A History of ASAO Sessions: Formats and Topics
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Much can be learned about an academic organization by examining its activities in historical

perspective. In this paper we focus on the development of the Association for Social

Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO)'s unique structure of annual conferences. Among the topics

we address are: What was the original justification for holding meetings? How did the format for

meetings evolve? Who were the main actors in shaping the structure and functioning of the

organization's activities? And what does an analysis of sessions held during the annual meetings

over the past fifty years have to tell us about changes and continuities in the direction of ASAO?

Our sources include *ASAO Newsletters* dating back to 1967, the recollections of some of

the surviving founders of the organization and long-term members who were involved in the

shaping of ASAO's policies over the years, and a database we compiled of some 700 sessions

from the nascent origin of the association in 1967 through 2017, which includes the organizers of

sessions, the names given to the sessions, and the authors and titles of papers contributed to

sessions where such information was available.

ASAO Beginnings

In order to understand the way in which the organization of meetings and the topics dealt with

evolved, one has to begin with the initial vision that prompted the organization of ASAO, or

more appropriately its forerunner, ASAEO (the Association for Social Anthropology in Eastern

Oceania). The idea for an organization that would focus on anthropological issues in the Pacific

Islands had one of its defining moments during a luncheon meeting between Vern Carroll and Alan Howard at Lynn's Delicatessen at Ala Moana Shopping Center in Honolulu in 1966. Carroll had recently returned from three years on Nukuoro Atoll (1963–1966) and Howard had spent two years studying Rotumans on Rotuma and in Fiji (1959–1961). In the course of their discussion, the topic of comparative research came up, especially the work in Africa and the publication of *African Political Systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940) and *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950). A. R. Radcliffe-Brown had made a strong case for regionally based comparative studies. For example, in the preface to *African Political Systems,* he argued that the "comparative study of political institutions, with special reference to the simpler societies, is an important branch of social anthropology which has not yet received the attention it deserves" and that doing so will allow scholars to "discover the universal, essential, characters which belong to all human societies, past, present and future" (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: xi). And in a 1951 article entitled "The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology," he wrote:

> For social anthropology the task is to formulate and validate statements about the conditions of existence of social systems (laws of social statics) and the regularities that are observable in social change (laws of social dynamics). This can only be done by the systematic use of the comparative method, and the only justification of that method is the expectation that it will provide us with results of this kind, or, as Boas stated it, will provide us with knowledge of the laws of social development. It will be only in an integrated and organised study in which historical studies and sociological studies are combined that we shall be able to reach a real understanding of the development of human society. (Radcliffe-Brown 1951: 22)

Carroll and Howard both subscribed to the idea that above all, social anthropology must be a comparative endeavor if any real progress were to take place in our understanding of social dynamics and social history.

At the time, the idea that Polynesia in particular was a natural laboratory for comparative research was in the air, stimulated in large measure by Marshall Sahlins's publication of *Social Stratification in Polynesia* (1958). Carroll felt that Micronesia, too, should be included in the "laboratory," insofar as, like Polynesia, it also manifested enough of a shared cultural template to warrant comparative investigations.

Credit for translation of these ideas into an organizational mode—the decision to form an organization to conduct comparative investigations in the Eastern Pacific—was entirely Carroll's, and accordingly, he, along with Roger Keesing, organized the first "symposium" in March 1967 at Keesing's home institution, the University of California–Santa Cruz.

The sole topic of the first meeting was adoption in Eastern Pacific societies (initially including Island Melanesia). Papers on adoption were first solicited by Carroll in the summer of 1964 during a break from his fieldwork, and a symposium on the topic was held at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in November of that year. As noted in a prospectus for the volume *Adoption in Eastern Oceania* (Carroll 1970), the papers from that AAA symposium, along with some additional papers, were circulated among the invitees to the UC–Santa Cruz meeting, and the authors commented on one another's papers through correspondence.

Why the focus on adoption? This was a period in sociocultural anthropology when kinship issues were of great prominence. In 1949, George Peter Murdock had published *Social Structure,* a book in which kinship terminology played a major role; Claude Lévi-Strauss published *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté (The Elementary Structures of Kinship)* in the same year; and componential analysis of kinship terms was still in vogue (eg, Goodenough 1956; Lounsbury 1956; Wallace and Atkins 1960). All of these approaches proved highly

controversial and stimulated spirited debates (eg, Sahlins's 1963 review of Murdock's 1960 edited volume *Social Structure in Southeast Asia*; Homans and Schneider's 1955 critique of Lévi-Strauss; Leach's 1971 criticism of componential analysis).

Within kinship studies, a number of anthropologists were interested in adoption in relation to the transmission of rights in land and other forms of property. While in Africa unilinear (primarily patrilineal) kin groups readily lent themselves to the formation of corporate entities, most Oceanic societies were characterized by cognatic kin groups, which resulted in blurred boundaries and the possibility of multiple and overlapping memberships. The driving question became how such ill-defined groups could function effectively as property-holding corporations, a topic that stimulated considerable discussion and debate in the 1960s and 1970s.

