

**Inclusiveness and ASAO Membership Categories\***  
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Attending my first ASAO conference (at Hilton Head in 1982), essentially alone, I was struck with how welcomed I felt, even though I was still a graduate student. I sensed that distinctions among graduate students, junior faculty, and senior faculty were underplayed and that anyone with appropriate research interests was deemed valuable to the organization and its sessions, regardless of years of experience, rank, or title. I attended a working session on aging organized by Dorothy and David Counts and felt included even though I was not a participant. During the course of the session I realized that I had some data on the topic but no idea whether a newcomer who had not participated in the working session could join late and participate in the symposium. The organizers not only agreed but made me feel they truly valued what I had to offer. In hindsight, I realize there may be no better way to be welcomed to ASAO than by David and Dorothy Counts, but they certainly encouraged a young, still ABD scholar to participate as a full-fledged member of an ASAO session.

Issues of inclusiveness along a variety of dimensions have pervaded ASAO discussions over the years. As Michael Lieber put it, ASAO has “managed to eliminate from our interpersonal dealings such invidious distinctions as graduate student/professional, senior rank/junior rank, star/drone, politically in/politically out. We’ve managed to preclude the status sneaking and frantic partying so characteristic of AAA [American Anthropological Association] meetings” (Chairman’s address to ASAO membership, Hilton Head, 4 March 1982, reprinted in *ASAO Newsletter* #63 [Summer 1982]: 10). From the organization’s earliest years, when it began

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as the Association for Social Anthropology in Eastern Oceania (ASAEO), graduate students were participating in sessions, and in the *Newsletters*, no particular distinction was made when discussing the sessions. In the very first *Newsletter*, published in May 1967, for example, the list of contributors to the first symposium on adoption included names and university affiliations, with no mention of academic status or rank (*ASAEO Newsletter* #1 [May 1967]: 2). In fact, there was explicit emphasis on recruiting graduate students and getting them involved, even before they had conducted fieldwork but certainly afterward, regardless of the status of a dissertation (for a detailed example, see Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi's paper on Jane Goodale's practice of bringing students to ASAO). The February 1969 *Newsletter* specifically invited students: "We particularly hope that a number of graduate students planning to do Pacific research will be able to take part in the meetings" (*ASAEO Newsletter* #4 [February 1969]: 1). Over the years, the organization has included people other than anthropologists and other than scholars, and innovative types of sessions have been allowed at the meetings (see Alexander Mawyer and Alan Howard's paper on ASAO sessions). In addition, the organization has been increasing its international membership, including Pacific Islanders, and this inclusiveness has been reflected on the Board of Directors as well (see list of ASAO Board members). To further facilitate inclusion, the ASAO Board decided not to require Pacific Islander members to pay annual dues (ASAO Board meeting minutes, February 2012).<sup>1</sup> Discussions continue to this day about when and where to hold the annual meetings and how to keep costs down, again to be as inclusive as possible, taking into account varying geographic locations of members and financial disparities (see Michael Rynkiewich's paper on ASAO site selection).

Considering this emphasis on inclusiveness, it was intriguing to discover that in the early years of ASAEO/ASAO, voting rights were restricted to a certain category of member. It was not

until the mid-1980s that all members had the right to vote for members of the Board of Directors (called, earlier on, the Executive Committee) and for Honorary Fellows. The May 1967

*Newsletter* discussed two categories of membership:

Members and Associate Members. The former will include all participants in one of the Association's symposia—so that their ranks will probably grow with each symposium. Associate Members will (according to present plans) include other professional anthropologists. Finally, our newsletters and other publications will be available to all interested parties. (*ASAE Newsletter #1: 2*).

The focus of the organization was on promoting research and convening meetings for the purpose of scholarly comparison. Those actually engaged in those scholarly discussions at the meetings, regardless of academic rank or position, would be the Members of the association. Information about the organization and its activities would be disseminated more widely, and the membership would conceivably grow over the years.

This distinction between types of members was formalized in the constitution (which also involved changing the name to the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, or ASAO) and printed in the March 1970 *Newsletter* with revised language: rather than “Members” and “Associate Members,” the language became “Fellows” and “Members,” with only Fellows having voting rights. In addition to rights to nominate and vote for members of the Executive Committee and for Honorary Fellows, Fellows also had rights to approve the constitution, propose and ratify amendments, and approve resolutions. Members simply received the *Newsletter* (*ASAO Newsletter #5: 1–4*).

