to individually vet specific lesson plans on a case-by-case basis, given the time investment involved, and so moving forward we will focus on highlighting resources sites that are from trusted groups and organizations, including [NCSE](#), [the Leakey Foundation](#), [NSTA](#), or [NISEnet.org](#).

Another necessary area of attention and growth for the committee will be more intentional and meaningful engagement with members and communities from the global South, and with marginalized and minoritized members of AABA and the public. This at minimum should include work to proactively engage with marginalized communities in our outreach, identify and disseminate non-English science education resources, promote accessibility in our activities, and channel resources such as casts and other teaching materials to teachers who lack necessary resources.

Anyone interested in the Education Committee should contact us at educommchairaaba@gmail.com to be added to our email list. Our committee website is <https://bioanth.org/about/education/>.

Active committee members as of February 2025

(we count 'active committee members' as people who have attended at least one meeting or activity of the AABA Education Committee at or since the 2024 AABA meeting.)

Kate McGrath (co-chair)
Rob O'Malley (co-chair)
Malorie Albee
Seth Chagi
Karol Chandler-Ezell
Kimberly Congdon
Katie East
Amanda Ellwanger
Kim Foecke
Jacqueline Garnett
Arielle Johnson
John Mitani
Amanda Owings
Briana Pobiner
Natalia Reagan
Terry Ritzman
Kinley Russell
Caitlin Schrein
Amanda Townley