

2025 REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

Written by Leslea J. Hlusko

As we convene for our 94th Annual Meeting, it is my honor and privilege to report that AABA continues to be a vibrant academic association well-positioned to continue its mission for many years to come. In the numerous committee reports presented at the Annual Business Meeting, you will read about the specific activities that were carried out through the year thanks to the effort and dedication of hundreds of AABA members who volunteer their time to keep the Association not only running, but flourishing. On behalf of all of us, I extend a giant thank-you to all of these volunteers.

For the President's Report, I focus on the activities of the President and the Executive Committee.

Executive Committee Activities

The Executive Committee met on an almost monthly basis throughout the year, convening eleven times since the last Business Meeting. AABA Officers also met on a monthly basis, with a standing meeting held the week before each Executive Committee meeting. Additionally, officers convened for a full-day meeting on August 26, 2024, at AABA Headquarters with Brett Burk, Lori Strong, and others from Burk & Associates to review the business and financial standing of the Association and plan strategy for the coming year. As outlined in detail in the Treasurer's Report, AABA has a particularly strong financial standing as our gains from investments were considerably more than our expenses for the preceding year. Therefore, the officers decided to increase our investment in the Association's activities. With the support of the Executive Committee, we increased support for various committee activities and also implemented two new programs:

Pilot-run of the International Travel Support Program. With the aim to increase the breadth of voices represented within our Association and in attendance at our annual meeting, and recognizing that the travel cost for many of these colleagues is prohibitively expensive, we designed a pilot program that funds the cost of international airfare between Baltimore and a Qualifying Country outside of Canada or the United States, as well as 4 nights of hotel accommodation at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront hotel. Fourteen conference attendees are being supported by this pilot program, traveling from Argentina, China, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, and Thailand.

Pilot-run of the AABA eats Program. This Program was inspired in part by the results of Abigail Houkes and Laura Cirillo's survey of biological anthropology graduate students (Houkes & Cirillo, 2024 *AJBA* meeting supplement, p. 75). They found that 50% of students are on government aid and 29% access food pantries to meet basic needs. And yet, 64% pay more than half of the cost of conference attendance out of their own pockets. This issue was also discussed at the Presidential Panel in Los Angeles ("*Funding Our Priorities: Past, Present, and*

Future “). During the audience discussion, it became clear that postdocs and contingent faculty are under similar financial duress, and that too many AABA attendees skip meals at the conference because they cannot afford to buy food. With the AABA eats program, attendees who registered for the in-person conference as a student, postdoc, or contingent faculty by February 12th will receive a \$50 gift card when they collect their registration materials in Baltimore. This direct placement of cash-in-hand, we hope, will encourage recipients to buy food for themselves so that they can more fully engage in conference activities.

Looking towards the long-term financial health of the Association, the Executive Committee established two endowed funds for which we are currently fundraising:

The **AABA Community Fund** will provide long-term financial resources for the Officers and Executive Committee to undertake activities that provide support to our membership and/or the broader community of biological anthropologists to enable more participation in AABA’s professional activities, including, for example, subsidizing food costs at the annual meeting or travel expenses to participate in AABA events.

The **AABA Presidents’ Fund** represents financial support by, and in honor of Past Presidents of AABA to the current President. The pay-out from this fund will provide financial resources for the President to undertake activities that build, enhance, or repair the sense of community among the AABA membership. This would include, for example, financial support of travel, honoraria, catering, etc. for the Presidential Panel/Keynote or similar event at the AABA annual meeting, and/or other activities that further this aim.

Each of these funds will be established with donations received through fundraising and \$30,000 from the Association. Fundraising has only just begun, as the two funds were announced in December 2024, but we have already raised over \$13,000. Donating to AABA has been facilitated through a new “Donate” link located on the homepage of the <https://bioanth.org> website. Fundraising for the Community and Presidents’ Funds will require a new donation model for AABA members and supporters to embrace, but hopefully, these two Funds will grow to have a large enough endowment to provide financial security for the types of initiatives that significantly augment and enhance AABA’s scientific programs.

Another of the Executive Committee’s tasks is to organize and support the various committees that keep the Association’s activities running. Updates to committee staffing over the last year include: **The Ethics Committee**: Yohannes Haile-Selassie was appointed chair in 2023, and the committee membership was completed in 2024 (Carlina de la Cova, Erin Williams-Hatala, Maja Seselj, Luca Pozzi, and Jada Benn Torres). The charge of this committee is to review and begin the process of revising the Code of Ethics that was last updated in 2003. Agustín Fuentes was appointed as the chair of the **Harassment Committee for Awareness, Response, and Equity (HCARE)** in 2024, and for 2025, new committee members will be Lee Getler, Caroline van Sickel, Catherine Llera Martin, and Chris Schmitt.