Achieving Fellow status required some sort of contribution to ASAO (as well as payment of dues). The contribution could take the form of writing a chapter in a published ASAO monograph, editing an ASAO monograph, or serving as a member of the Executive Committee or as an officer (*ASAO Newsletter #5: 2*). “The rationale was that the people who contribute time,

labor, and thought to ASAO should be the ones who make decisions for ASAO” (Michael Lieber, personal communication, July 1, 2016). Participation in a symposium, implied as a membership criterion in the first *Newsletter*, was not in and of itself deemed to be a sufficient contribution to become a Fellow.

The status of Member could be acquired by “any person or organization sharing an interest in the Association’s purposes” and who paid dues; all Members were entitled to receive the *Newsletter* and other announcements from ASAO but had no voting rights. That said, Members were encouraged to voice their thoughts and “make suggestions to any member of the Executive Committee” (*ASAO Newsletter* #5: 1). The same *Newsletter* presenting the constitution also invited any interested Member to consider serving as editor of an ASAO monograph. Anyone—including graduate students—could participate in a symposium that could turn into a monograph, so the number of official Fellows would presumably increase over time. In other words, the status of Fellow was restricted but open, and some effort was made to give voice to regular members, even if they couldn’t vote.

The March 1971 *Newsletter* included additional comments about Members and Fellows. There was an explicit statement that “all members of the Association are welcome at any Annual Meeting and are encouraged to attend” (*ASAO Newsletter* #7: 4), and from the very founding of the organization, one did not have to be a Fellow to participate in a session. This issue of the *Newsletter* also published bylaws, which included procedures for nominating and electing the Executive Committee members and Honorary Fellows, and it was made clear that only Fellows could nominate possible Executive Committee members and Honorary Fellows. Furthermore, since there was apparently some confusion about when exactly a person involved in a monograph contribution actually became a Fellow, this was clarified: “The status of Fellow is

achieved by authors and volume editors of Association monographs when the volume is complete and has been accepted for publication by the Series Editor.” Finally, it was clearly stated that “the status of Fellow is *not* requisite to membership on the Executive Committee” (*ASAO Newsletter #7: 5–7*). At least in theory, then, the system was open, even though nominating and voting rights were restricted.

Fellows held their own meetings. In addition to setting up annual Executive Committee (EC) meetings, the Program Chair was charged with setting up a “General Meeting of ASAO FELLOWS (only) to plan the program for the Annual Meeting, make presentations to the EC, discuss common problems, etc.” (*ASAO Newsletter #7: 5*). In other words, the intent appears to have been to actively engage Fellows in shaping policy and making decisions beyond nominating and voting for members of the Executive Committee and Honorary Fellows. Although in theory anyone could attend Executive Committee meetings and attempt to affect policy, an organized meeting of Fellows facilitated Fellow participation.

This may have contributed to a sense of exclusivity, however, as the Winter 1972 *Newsletter* carried a report from the Executive Committee responding to a sense that “the organization existed for the benefit of only a small group of founders who were not interested in expanding their core membership.” It appears as though the leaders grappled with issues of exclusivity, despite efforts to include graduate students and junior faculty. The main concern does not appear to have been restrictive voting rights at this time, but that may well have contributed to a sense of restricted membership. Members of the Executive Committee had been informed that “many had heard about ASAO but had not been personally approached about participating.” The committee attempted to clarify that their initial efforts had been focused on

creating a strong foundation for the organization before embarking on serious efforts to recruit larger numbers of members (*ASAO Newsletter #9*: 1).