Perhaps the strongest critic of prevailing kinship theories at the time was David Schneider, Carroll's mentor at the University of Chicago, where Carroll had done his graduate work. Schneider was a strong advocate for an empirical approach and disdained theoretical and formalistic approaches to kinship based on European concepts of consanguinity. He asserted that the notion of kinship exists in the minds of anthropologists rather than in the minds of the people they study: "Kinship has been defined by European social scientists, and European social scientists use their own folk culture as the source of many, if not all, of their ways of formulating and understanding the world about them" (Schneider 1984: 193).

Schneider's involvement in the adoption project from the beginning is apparent in a July 7, 1965, memo from Carroll, circulated to colleagues, that stated, "If there are any who would like to do a paper towards a later seminar (and eventual publication) on this topic [adoption], please declare yourself now to David Schneider, University of Chicago."

In his introduction to *Adoption in Eastern Oceania,* Carroll reflected Schneider's

approach, and the relevance of adoption to understanding kinship:

> The answer to questions about the nature of kinship can only be determined on the
> basis of investigations into the precise extent to which adoptive relations are
> construed as tantamount to "biological" relationships. To what degree does
> adoption really rearrange ties of consanguinity? Is it possible that, appearances to
> the contrary, adoption is not perceived as not changing the "natural" relationship
> of the child to his "biological" parents (as I have argued in chapter 6)? Or is it
> perhaps the case, as [Robert] Levy has suggested (chapter 4), that biological
> parenthood may, in some societies, be usefully construed as "contingent" in the
> same way that an adoptive relationship is contingent? (Carroll 1970: 14)

As Michael Lieber recalled, Schneider's role in the adoption symposium was significant

in several respects. One outcome of his role was the nearly excruciating tension that

characterized that session. Harold Scheffler, Paul Kay, and Ward Goodenough represented

approaches to interpretation of data to which Schneider was unalterably opposed. Is genealogy a

scientific representation of biological reality or a cultural construct? Everyone in the room was

wary of starting a row. "We never resolved this tension, in great part because we had no

experience in how to talk to one another" (Lieber, personal communication, March 2015).

The significance of kinship for the nascent organization, at least in Carroll's mind, was

clearly manifest in the February 1968 *ASAEO Newsletter* (#2: 11) in which he proposed possible

topics for the symposium to follow the adoption session (see table 1).

Table 1: Carroll's Proposed Topics for Next Symposium

1. Incest
2. Primary kin roles (mo, fa, child)
3. "close" kin vs. "distant kin"
4. Kinship terminology
5. Affinity as a principle of social organization
6. Marital stability and divorce
7. Wives as quasi-kin
8. Friends as quasi-kin
9. Domestic economy
10. Male/Female

11. Age as a principle of social organization
12. Economic implications of extended kin ties
13. Sex practices and their implications
14. Psycho-sexual development of the individual
15. The social significance of land holding
16. Inheritance
17. Kinds of property
18. Social structure and ecology
19. The colonial experience in East Oceania

In some respects these concerns might be seen as carving out a broad space for inquiry, but the great majority of these topics could be reclassified as dealing with kinship (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 16) and social organization (5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 15, 17, 18); of the remainder, only two deal with psycho-social topics (13, 14) and one with culture history (19).

Furthermore, in the August 1968 *Newsletter,* three volumes were proposed, with symposia to be arranged after draft chapters had been circulated. One was tentatively titled "Anthropological Studies of Land Tenure in Oceania" (possibly to include New Guinea); another was to address "Social Control in Eastern Oceania" (but this did not emerge); and a third volume, on "Kinship Terminology in Oceania," with the principle theme being "the relationship between kinship categories, genealogical network, and behavioral rules, with Oceania providing an analytical laboratory," was to include papers to be presented during a symposium at the November 1968 AAA meeting prior to the ASAEO meeting (*ASAEO Newsletter* #3: 2).

Although the land tenure collection eventually emerged as the second book in the ASAO Monograph series (Lundsgaarde 1974), the envisioned volume on kinship terminology was never published because, in the opinion of Michael Lieber, "there was never the kind of discussion that could lead to a volume. … The point is about AAA vs. ASAO as venues for comparative anthropology, and that we've tried AAA a number of times, never with a volume resulting" (personal communication, March 2015).

While Leiber emphasized the role of meetings in whether or not they facilitated concrete outcomes in terms of scholarly discourse in reviewed and impactful publications, our emphasis is on the nature of the discourse itself and the development of both a means for learning "how to talk to one another" as Leiber put it, and for doing so across a growing body of comparative topics.

