Renaissance Society of America Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion

Report, October 2020

Presentation

In the summer of 2020, RSA constituents, including members of the Board of Directors, and with the full support of the RSA President, formed a Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion, with the aim of stewarding broader conversations about the diversity of the Society’s membership, the breadth of its scholarly purview, and the manner in which it could further support diversity and inclusion in all aspects of its endeavors.

The Working Group organized a series of videoconference workshops open to RSA members and nonmembers working in the field of early modern studies during which they collected remarks and observations gathered in small groups discussions. 134 individuals participated, and 200 questionnaires were filled out and returned (including some respondents who did not attend the workshops). These voices and the collective wisdom that emerged from the conversations form the core of the present report, subsequently authored by the members of the Working Group and submitted to the Board of Directors.

Transparency is a core value of the RSA; the Society shares the report as a document whose content will be of interest to its membership, providing a snapshot of some of its members’ thoughts and recommendations on the topic of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the summer of 2020. The topical context of this period is important to bear in mind: in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the subsequent rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, and similar protests against police brutality and systemic discrimination in France, Canada, Nigeria, and elsewhere across the globe, many scholarly organizations had begun to examine their structures of access, inclusion, and belonging. The Working Group was established to begin this long process at the RSA.

As members of the RSA, we owe a deep debt of gratitude to the members of the Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion for their leadership, diligence, and sensitivity in hosting the workshops and writing the report. We also acknowledge the critical feedback of every workshop participant and questionnaire respondent as they considered how to best further diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Society as it looks towards its future.

A Few Important Notes

The report, and the opinions it expresses, should not be understood as definitive or representative
of the RSA, its leadership, or its membership. The “We” of the report refers to the members of the working group.

A longer version of this document including anonymous, paraphrased quotes from workshop participants has circulated internally within the RSA leadership. We chose not to include those quotes in the present iteration in order to respect the privacy of workshop participants who did not speak with an expectation of public disclosure.

Since the submission of the report in October of 2020, the RSA has taken the following actions to increase its diversity, foster inclusion, and become more equitable as an organization, some of which correspond to the recommendations in the report, others of which were already in motion:

● creation of a DEI Chair who is a member of the Board
● creation of a DEI Committee
● creation of a Student Counselor position on the Board
● training of staff and elected leadership
● consideration of how to restructure the framework of Discipline Representatives
● adoption of new mission, values, and vision statements
● restructuring of the Renaissance Quarterly editorial leadership
● ongoing redesign of the website, to include accessibility improvements
● retooling of small professional development groups
● making this report available to our membership.

While I am happy to report these significant actions, this is not a self-congratulatory message. These are steps towards implementing the RSA's mission, values, and vision and better fulfilling its potential to gather scholars, students, and publics interested in furthering knowledge and understanding of the 1300-1700 period, worldwide, and its ramifications in contemporary times.

I will end with a call to each of you, as RSA members, to volunteer for service in the organization, and to speak up and reach out to me or other members of the RSA leadership with questions, comments, and suggestions.

Cécile Fromont

DEI Chair
Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion: Final Report

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Executive Summary

The Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion: Charge, Membership, Activities

The RSA Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion was formed in July 2020, with the purpose of conducting a series of workshops open to all interested scholars and graduate students specializing in early modern studies who wanted to discuss how the RSA could become a more diverse and inclusive organization. At issue were both the overwhelmingly white membership of the RSA and its relatively focused scholarly purview in comparison to the state of the field. The Working Group included the following members:

- Celine Camps, Member of the RSA Graduate Student Advisory Committee
- Clare Carroll, Immediate Past President of the RSA
- Samantha Chang, Member of the RSA Graduate Student Advisory Committee
- Surekha Davies, Member of the RSA Board of Directors
- Nick Jones, RSA Member
- Blake de María, Member of the RSA Board of Directors
- Ricardo Padrón, Member of the RSA Board of Directors (Chair)
- Tracy Robey, RSA Staff
- Cassander Smith, RSA Member
- Cornesha Tweede, RSA Member

The WG met to plan and execute the workshops during late July and August of 2020. The workshops themselves were held on Zoom from 12:00-1:30 p.m. EDT on July 29, August 4 and August 13. They were advertised broadly via email and social media, and attracted a total of 134 in-person participants, and almost 200 questionnaires (received from participants plus interested parties who were unable to attend). A demographic breakdown of the participants can be found at the end of this report. These participants completed a brief questionnaire upon registration, where they were asked to provide their observations and recommendations in writing. The discussions were carried out in Zoom breakout sessions of 8-11 participants each, moderated by at least one member of the Working Group. The moderators took notes during the discussion. After the breakout sessions were concluded, a member of each group reported what was discussed to the workshop as a whole. Participants were provided with the email addresses of the Working Group members and were invited to contact them if any questions or issues arose.

After the end of the last workshop the Working Group members assembled a list of the major topics that were discussed in the sessions. Each member assumed the responsibility of assembling the recommendations regarding each topic from the answers provided in the entrance questionnaires and the notes from the discussions into a draft report. The group met on September 16 to discuss the result, and to develop a plan for revision. It met again on October 2 to finalize the text. The report provided here is the result of their collective effort.
Structure of the Report

The report opens with a series of very broad Action Items. Each addresses a topic that emerged repeatedly in the entrance questionnaires and became a topic of extensive conversation in the workshops. Each recommendation attempts to capture in the broadest possible way what participating members had to say about the topic.

A series of brief reports follows, one for each action item. These reports attempt to flesh out the individual recommendations by relating them to what the RSA is currently doing or not doing, describing what the recommendation would mean in practical terms, and explaining the way it would contribute to making the RSA a more diverse and inclusive organization. The Working Group endorses the changes suggested at this level of discussion.