The same *Newsletter* stressed that all that was involved in becoming a Member was payment of annual dues and “an interest in the Association’s purposes,” while pointing out that those interests should focus on “*ethnography* in one of the three culture areas of Oceania” and that benefits of membership included rights to receive the *Newsletter* and to attend and participate in annual meetings. Furthermore, efforts continued to include and incorporate graduate students. It was made clear that anyone could attend Executive Committee meetings and speak up in plenary sessions. The *Newsletter* also attempted to discourage the appearance of the existence of an exclusive “inner circle” and the expectation of prospective members that they had to be invited to participate in meeting sessions. The leadership asserted an openness to wide participation in the meetings and explicitly encouraged interested parties to take more initiative if they wished to participate in sessions. The section finished with, “Of course, those who do the most organizational work will have more knowledge of what is happening, and a greater sense of meaningful participation, BUT it is important to stress that *everyone* is welcome and needed in the ‘inner circle’” (*ASAO Newsletter #9*: 6, 7, 9).

Interestingly, this *Newsletter* also explicitly asserted that “any MEMBER may be elected to the Executive Committee,” even though it was only Fellows who actually voted for committee members (*ASAO Newsletter #9*: 7). Nowhere in the constitution or bylaws had it stated that one had to be a Fellow to be on the Executive Committee, though many may have assumed that was the case because of the voting privileges. In fact, at the end of the bylaws in the March 1971 *Newsletter* there was a “footnote” to the effect that the “Executive Committee is a *working* group and that willingness to work, availability, and interest in the Association are the most important

criteria for the selection of Executive Committee members. At the present time, it is difficult to arrange transportation to Executive Committee meetings for anthropologists residing abroad” (*ASAO Newsletter* #7: 7).

The Winter 1972 *Newsletter* also stated the rationale for restricting voting rights: “The obvious purpose of this distinction in classes of membership is to keep voting control of the Association in the hands of those who care enough about it to contribute to its goals.” Countering this exclusionary tendency was an inclusiveness regarding eligibility to make the professional contributions asked of Fellows: “Professional standing—e.g., whether or not one is an “anthropologist” or a “Ph.D.”—has nothing to do with qualification as a FELLOW” (*ASAO Newsletter* #9: 8). A glance at contributors to ASAO monographs clearly shows this type of inclusiveness has indeed taken place.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, it was made clear that if someone had not been asked to contribute to participate in an ASAO session, which ideally would lead to an ASAO volume—one of the avenues for achieving Fellow status—that person could pursue one of the other routes and “a prospective fellow may always undertake to edit a volume himself, or propose to the Executive Committee that his name be sent to the Nominating Committee for consideration, or volunteer to serve as an officer” (*ASAO Newsletter* #9: 8). At that time, in 1972, only the first of the ASAO monographs had been published (Carroll 1970), and it wasn’t until 1974 that the second volume came out (Lundsgaarde 1974). There must have been an appearance of exclusivity because the *Newsletter* commented on the small number of Fellows and explained that fact by the restrictions on how one achieved that status; this comment was coupled, however, with assertions that the numbers of Fellows would presumably grow as new volumes were published and volunteers were found

to serve as ASAO officers (*ASAO Newsletter* #9: 8). Thus the organization was balancing the tension between being open and inclusive while guarding the direction it would take.

In August 1975 issue (#17: 3), the *ASAO Newsletter* began to include reports from “Fellows Meetings,” separate from the plenary sessions or the Board of Directors meetings. (The Executive Committee became the Board of Directors with the filing of Articles of Incorporation with Washington State in August 1973, according to the last issue of 1973 [*ASAO Newsletter* #14: 1.]) Fellows Meetings included discussions of nominations for new Board members and new Honorary Fellows. Later reports of Fellows Meetings announced votes taken on issues such as establishing a general fund and a publication fund (*ASAO Newsletter* #20 [April 1976]: 11) and discussions about developing guidelines for ASAO sessions. These were matters taken to the Fellows rather than undertaken only by the Directors. The Spring 1978 *Newsletter*, for example, mentioned discussions at the Fellows Meeting about “whether the size and number of formal symposia should be limited”; the question of whether, in planning the sequence of presentations, symposia organizers should take into account people participating in more than one session; and the need for clarity about the critical evaluation of papers coming out of symposia for future publication (*ASAO Newsletter* #26: 14). Such issues are now dealt with by the Board of Directors, with results of those discussions announced to the membership at large.