Subsequent to the 1967 symposium on adoption at Santa Cruz, a symposium was held in 1968, also at Santa Cruz, on "Colonialism in the Pacific," organized by Henry Lundsgaard. Interestingly (and foreshadowing later session formats), although it was labeled a "symposium" in *Newsletter* #3, in the session report it was described as an "informal discussion." And, while a useful exchange of ideas and research leads was said to have occurred, participants "agreed that the subject ramified in too many directions to produce a suitably unified volume in the monograph series" (*ASAEO Newsletter* #3: 2).

The possibility of holding an annual ASAEO meeting at the University of California–Santa Cruz was proposed in 1968 by Douglas Oliver:

> The meetings would take place in March, during the Santa Cruz spring quarter-break when dormitory space can be used to house participants. The setting is splendid, the facilities conducive to informal exchange of news, ideas, and arguments.
>
> The meetings would consist of:
>
> (a) One or more symposia for the ASAEO volume series, with presentation, discussion, and polishing of formal papers.
>
> (b) Additional symposia or discussions with an areal or topical focus that renders them unsuitable for the volume series (though they might well be suitable for journals or other publications). Then we contemplate symposia on such topics as:
>
> (1) Social anthropology of the Gilberts (Lundsgaarde and/or Silverman, Chairman).

(2) Social anthropology of Malaita (B.S.I.P.), (Keesing, Chairman).

(3) Ancient Polynesian Political Systems (Oliver and Davenport, Chairmen).

(4) Variability in Melanesian Social Structure (Davenport or Keesing, Chairman).

The possibilities here are limited only by the energy and imagination of members. Symposia might include scholars from neighboring disciplines or specialties (psychology, physical anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, etc.); hopefully a number of overseas scholars will be able to participate.

(c) Formal papers on any topic in Pacific social anthropology.

(d) Plenty of informal discussion. Experience of several meetings of Pacific anthropologists at Santa Cruz suggests that we learn more about each other's ideas, data, and plans in such informal bull sessions than in a year or two of exchanging letters and publications.

A two and a half day meeting should suffice. (*ASAEO Newsletter* #3: 2)

A 1969 meeting was also held at Santa Cruz (the third to take place in that location), and while it engaged with several of the topics identified by Carroll (see table 1), it also opened up other fresh topics and notably included several nods to highly place-specific anthropologies. The 1969 meeting included the following symposia (as announced in *ASAEO Newsletter* #4: 1):

· Social Structure in the New Guinea Highlands and Island Pacific (Chairman: Roger Keesing)

· Kinship Terminology in Oceania (Chairman: David Schneider)

· Modernization of Micronesia (Chairman: Frances McReynolds Smith)

· Polynesian Political Systems (Chairmen: Douglas Oliver and William Davenport)

· Anthropology of the Gilberts (Chairmen: Martin Silverman and Henry Lundsgaarde)

· Social Anthropology of Malaita (Chairman: Roger Keesing)

It is again apparent from the titles of the symposia at the 1969 Santa Cruz meeting that kinship and sociopolitical organization were dominant concerns. However, in April 1970 an ASAO symposium was held at the University of Washington, supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, on "Relocated Communities in the Pacific." The November 1970 *ASAO Newsletter* noted that "the purpose of the Symposium was to bring together people who had done field research in relocated communities in order to formulate a conceptual framework to facilitate the comparison of disparate sets of data" (*ASAO Newsletter* #6: 3). Although he was unable to attend the symposium because of illness, it was inspired by Homer Barnett, who directed a project on relocated populations in the Pacific. The symposium was organized by Michael Lieber and chaired by Martin Silverman, with David Schneider and Murray Chapman serving as discussants. It resulted in a volume edited by Lieber titled *Exiles and Migrants in Oceania* (1977), which was dedicated to Barnett.

No meeting of the association was held in 1971, but Carroll organized a symposium on "Incest in Eastern Oceania" at the American Anthropology Association meeting in New York that year, with the papers published as a special issue of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* in 1976, edited by Judith Huntsman and Mervyn McLean.

It was at the first regular meeting of ASAO (held from March 29 to April 1, 1972, at Orcas Island in Washington State) that the topics discussed significantly expanded in scope. In addition to symposia on "Adoption and Fosterage in Oceania," organized by Ivan Brady, and "Sex Roles in Oceania," co-organized by Jane Goodale and Martin Silverman (both of which resonated with earlier themes concerning kinship and sociopolitical organization), all of the remaining sessions dealt with issues associated with sociocultural change. They included a symposium organized by Sherwood Lingenfelter on "Political Development in Oceania," which

resulted in the publication of a book (Hughes and Lingenfelter 1974), and informal sessions on "Oceanic Peoples as Minority Groups" (organized by Marion Kelly); "The Ideology of Change in Non-Western Societies" (organized by Robert McKnight); "Medical Problems Peculiar to Oceania" (organized by Marjorie Whiting); and "Names and Naming in Eastern Oceania" (organized by Bradd Shore) (*ASAO Newsletter* #10 [Spring 1972]).

