Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA) Annual Report

January 1, 2009-December 31, 2009

Submitted by Carolyn Sargent, SMA President

Society for Medical Anthropology

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Status, Activities, Accomplishments This Year:

1. Membership.

Membership by category fluctuates typically within each year but has held relatively steady until a drop this year from 1332 to 1256. The number of international members shows a downward trend with a slight rebound. Since October 2005, the high was 61; the low was the 2008 count of 39, and we are up to 48 this year. Student memberships have decreased substantially and are the major contributor to this year’s lower membership totals. Discussion of how to increase student membership and to attract international members is underway, as is the question of lowering dues.

2. Financial Balances and Budgets:

(a) The financial status of the SMA has improved due to changes in management of publications budgets. The fund balance for the SMA as of October 31, 2009 was $167,303. Anticipated end of year fund balance is significantly lower, given MAQ costs that will be included in the final 2009 budget.

(b) The Basker Prize endowment no longer generates the $1000 mandated for the prize recipient each year. Although we were able to provide the award this year, we are
unlikely to be able to cover the full $1000 next year without supplementing from our general revenues.

(c) MAQ. As projected, over the past year, revenues have exceeded expenditures. AnthroSource guaranteed revenues for AAA units for 2009. These have covered publishing expenses, excepting the cost of the Academic Editorial Offices. Given the scale of the MAQ, this is a necessary expense.

3. AAA Session Information:
   (a) Invited Sessions—
   - The Effects of a Paradigm in Health Advocacy: Female Genital Cutting as a Human Rights Violation
   -The “Lived Experience” of Health Research Ethics: The Negotiation of Guidelines into Practice (Co-Sponsored by NAPA)
   -Do “Illegal” Migrants have a Right to Health? Towards a Critical Medical Anthropology of Unauthorized Migration and Health (Co-Sponsored by BAS)
   -Towards a Medical Anthropology Against Militarism (Co-Sponsored by APLA)

(b) SMA Official Meetings and Special Events
   -Special Interest Group Chairs Meeting
   - Special Interest Group Meetings (AIDS and Anthropology Research, Complementary & Alternative Medicine and Integrative Medicine, Council on Anthropology and Reproduction, Disability Research, Council on Nursing and Anthropology, Critical Anthropology of Global Health Study Group, Alcohol, Drug, and Tobacco Study Group, Medical Anthropology Student Association, Science, Technology, and Medicine Interest Group)
   -SMA Open Business Meeting
   -SMA Awards Ceremony, Presidential Address, and Reception
   -SMA Board Meeting
   -MAQ Editorial Board Meeting

4. Spring Meeting Activities:
The SMA board held an informal meeting at the SfAA meetings in Santa Fe, March 22, 2009. The board discussed plans for the SMA independent meeting at Yale (September, 2009), considered possible sessions to propose, and created a liaison committee for the 2010 joint SMA-SfAA meeting in Merida, Mexico.

5. Mentorship Efforts:
The SMA Board includes a representative from the Medical Anthropology Student Association. The graduate student board member serves as a conduit for mentoring. This may take the form of organizing workshops and sessions in consultation with MASA, on topics including job search skills, publishing, employment opportunities. The SMA established a dissertation prize as well as two student paper prizes (one graduate, one undergraduate), in order to recognize outstanding new scholars who are honored at the awards ceremony. MASA is responsible for selecting the recipient of the SMA Mentoring Award.

6. Additional Outreach:

The SMA holds a joint meeting every other year with the SfAA and routinely co-sponsors sessions with other sections. The Society seeks to engage academic and practicing medical anthropologists in workshops, sessions, and other AAA events. The SMA website serves as an important mechanism for outreach to anthropologists and the public. Through the “SMA Takes a Stand” process, the SMA encourages special interest groups to develop policy statements which are accessible on the website and disseminated to press and other media venues.

September 24-27, 2009, the SMA sponsored an independent meeting, “Medical Anthropology at the Intersections,” organized by program chair, Marcia Inhorn and held at Yale. This conference was widely publicized and drew an audience of over 1000 from diverse countries. The event promoted the SMA and AAA globally and is generating continued linkages among participants worldwide.

