



### A143 Diversity and Inclusion in Forensic Anthropology: Where We Stand and Prospects for the Future

*Sean D. Tallman, PhD\*, Boston University, Boston, MA 02118; Cate E. Bird, PhD, International Committee of the Red Cross, Washington, DC 20036*

**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand how forensic anthropologists currently perceive diversity and inclusion in the Anthropology Section.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the importance of diversity and inclusion, and how they can benefit the forensic anthropology community. Additionally, this presentation will outline the development of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee within the Anthropology Section, as well as its primary objectives, survey results, and proposals of how individuals and institutions can increase diversity at multiple levels within applied and academic contexts.

Diversity and inclusion has proven to be an asset for individual and group performance, growth, development, and success in business and academia through principles of flexibility, equifinality, and respect for differences. Research demonstrates that diverse communities or workforces result in sustained competitive advantages through increased innovation and creativity. In 2017, the President of the AAFS Anthropology Section created an ad hoc committee to critically explore the current state of diversity within forensic anthropology. In 2018, this ad hoc committee was enthusiastically changed to a permanent Diversity and Inclusion Committee by voting members (AAFS created a similar Diversity and Outreach Committee in 2015 to develop comprehensive strategies to support diversity and promote collaboration, professionalism, and integrity). Primary objectives of the Committee include assessing diversity-related concerns of the Section, promoting inclusiveness, acting as an advocate for underrepresented individuals in forensic science, and promoting diversity-related resources for all Section members. This venture importantly parallels committees formed by closely aligned professional organizations, including the American Association of Physical Anthropologists and the Society for American Archaeology, and thus has the advantage of observing how diversity and inclusion movements in similar organizations have successfully resulted in innovation, renewal, and growth.

To evaluate the current state of diversity and inclusion in forensic anthropology, the Committee created and distributed an Institutional Review Board-approved survey to all members of the Anthropology Section (University of South Florida proposal #00032513). Of the 220 participants, ages range from 18-85+ years, with most being 25-44-year-olds (58.8%) who hold various degrees/certifications, including BA/BS (13.3%), MA/MS (26.1%), PhD (28.0%), MD/PhD (12.8%), and PhD/Diplomate status in the American Board of Forensic Anthropology (19.9%). Of the respondents, only 30.9% self-identify as a member of an underrepresented group, including African American, Native American, Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, LGBTQ+, and/or disabled. Heterogeneity is believed to be the greatest at the undergraduate level, with diversity decreasing in vertical movement through graduate, postdoctoral, and/or professional statuses. Overall, the majority (63.9%) of respondents believe that forensic anthropology exhibits little diversity; this lack of diversity is considered problematic to 73.4% of respondents, while 84.3% believe the Section should do more to recruit and maintain diverse forensic anthropologists.

While 90.6% of respondents feel accepted within the Anthropology section, discrimination is an issue: 24.0% of respondents have experienced discrimination, while 46.3% have witnessed discrimination in the Section. Issues of discrimination, disrespect, and exclusion can have a particularly negative effect on our community, as it can lead to attrition of those with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Furthermore, these figures are especially worrisome since 59.9% of respondents do not know how to report incidents of discrimination within the Section.

Like comparable endeavors in other scientific and non-scientific contexts, the Committee contends that diversifying forensic anthropology through outreach and inclusion of persons with unique backgrounds and life experiences will ultimately benefit our science. While the Committee recognizes a strong tradition of scientific integrity in forensic anthropology, our community's homogeneity, exclusivity, and competitive nature may make us blind to assumptions in our scientific interpretations. The Committee believes diversity and inclusion in research and practice permits greater innovation, and the propensity to critically examine our assumptions, particularly as they relate to the complex and dynamic populations that we serve. This study demonstrates that our scientific community faces two major hurdles in this venture: *recruitment* and *retention* of diverse members. Through thoughtful and concerted efforts to value diversity during graduate school selection and hiring processes, to support mentorship programs, and to foster an environment of respect and acceptance in our Section, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee believes forensic anthropology can greatly improve and serve as a successful model within the forensic sciences.

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#### Diversity and Inclusion, Forensic Anthropology, AAFS