Session Formats

Carroll's vision for meetings of the association was that they would consist exclusively of symposia, with advanced drafts of pre-circulated papers, ideally resulting in a published volume of comparative significance. He made this clear in a report dated March 22, 1983, published in the Spring 1984 *ASAO Newsletter* (#50), which we see as a watershed moment in which competing tendencies in the organization of the association's meetings came into crisp visibility, along with a general association commitment to a nonhierarchical and decentralized conference in which session organizers would wield all the significant authority. At the time Carroll was the outgoing Program Chair (he had stepped down as Board Chair in 1973), and this was his last substantive communication within ASAO.

As a number of board members active at the time recalled, his break from the association followed two years of conflict between Carroll and colleagues on the Board and the general membership attending the meetings over what he perceived as the dilution of the efficacy of the original ASAO treatment—pre-circulation of papers followed by discussion of the issues raised in the papers. What he observed was people presenting papers in sessions, people designated to comment on one of the other papers, and other variations of what he considered show-and-tell

masquerading as comparative conversation (Leiber, personal communication, March 2015).

Carroll's report clearly expressed his opinions:

> (1) There is little need for any "Informal Sessions." Interest in almost anything can be generated via the *Newsletter* and special mailings. This sort of organizational work cannot be by-passed; informal sessions are no substitute. Indeed the only rationale for an "informal session" that makes sense to me is where one feels it important to organize a response to late-breaking political events.

> (2) As for "working sessions" and "symposia," there is no need at all to read papers—or to spend a lot of time on the authors' summaries of them. This is not AAA!! (Nor for that matter any other sort of conference or meetings that any of us have been to.) Papers can (and should) be circulated well in advance. Comments on them can be circulated in advance too. Sessions can (and should) be devoted to the issues that remain to be thrashed out in order to transform a collection of papers into something more useful. Those who get travel money to "present papers" can get reimbursed by flashing the program at their accounting department. Spectators in sessions can be accommodated by having packets of all session papers on hand, at the beginning of the meetings, for sale (at cost) to those who want to participate but have not previously been a "full participant" (one who has contributed something and received copies of others' contributions). Session participants who have not finished their papers in time to circulate them before the meetings—and who are not embarrassed to impose on their colleagues' time—can insure that every participant in their session gets a copy of their paper at the plenary session. Session chairs should simply not allow paper reading.

> (3) Our labels for various kinds of sessions do *not* propose a temporal order (start with an "informal session," continue the same project the next year with a "working session" … etc.). They are merely labels for the amount of time during the meetings that a session can lay claim to (based on how much "product" is in hand by the relevant deadlines). In an ideal world (given enough prior planning and organization) there would never be a need even for a "working session" (except perhaps when a very limited number of participants were involved in what—were there more of them requiring more time on the schedule—would be called a "symposium"). In the same ideal world, there would never be a need to have more than one symposium (or other sort of time on the annual meetings schedule) on the same topic. (In this connection it might be useful to remember that many of our published symposia involved only one occasion on which the participants met face-to-face.) By the same reasoning there is really not a lot of cause to devote large chunks of meeting time to discussion of each paper in a session (this too can be done by round-robin correspondence). (*ASAO Newsletter* #50: 2–3)

Carroll referred to his comments not as "policy" but as "merely the reflections of someone who has been around for a while and listened to a lot of members who felt that their sessions went particularly well (or badly)" (*ASAO Newsletter* #50: 2).

In fact, though all the sessions during the AESAO phase (1967–1970) were labeled "symposia," sessions labeled "informal" and "working" were introduced very early in the history of the association as well as immediately following incorporation as ASAO in 1972. As noted above, at the 1972 meeting of ASAO there were three symposia and four informal "discussions." At the 1973 meeting there was one evening discussion session (organized by Torben Monberg), two sessions labeled "working" (one organized by Karl Heider, the other by Candace Brooks), and two symposia (*ASAO Newsletter* #12 [Spring 1973]: 1).

The 1973 meeting was the first at which informal sessions, working sessions, and symposia were all held. The emergence of the three types of session co-occurred with the start of what became ASAO's iconic "three-year cycle" of developmental sessions. That 1973 meeting was also the first in which a session was launched that progressed over three years; "Missionary Position" (organized by Karl Heider) returned for further development in 1974 and in 1975. The second session to go through a three-year cycle (albeit with a change in organizers and a variation in the eventual "normal" order of sessions) was "Conflict and Conflict Management" (organized as an informal session in 1974 by Henry Lundsgaarde, as a symposium in 1975 by Sharon Tiffany, and again by Tiffany as a working session in 1976). These developmental sessions clearly marked a chartering moment though the format was not formalized until a decade later. Despite Carroll's later misgivings, it seems clear that this multistage development of topical sessions was very much about "learning to talk to one another" over multiyear conversations.