7. Awards Presented:

a) Career Achievement Award (Charles Leslie, posthumous).

b) George Foster Practicing Medical Anthropology Award (Noel Chrisman, University of Washington).

c) MASA Mentoring Award (Carole Browner, UCLA).


e) New Millenium Book Award (Athena McLean, Central Michigan University, for *The Person in Dementia: A Study of Nursing Home Care in the US*, Broadview Press, 2007).

f) MASA Dissertation Award (Sera Lewise Young, Cornell University, 2008, for “A Biocultural Study of the Relationship between Pica and Anemia.”)

h) Rudolph Virchow Undergraduate Student Paper Award (Serena Stein, U Penn, for “Health at the Margins: Distress and Illness after the 2005 Mudslide in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala”).


j) Virchow Professional Award (Sherine Hamdy, Brown U, “When the State and Your Kidneys Fail: Political Etiologies in an Egyptian Dialysis Ward,” American Ethnologist.)


l) Aids and Anthropology Research Group Prizes—

-Clark Taylor Professional Prize (Manjeri Mahajan, “Governing through the Non-Governmental: Shifting Terrains of Public Health in India’s AIDS Epidemic);

-Graduate Student Paper Prize (Hanspeter Reihling, Freie Universitat Berlin, “Whose healthy masculinity: Men as New Subjects of Sexual and Reproductive Health in South Africa.”

m) Alcohol, Drug, and Tobacco Study Group Graduate Student Paper Competition (Kate R. Goldade, “Breastfeeding and Smoking among Low-Income Women: Results of a Longitudinal Qualitative Study.)

8. Much SMA outreach is accomplished via the SMA website (www.medanthro.org). During 2009, the website was completely overhauled by webmaster Ben McMahan to reduce inconsistencies and inefficient layout. As of November, 2009, the total number of unique visitors to the SMA Web site since launch was approximately 1.7 million; from December 2008-November, 2009 the site received approximately 300,000 visits. 2009 visitors generated just over 2.3 million hits. Most frequently visited pages included the SMA homepage, the “what is medical anthropology page,” job listings, academic resources, main page for MAQ, and special interest groups. The webmaster syndicated the news feed through RSS and switched online web-stats collection to Google
Analytics. He also started a Twitter feed in summer 2009 @SocMedAnthro to provide updates on news, announcements, or articles/research.

In process is an SMA blog, initiated immediately following the 2009 AAA, “Voices from Medical Anthropology,” with the inaugural theme, “Who are We in the Public Imagination.” The membership has been encouraged (via the SMA List serve) to post comments on the blog.

9. The SMA By-Laws were revised and updated, approved by the board, circulated to the membership by the AAA following appropriate procedures. Subsequent to an online vote in which the necessary 2/3 of those voting approved the revisions, the new by-laws were accepted by the membership.

10. Future Plans/Activities:

(a) Health Care Reform Task Force created by president and approved by board, meeting February 1-3, 2010, at Washington University in St. Louis, to discuss mechanisms for translating ideas into policy; additional goals include establishing an infrastructure for the SMA to facilitate calls for research on health issues of national concern and dissemination of such research;

(b) Increase membership by building stronger ties with medical anthropologists in other countries;

(c) Explore the possibility of organizing future SMA independent meetings at four-year intervals, possibly in a European country in 2013 as part of our other international outreach activities;

(d) Consider the role of dues in determining membership;

(e) Maintain and/or increase special interest groups;

(f) Meet jointly with SfAA in March, 2010, Merida, Mexico;

(g) Continue to work on collaboration with practicing anthropologists.

11. Chief Concerns:

Scheduling SMA events at the AAA has become increasingly problematic. Our public business meeting was scheduled against our special interest group events, and the awards ceremony and presidential address were also scheduled against competing events. The limited slots available for “special events” leads to diminished participation by our members at important SMA meetings (e.g. the open business meeting). This, in turn, reduces the sense of access to SMA board members and understanding of activities, as well as a lessening of community. We urge the appropriate AAA and
Section Assembly leadership to address the problem of insufficient time slots for special events.