Additionally, the Executive Committee developed three new committees. The first is a 2-year *ad hoc* **Science Policy Committee** to develop guidance on the use of historical data from skeletal remains, chaired by Lumila Menéndez with committee members: Noriko Seguchi, Michael B.C. Rivera, Ericka Labbe, Mirsha Quinto Sánchez, Teresa Wilson, and Marin Pilloud. This committee is sponsoring the invited symposium *An Open Debate on the Analysis of Legacy Data from Human Skeletal Remains* (Friday, March 14th, 8am-12pm). We also formed the **Web & Communications Committee**. This committee replaces the Media & Communication Committee, incorporating the new responsibilities associated with AABA's move to XCD (to manage our membership and abstract databases) and the modern social media landscape. This committee is chaired by AABA's Secretary Kristi Lewton, with committee members Ed Hagen, Brian Wood, Jennifer Raff, the Chair of Membership, and with technical and administrative support from Plumley Creatives and Burk & Associates. We also formed the **Financial Policy Committee**, tasked to provide guidance on investment structure and charitable gifts to the Association. This Committee is chaired by the Treasurer Jonathan Bethard, with committee members Past-Presidents Steve Leigh and Anne Grauer, the current President, and Brett Burk from Burk Associates.

Wiley Publishing and the *American Journal of Biological Anthropology* (AJBA)

Another major task on the Executive Committee's Agenda has been preparations for December 31, 2025, when AABA's contract with Wiley Publishing comes to an end. The Wiley Publishing contract runs in tandem with the contract for the Editor-in-Chief of the *AJBA*. Two ad hoc committees were formed to address these upcoming deadlines. I am chairing the AABA/Wiley Contract Negotiation Committee with members Trudy Turner (current *AJBA* Editor-in-Chief), Anne Grauer (AABA Past President), Anne Stone (AABA President Elect), Graciela Cabana (Co-Editor of the *Yearbook of Biological Anthropology*), and Brett Burk (Burk & Associates). The conversation with Wiley is proceeding productively, and we are on track to have the new contract finalized in a timely manner. Ripan Malhi is chairing the *AJBA* New Editor Search Committee with members Avriel Licciardi (Wiley Publishing representative), Clark Spencer Larsen, Tracy Kivell, Lyle Konigsberg, and Robin Nelson. The call for the new editor was posted in early February 2025, with applications due March 31, 2025.

On behalf of the Association, I express a huge amount of gratitude to *AJBA*'s current Editor-in-Chief Trudy Turner. She has shepherded the Association's official journal through an incredible 5-years beginning with the name change from the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* to the *American Journal of Biological Anthropology*, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing huge shifts in the academic publishing landscape, and now the added turbulence of a dramatically changing funding structure for research. Dr. Turner's leadership and hardwork has kept *AJBA* as the preeminent journal for biological anthropology, not only maintaining stability but also keeping the journal thriving. Her shoes will be difficult to fill.

Additional Administrative Efforts

Over the last year, I also oversaw several other administrative efforts. First, AABA and the Human Biology Association developed and signed a Memorandum of Agreement to help equilibrate the financial costs of the HBA's annual meeting running alongside that of AABA. I also developed and signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the artist Vaughn Randall to create the statues that are given as part of the Charles R. Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award for the foreseeable future. Additionally, the newly updated <https://bioanth.org> webpage for the Association presents our new Mission Statement that was co-written by Anne Grauer, Anne Stone, and me, with assistance and approval from the Executive Committee.

Support for Membership and Biological Anthropology

Throughout the year as President, I sent out a monthly newsletter via email to the membership to keep our community informed of AABA activities and other relevant news, and also to provide community support as needed. AABA also provided public letters of support for Argentinian science and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Akron.

As we prepare for the 2025 Annual Business Meeting, the federal funding landscape is changing rapidly and in unprecedented ways. AABA has a survey form to collect data on how biological anthropologists are being affected by these new policies. Results from this survey and other related issues will be the focus point for the *Community Meeting about the Changing Landscape of Biological Anthropology in the United States* on Thursday, March 13th from 7:30-9pm, during the annual meeting.

On a happier note, I organized a President's Welcome Breakfast and Keynote Lecture for 8am on Thursday, March 13th. Coffee and light catering will be provided. The lecture will be given by our President-Elect Anne Stone, providing the opportunity for all conference attendees to meet our new President.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

It has been an immense honor to serve as President of AABA. I thank the entire membership for entrusting me with this awesome task. And an awesome task it has been, but luckily, not one I did alone. AABA runs on the volunteer power of an incredible group of biological anthropologists. I want to thank everyone on the Executive Committee for always showing up prepared and ready, always having a word of wisdom or an idea, and always bringing a positive and compassionate attitude. I could not have dreamed up a better group of colleagues to travel with on this journey. The officers of AABA are particularly special. Many thanks to President Elect Anne Stone, Vice President Amy Rector, Treasurer Jonathan Bethard, and Secretary Kristi Lewton. I cherish the many hours of Zoom calls and WhatsApp messaging we have shared over the past year. I also have an immense amount of gratitude to Lori Strong, Brett Burk, and the rest of the Burk & Associates team, without whom the Association's business would be impossible. I am grateful to pass the gavel of the President to Anne Stone. Looking at what lies ahead for AABA, she is the ideal person to lead the Association through the challenges that we now face.