Moreover, and somewhat ironically, the evolution of session formats might be seen as the result of Carroll's initial organizational scheme, which placed power in the hands of session organizers. Neither he nor any subsequent Program Coordinator was intended to have the power to control the format or content of a session. Topics were not selected by the ASAO Board of Directors or officers; rather, it was very much a grassroots matter of someone with a keen interest in a topic proposing it and taking responsibility for guiding the development of the "long conversation" (as David Counts called the multiyear cycle [personal communication, December 2015]), echoing Oliver's emphasis on discussion.

The formalization of the protocols governing the different types of sessions was the work of Dorothy Counts, who took over as Program Chair in 1983. Prior to Counts's appointment, Program Chairs served for only one meeting; she was the first to serve in that capacity for an extended period of time (1983–1990), which gave her an investment in having a firm set of guidelines in place. In the same *Newsletter* that contained Carroll's report questioning the value of informal and working sessions (*ASAO Newsletter* #50 [Spring 1984]), Counts published guidelines, which emerged from discussions among the membership over the previous decade, regarding the appropriate formats for the three kinds of sessions (see appendix 1). Counts published a revised set of guidelines in the Spring 1988 *ASAO Newsletter* (#66), spelling out in more detail the criteria for allocating time at the meetings for each type of session.

Notwithstanding the early development of the three session categories, it took some time before the notion of a sequence from informal session (I) to working session (W) to symposium (S) in successive years firmly took hold. Six instances of the sequence occurred through the 1980s, and in some instances (eg, Bradd Shore's sessions on personal names), significant time elapsed between informal or subsequent sessions:

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· Personal Names (Organizer: Bradd Shore), I-1972, W-1980, S-1981

· Social Stratification in Oceania (Organizer: Michael Howard), I-1980, W-1981, S-1982

· Aging and Dying in Oceania (Organizers: Dorothy Counts and David Counts), I-1981, W-1982, S-1983

· The Rashomon Effect (Organizer: Karl Heider), I-1981, W-1982, S-1983

· Primogeniture in Pacific Societies (Organizer: Naomi Scaletta), I-1985, W-1986, S-1987

· Health-Related Research in the Pacific (Organizer: Leslie Marshall), I-1986, W-1987, S-1988

Topics: Historical Trends

Drawing on our database of ASAO sessions over a fifty-year period, we are able to address a number of questions of potential interest, ranging from the empirical (how many sessions were organized in a given year?) to the interpretive (does analysis of coded session topics prove illuminating regarding disciplinary trajectories and shifts over the years within Pacific anthropology?).

In order to pursue an analysis of topical concerns over the years, we developed a coding scheme (see appendix 2) and applied it to a tabulation of ASAO sessions from 1967 to 2016 drawing on the association's published newsletters. We coded sessions for topicality; regional scope (currently defined in terms of the three problematically defined culture areas [Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia] and Papua New Guinea); the names of organizers; the type of session (informal, working, symposium); and form of publication, if one resulted. In the following commentary, it should be stressed that these tabulations include multiple instances of the same session if it reconvened over two or more years at different levels of organization (eg, informal, working, symposium).

Our analysis suggests that ASAO topics and the sessions in which they found expression have been either (a) perduring, (b) cycling, (c) completed, or (d) emergent. Perduring topics are those that occur regularly over the years and that maintain their status as a persistent focus for the association. Examples of perduring topics include historical process (124 sessions); ethnographic concerns, which includes such matters as fieldwork experiences, representations of cultures studied, the impact of colonialism on ethnographic endeavors, issues of repatriation, and the like (107 sessions); sessions having a regional focus (57 sessions); social organization (53 sessions); epistemology and belief (50 sessions); political issues (45 sessions); health issues (42 sessions); economics (41 sessions); and gender (35 sessions).

Cycling topics are those that have occurred periodically. The primary distinction between cycling sessions and perduring sessions is the way in which cycling concerns come into and out of view as opposed to being consistently visible on the program. A striking number of classic topics of early interest to the association's founding members have attracted cycling or returning interest over the years. Examples include conflict (1974–1977, 1984, 1994–1996); ritual (1977–1979, 1986–1988, 1998–1999, 2006–2009, 2015); adoption (1967, 1972, 2005–2007, 2013–2015); colonialism (1968, 1973, 1994–1998, 2002–2003, 2014–2015); and education (1986–1989, 1991, 1996–1997, 2000, 2007–2011, 2015–2016).

Completed topics are those that appear strongly embedded or grounded in the foundational disciplinary concerns but that do not appear to be generative of an obvious discursive or conversational trail. This is not to say that these sessions were not significant or potent contributions to the year(s) in which they occurred. We note only that, for whatever reason, the topic was not returned to in subsequent years as focalized by the more or less coherent work of a session. This category also covers one-offs and special sessions. Examples of

completed sessions include memorial or festschrift-type sessions for particular ethnographers, and notable, theoretically informed trends at specific moments in the discipline's history, and highly specific topics (such as Robert Franco's sessions in 1987–1989 regarding teaching Pacific Islands anthropology, and the 1996 and 1997 sessions on Pacific Islander–Made Videos organized by Karen Nero), which has had few, if any, direct antecedents and few, if any, subsequent directly related sessions.