This situation apparently did not rest easily with all members. In the April 1976 *Newsletter*, the report from the plenary session at the February annual meeting provided evidence of a concern that ASAO become more inclusive in terms of who has voting rights: “Shulamit Decktor-Korn discussed the criteria used for selecting ASAO Fellows, and after considerable discussion from the floor, the Chair proposed that the Board re-evaluate the criteria for selecting Fellows and report the results back at the next Annual Meeting” (*ASAO Newsletter* 20: 11). The

issue, however, wasn't about how Fellows were selected but the ability to take part in association decision making. The next issue of the *Newsletter* (June 1976) contained a letter to the editor—an act unprecedented in the organization—in which the position for opening up voting rights was carefully argued by Decktor-Korn. Members were invited to respond to the letter by contacting the *Newsletter* Editor or any member of the Board. The discussion at the annual meeting had apparently raised “strong feelings” and the issue of voting rights struck at the core of inclusiveness:

The main point I was trying to make was not focused on the question of criteria for selecting ASAO Fellows. The reason I spoke up is that the Association is at a critical juncture, important decisions are being made about the future of the organization, and the membership at large has little opportunity for input in these decisions. I noted that I had heard that a member of the current Board was proposing a publicity drive to recruit new members, with the aim of something like a three-fold increase in Association membership (which presently numbers about 275 members). I said it seems to me that such an increase in members would entail that the ASAO become a very different organization from the one it is at present. A membership drive, therefore, is an important matter, and I said that I and other persons who are not members of the Board would like to have the opportunity for participation in the deliberations on the matter. However, the fact is that much of the decision-making of ASAO is not conducted through a polling of the members, nor through discussion at the Plenary Session of the Annual Meeting. Instead, much of the decision-making is in the hands of the Board of Directors. This being so, it is important who is a member of the board.

I then went on to note that the exclusion of the membership at large from significant decision-making is to be seen again in the procedures for choosing the members of the Board. Membership on the Board is through election by Fellows of the Association or through appointment by the Board to serve as an Officer of the Association. (*ASAO Newsletter* #21: 4–5)

The letter noted that only thirty-five people appeared to have acquired the status of Fellow, with only about half of that number actively involved in ASAO; in effect, then, only about twenty people were responsible for decision making, with far greater numbers interested in the goals and operation of the association as evidenced by the level of their participation in ASAO annual meetings over a number of years. Decktor-Korn continued to argue that those interested parties

faced obstacles in achieving Fellow status, however, because of how slowly the monograph series appeared to be progressing at the time (see the paper by Margaret Critchlow and others for a history of the ASAO Monograph/Book series). The letter concluded with pointing out that the comments at the meeting were “met with some vehement opposition” and the conversation became focused on selection of Fellows rather than the larger issue “that many of the concerned membership have little opportunity for input” (*ASAO Newsletter* #21: 5–6).

The November 1976 *Newsletter* made it clear that the issue was being addressed by the organization leadership: “The present Fellows are now considering a proposal and a counter-proposal dealing with this issue. Resolution has not yet been reached, but should be complete by the time of the Annual Meeting in Monterey” (*ASAO Newsletter* #22: 5). Those discussions ensued and the requested change was made; the Board and Fellows amended the bylaws to create a new category of Voting Member, while the status of Fellow was retained. As reported in the Spring/Summer 1977 *Newsletter*, “Fellows are differentiated from Voting Members only on the basis of achievement with the parameters of ASAO’s goals, purposes, and scholarly activities” (*ASAO Newsletter* #24: 14). The decision greatly expanded the number of people eligible to vote for Board members and other issues requiring votes.

The revisions resulted in four categories of membership: Subscribing Member, Voting Member, Fellow, and Honorary Fellow. No changes were made with the category of Honorary Fellow, but the other three categories entailed increasingly higher levels of engagement:

The status of SUBSCRIBING MEMBER is achieved simply by payment of annual dues. It is a statement of *interest* in the corporation.

Voting membership is achieved by payment of annual dues by persons who have either: (a) acquired the degree of Ph.D. in Anthropology and conducted research in Oceania. . . or, (b) conducted research in Oceania comparable to that expected from the holder of a Ph.D. in Anthropology and published a major article or

monograph describing this research. . . . Voting Member status is granted in recognition of *commitment* to the corporation and its affairs.