Emergent session topics are those that first appeared well after the founding of ASAO. Examples of emergent sessions include race (first session focus in 2001–2002, recurring in 2007 and 2014–2017); environmental issues (first session in 1999 and having a continuous presence since); and Austronesia (first appearance in 2009 with a continuous presence since). Emergent topics such as these are testimony to the organization's response to relatively recent concerns among Pacific Islanders and within academic disciplines concerned with Oceania.

As an increasing number of anthropologists and scholars from related disciplines have engaged in research in the Pacific Islands, the membership of ASAO has grown substantially from the handful of anthropologists who composed the first few symposia to 371 in 2017, as have the number of sessions at annual meetings (see figure 1 and appendix 3).

We also note the importance of collaboration in session organization. In fact, more sessions have been organized by two or more collaborators (381 sessions) than by single organizers (326 sessions). Moreover, there appears to be growth over time in the proportion of sessions organized by two or more people. Interestingly, collaborating organizers often "team up" on more than one topic in succeeding years, which suggests a direction for future inquiry into the nature of professional scholarly networks.

Regional Topics

Our technique for identifying regional foci of the sessions was to rely on the titles of papers included in the sessions that explicitly mentioned an island or group of islands. We coded each session with regard to the general regions that were included: Polynesia, Micronesia, Island Melanesia, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia (including Irian Jaya), Australia (Aboriginal Australians), and Taiwan (indigenous Austronesian groups).

When the organization was founded, in the late 1960s, the focus was almost exclusively on Polynesia and Micronesia, with a grudging concession to Island Melanesia, but during the 1970s the scope expanded to include New Guinea and Australia, and in the 1980s, Indonesia and Taiwan. Table 2 provides a count of the number of ASAO working sessions and symposia for which data were available (295 total sessions) in which each region was represented from 1968 through 2016, by decade.

Table 2

Inclusion of Culture Areas in Symposia and Working Sessions, By Decade

	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010-2016	Total Included
Polynesia	2 (100%)	17 (68%)	47 (71%)	48 (80%)	66 (84%)	44 (70%)	226 (77%)
Micronesia	2 (100%)	21 (84%)	53 (80%)	43 (72%)	31 (39%)	33 (52%)	184 (62%)
Is Melanesia	1 (50%)	17 (68%)	56 (85%)	37 (62%)	55 (70%)	51 (81%)	217 (74%)
PNG	0 (0%)	10 (40%)	61 (92%)	51 (85%)	62 (78%)	41 (65%)	225 (76%)
Australia	0 (0%)	5 (20%)	11 (17%)	5 (8%)	20 (25%)	6 (10%)	47 (16%)
Indonesia	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (5%)	10 (17%)	8 (10%)	3 (5%)	24 (8%)
Taiwan	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4%)	7 (11%)	10 (3%)
Total Sessions	**2**	**25**	**66**	**60**	**79**	**63**	**295**

The data speak to the increasing inclusiveness of culture areas over the years, with anthropologists doing research in Island Melanesia and Papua New Guinea coming to play a role at least equivalent to that of researchers working in Polynesia and Micronesia. Relatively few sessions (29, 10%) have been exclusive to one culture area (Polynesia 9, Micronesia 7, Island Melanesia 5, Papua New Guinea 8), which suggests that the founding commitment to comparative research, no matter how uncontrolled it has become, remains at the core of the of the organization's goals.

Figure 1

Number of ASAO Sessions Held at Annual Meetings
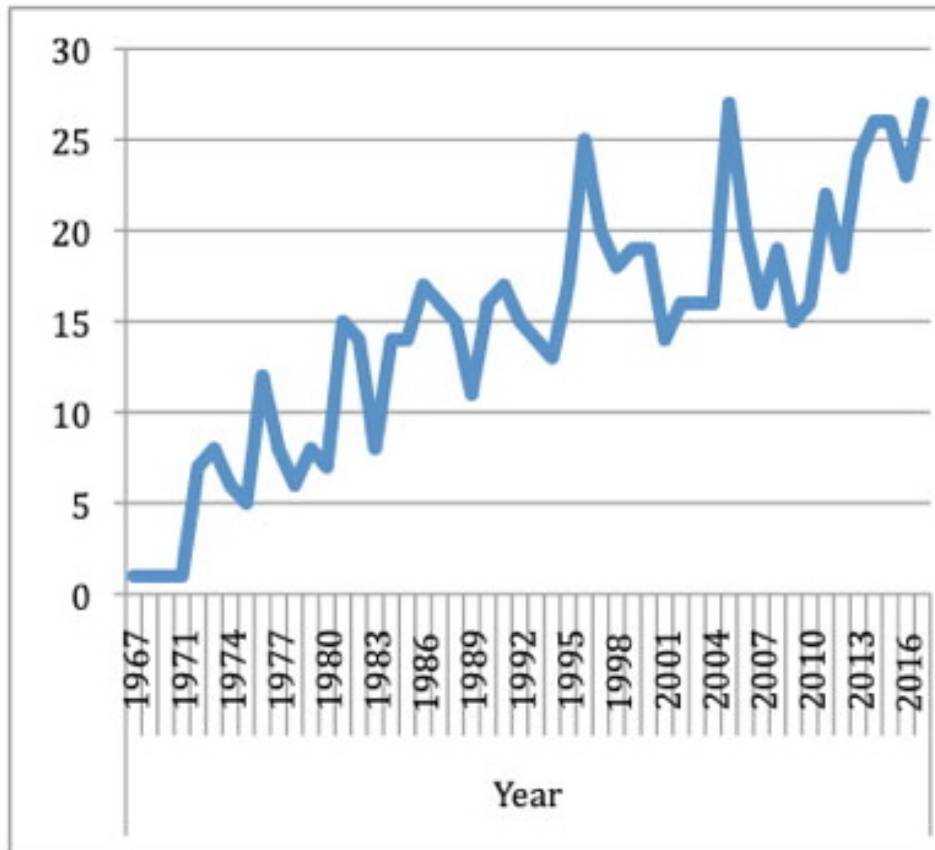
Conclusions

Coming out of these examinations of ASAO beginnings, the development of the association's three-year session structure, and the course of its topical concerns, a few observations are possible. First, the importance of the role of session organizers in guiding ASAO's intellectual contributions cannot be overestimated. Session organizers not only have initiated topics for examination, they have been instrumental in guiding discussions over a period of time (ideally the three-year cycle) and shepherded into existence numerous noteworthy publications (see lists of edited collections emerging from ASAO sessions, on the ASAO website: https://www.asao.org/asao-publications.html). Second, despite sometimes strained relationships within the association over directions to be taken, ASAO has arguably fulfilled, and continues to fulfill, its mission as conceived by its founders. Third, and most importantly in our view, even as some senior colleagues have passed away and some others have become infrequent attendees, the association has demonstrated a remarkable degree of continuity in its pursuit of the initial vision of pursuing comparative understandings of ethnographic findings through extensive discussion in an atmosphere in which all members are regarded as valuable colleagues regardless of rank, experience, and status within their profession.

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Appendix 1: Counts's Formalization of ASAO Session Types

There are three types of sessions at the ASAO Annual Meetings:

1. INFORMAL SESSIONS are for the informal sharing of ideas to determine if there is a common ground of interest and data to justify organizing, at a later meeting, a session with formal papers. Participants do not write papers for an Informal Session. The organizers should send a brief description of the focus of the session to the Program Chairman and to the Newsletter Editor no later than the deadline for the Fall issue. Informal sessions will be given no more than one block of time (9–12 a.m., 2–5 p.m., or 8–10 p.m.) and may receive 1/2 block. Available time will be allocated according to the number of people indicating an interest in the session. The organizers of Informal Sessions are responsible for keeping the Program Chairman posted regarding the number and names of interested people. This will facilitate scheduling and the appropriate allocation of time.

2. WORKING SESSIONS are based on the existence of prepared papers that are summarized (NOT READ) during the session. The organizer(s) of a Working Session are responsible for: (a) sending a description of the topic of the session and call for papers to the Program Chairman and the Newsletter Editor no later than the deadline for the Summer issue; (b) obtaining from participants by late fall an abstract or 2-page synopsis of all papers; and (c) sending to the Program Chairman the names, paper titles, copies of the abstract/synopsis of all papers and a realistic indication of how many participants will actually be attending the meetings. These materials should be mailed to the Program Chairman by December 1. A Working Session requires the presence of seven participants with papers. A session that does not meet these criteria by December 1 (so your Program Chairman can meet the January Newsletter deadline) will be listed on the Program as an Informal Session. Complete information (brief description of topic, list of participants by name and paper title, order of presentation) will be included in the January Newsletter if it is sent to the Program Chairman by December 1. Ordinarily a Working Session will receive no more than two time blocks (9–12 a.m., 2–5 p.m.). Available time will be allocated according to the number of participants attending and presenting papers.

3. SYMPOSIA are sessions that normally have met at a lower level of organization at least once before and that are based on papers that have been pre-circulated among the participants for written criticism leading to revision. The Symposium is a forum for the discussion of ideas and issues arising from the papers rather than for the presentation of the papers themselves. The organizer(s) of a Symposium are responsible for: (a) sending a topic description and call for papers to the Program Chairman and Newsletter Editor before the deadline for the Spring issue of the Newsletter; (b) assuring that drafts of papers are circulated among participants by mid-fall; and (c) sending to the Program Chairman the first page of each full paper (with title and author) together with a dated note indicating to whom the paper has been circulated and whether the author will be physically present at the session. This information must be sent to the Program Chairman by December 1. The presence of seven participants with pre-circulated papers is required for full Symposium status. Sessions that do not meet these criteria will go on the Program of the Annual Meeting as Informal Sessions or Working Sessions, according to the judgement of the Program Chairman. Symposia may receive up to three time blocks (9–12 a.m., 2–5 p.m., 8–10 p.m.) and will receive priority over other types of sessions.