FELLOW status represents recognition of *achievement* within the framework of the corporation's stated goals, purposes, and scholarly activities. (*ASAO Newsletter #24*: 14)

While opening up opportunities to vote, however, other types of exclusion emerged: those with doctoral degrees had privilege relative to graduate students, and certainly those with degrees in anthropology over those in other disciplines. Those just contemplating research clearly could not receive voting rights.

The Fellow status, however, was somewhat expanded. An additional avenue to achieving the status was added: a scholarly contribution not just to an ASAO monograph but "any other official ASAO publications the corporation may devise or designate as acceptable," thus allowing for a bit more inclusiveness. And all Voting Members, Fellows, and Honorary Fellows explicitly were given the "right to vote in corporate elections and on such issues as may require vote" (*ASAO Newsletter #24*: 14, 15).

In at least one case, a distinction affecting decisions was retained. This was in connection with proposing bylaw changes. Such proposals required "no less than a combination of ten Fellows and five Voting Members." A small number of Voting Members could not, alone, propose changes. Approval of changes, however, required no more than a "simple majority of the ballots of the voting Members and Fellows" (*ASAO Newsletter #24*: 18).

The Spring 1979 *Newsletter* reported on a combined "Fellows and Voting Members Meeting" in which there were discussions of a monetary contribution from ASAO in honor of Margaret Mead and the need for a Program Chair and Local Arrangements Chair for the next meeting (*ASAO Newsletter #30*: 4). Later issues of the *Newsletter*, however, reported on separate meetings of the two categories of members. The Winter 1980 issue, for example, listed a

“Fellows Meeting” for the 1980 Galveston meeting (*ASAO Newsletter* #33: 3). The Spring 1982 issue also reported separate Fellows and Members meetings. At the Fellows meeting, participants heard of recent Board decisions, and this was “followed by a long discussion of proposed changes in meeting sites and season.” The Members meeting, however, consisted only of hearing Board decisions and officer reports (*ASAO Newsletter* #42: 14).

Yet one more change took place regarding membership and voting, as announced in the Spring 1985 issue. This last amendment was billed as a “simplification of the membership categories” (*ASAO Newsletter* 54: 3). No longer would there be the category of non-voting Member. The Summer 1985 *Newsletter* announced the official approval of the changes:

The approval of the changes in the ASAO Bylaws in the recent referendum has conferred voting rights on a much larger proportion of the membership than heretofore. The abolition of a two-tiered system of members and voting members will hopefully encourage a wider participation in the affairs of the association and guarantee a stronger and more vital association. (*ASAO Newsletter* #55: 1) .

One effect was to enfranchise graduate students.

The full text of the revised bylaws was published in the Summer 1988 *Newsletter* and retained the language of varying types of commitment or involvement:

The status of INSTITUTIONAL MEMBER is achieved simply by payment of annual dues. It is a statement of *interest* in the corporation.

VOTING MEMBER status is granted in recognition of payment of annual dues and is a statement of *commitment* to the corporation and its concern with comparative research in the Pacific.

FELLOW status represents recognition of *achievement* with the framework of the corporation’s stated goals, purposes, and scholarly activities. ...

Distinguished scholars in the field may be elected as HONORARY FELLOWS (*ASAO Newsletter* #67: 9).

Over the years, then, ASAO has seen voting rights vested in an ever-widening group, but otherwise decision making now rests in the hands of the Board of Directors and the officers.

These decisions are announced to the larger membership, and certainly the Board and officers respond to issues brought to them, but Fellows no longer play a role separate from that of any other member. They no longer meet as a group or have discussions as a group with the Board or the officers. In short, decision making has moved from the hands of a small group of voting members into the hands of the Board and officers.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes

1. Membership Coordinator Barbara Anderson reported in the April 2018 *Newsletter* that 43 Pacific Islanders (15% of the total ASAO membership) took advantage of this fee waiver in 2017 (*ASAO Newsletter* #160: 6).
2. For example, the first ASAO Monograph (Carroll 1970) included as authors Ronald G. Gallimore with a PhD in psychology and Ruth Gallagher Goodenough with an AM in social psychology. To cite another example, the fourth monograph (Brady 1976) included three authors who at the time had not earned a PhD degree. For a list of ASAO Monographs and other ASAO publications, please see <https://www.asao.org/asao-publications.html>
3. The impact of this shift has been cushioned somewhat by the growth in the number of officers over the years.

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