Appendix 2: Conceptual Organization

Cultural Behavior
Adolescence
Alcohol, tobacco & drug
  use
Conflict & conflict
  management
Consumption
Deviance
Friendship
Gambling
Hostility
Incest
Kava & betel
Rape
Sorcery
Suicide
Sexual

Cultural Psychology
Affect
Dreams
Empathy
Ethnopsychology
Gentleness
Mimesis
Personhood
Violence

Demographics
Population
Ageing & dying
Age stratification
Urban/rural movements

Education
Indigenous experts
Schooling
Teaching about the Pacific
Teaching anthropology
Transmission

Economics
Agriculture
Cloth & textiles
Commercial activities
Commodification
Consumption
Copra
Exchange & reciprocity
Household economics
Indigenous currencies
Logging
Marine resources
Middlemen & brokers
Mining
Money
Production of special
  goods
Property
Subsistence strategies
Sustainability
Wealth

Environmental Issues
Climate change
Indigenous knowledge
Ontology
Place

Epistemology & Belief
Concepts of pollution
Ethnoethnography
Intentionality
Indigenous knowledge
Morality
Mythology
Notions regarding the
  body
Ontology
Religion
Spirits
Spatial orientation
Seafaring, navigation,
  wayfinding

Temporality
Theories of conception
Truth
Western & non-western
  differences
Notions of worth

Ethnographic Concerns
Anthropology in home
  communities
Archival issues
Biography
Consultancy
Effects of ethnographic
  research
Ethical issues
Families in fieldwork
Field methods
Fieldwork experience
Gender in fieldwork
Historicity
Homage (to specific
  ethnographers)
Indigenous anthropology
Indigenous reactions
Indigenous involvement
Methodology
Technology
Museums
Repatriation
Representation
Restudies
Use of technology
Writing culture

Gender
Masculinity
Multiple genders
Transgender
Women's lives

Health Issues
Disability

Food
Health transition
Infant & child care
Major diseases (malaria, AIDS)
Maternal
Medicine & cures
Obesity
Reproductive
Survival
Tobacco use

Historical Process
Cargo cults
Christianity
Colonialism
Community formation
Custom
Development
Effects of television & digital media
Globalization
Identity
Ideological change
Judaism
Migration & diaspora
Missionization
Relocation
Settlement
Socio-political change
Religious movements & revivals
Tourism
Urbanization
World War II

Language & Communication
Apologies
Personal names
Pidgin & Creole
Pragmatics
Political language
Language ideologies

Language change
Literacy
National languages
Oral tradition
Reflexivity
Writing

Life Cycle
Adolescence
Aging
Childhood
Grandparenting
Dying
Infancy
Parenting

Production
Architecture
Art & aesthetics
Cultural identity
Festivals
Film
Folklore
Material culture
Music
Tattooing

Performance
Acting
Clowning
Humor
Spirit impersonations
Sport

Political Issues
Chiefs & leadership
Coups
Hierarchy & equality
Indigeneity
Law & legal issues
Militarism
Minority groups
Multiethnic politics
Nuclear
Nationalism

Political ecology
Political process
Power
Power brokers
Power relations
Village-state relations
Warfare & pacification

Regional or Ethnic Focus
Cultural Geography
Europe
Fiji
French Pacific
Irian Jaya
Micronesia
Melanesia
Oceania
Outliers
Papua New Guinea
Polynesia
Regional histories
United States
West Papua
Vanuatu

Ritual
Initiation (male & female)
Mortuary rites
Spatial practices
Symbolism

Social Organization
Adoption
Gender (sex roles)
Housing
Inheritance
Kinship
Land tenure
Marriage
Naming
Race & racism
Siblingship
Social relationships
Succession
Stratification

Appendix 3: Sessions per Year (1967–2017)

YEAR	No. Sessions			
1967	1		1993	14
1968	1		1994	13
1970	1		1995	17
1971	1		1996	25
1972	7		1997	20
1973	8		1998	18
1974	6		1999	19
1975	5		2000	19
1976	12		2001	14
1977	8		2002	16
1978	6		2003	16
1979	8		2004	16
1980	7		2005	27
1981	15		2006	20
1982	14		2007	16
1983	8		2008	19
1984	14		2009	15
1985	14		2010	16
1986	17		2011	22
1987	16		2012	18
1988	15		2013	24
1989	11		2014	26
1990	16		2015	26
1991	17		2016	23
1992	15		2017	27