Each report is followed by a detailed list of observations and recommendations presented by workshop participants in the entrance questionnaires or the conversations. The inclusion of these more specific recommendations does not constitute an endorsement by the Working Group. We recognize that a number of them presented a series of problems, including lack of practicality. The Working Group nevertheless wanted to give voice to the individual participants and their ideas, and provide the Board with a full repertoire of concrete suggestions. It is our hope that these lists will serve as a resource for future efforts to reform various aspects of the RSA and its work. [Note that the longer version of this document including the anonymous, paraphrased quotes from workshop participants has circulated internally within the RSA leadership. We chose not to include those quotes in the present iteration in order to respect the privacy of workshop participants, who did not speak with an expectation of public disclosure.]

Readers will notice some repetition from one report to the next. This is intentional. It is meant to allow each of the reports to stand more or less independently of the whole, and thereby enhance their usefulness to individuals and groups interested primarily in a particular Action Item or recommendation.

We would like to highlight a single recommendation that appears in the report on Governance, and that the Working Group believes to be central to the whole project of enhancing diversity and inclusion in the RSA. The RSA should elect or appoint a Chair for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion who sits on the Board of Directors and has the authority to lead a committee. At the very minimum, this person would be charged with keeping the issues and recommendations in this report before the Board, in order to facilitate follow through. The Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion recommends that this be the first action the Board takes, and that it do so expeditiously.
Action Items

1. **Governance and Representation.** Rethink representational structures at all levels including the Board, Discipline Reps, Associate Orgs. Appoint a Chair of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion who is a member of the Board.

2. **Discipline Representatives.** The Discipline Representative structure should be thoroughly overhauled, replacing traditional disciplines with flexible thematic categories.

3. **Pedagogy.** The RSA should develop structures to support the pedagogy of its members with an eye toward issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

4. **Mission and Vision.** The RSA must develop a clear vision that states where it is going, and a clear mission statement that states how it will get there.

5. **Annual Conference.** The Annual Conference must become more demographically, economically, intellectually, and geographically inclusive and accessible.

6. **Renaissance Quarterly.** *RQ* needs a complete overhaul in order to attract and represent the full range of work being done in our field.

7. **Website.** The website should be transformed to present a more transparent, humanized, and inclusive vision of the society.

8. **Advocacy and Outreach.** RSA should take on a greater role in advocacy and outreach.

9. **Professional Development of Members.** RSA should develop more robust mentorship structures, including support structures that foster the professionalization of BIPOC scholars, and make changes to its grants and awards.

10. **Accessibility.** RSA should work to become accessible to all members, with or without disabilities, across the full range of its activities and publications.
1. Governance and Representation

Recommendation

Rethink representational structures at all levels including the Board, Discipline Reps, Associate Orgs. Appoint a Chair of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion who is a member of the Board.

Brief Report

We need to revise our representational structures at all levels--including the Board, journal, conference, and committees--to create greater inclusion, equity, diversity, and transparency. To this end we recommend that the RSA either appoint or elect a Chair of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to the Board with the power to form a committee proposing concrete steps to achieve greater diversity that could be voted on and implemented. The example of such committees at SAA and MA shows that they have been successful in creating greater inclusion. The individual in this position should bring both demographic and intellectual diversity to the Board.

Until recently, the RSA has had an all-white group of Directors and Editorial Board. Among our Discipline Reps there are only a few not from English-speaking Global-North academia. We have also never had a BIPOC president. This lack of representation cries out for a remedy. The RSA needs to reach out to the wider field of scholars globally, and especially to welcome and empower BIPOC scholars. We need to signal to potential members that RSA is a place where their voices matter and make a difference.

Greater diversity on the Board would also help us with outreach, connecting with a greater diversity of scholars around the globe. As one scholar pointed out, “People vote with their feet.” There needs to be more diversity in all representative bodies of the organization for the RSA to attract a broader membership both in the U.S. and around the world.

The RSA is limiting itself intellectually by not engaging a more diverse range of scholars in our governance, publications, and conference. A more diverse Board would significantly improve our ability to define our intellectual mission and vision in the twenty-first century. Many subject areas, including Asian Studies, both East and South, and Africana studies, with regard to Africa as well as the African diaspora, are not included in the Editorial Board of RQ. To represent the global Renaissance in both the journal and the conference we will need to cast a wider net.

Many RSA members are unclear about how our editors, reps, and officers are selected, or what their responsibilities are; there is the perception of a top down structure. People often nominate their friends, with the result that the same people are selected again and again for positions of power. Discussants strongly urged that we set up a Governance Committee to create more transparency.

For the RSA to play a leading role in advocacy for diversity within the field in the larger world of academia and beyond, we need to represent the diversity of early modern scholars globally, and provide transparent means for their participation in the RSA. It cannot only be BIPOC scholars engaging in this work of diversity and inclusion, but they need to have more representation and
visibility throughout our governance structures. Such representation throughout our society can help guarantee that this work on diversity will be part of a continuing meaningful commitment.

2. Discipline Representatives

Recommendation

The Discipline Representative structure should be thoroughly overhauled, replacing traditional disciplines with flexible thematic categories.

Brief Report

Re-thinking discipline reps is essential for keeping the RSA at the cutting edge, and for decolonizing the academy. Governance procedures should recognize that regular change and reorganization from the ground up needs to be built into how the RSA conceives of thematic/disciplinary categories, if they are to more fully support original scholarship. Recent additions (Africana Studies, Americas, & Islamic World) began this work. One could productively dovetail future work with re-thinking the Associate Organizations structure.

A representatives structure driven primarily by disciplines or traditional geographies diminishes the value of our interdisciplinary conference. Increasing the number of subject reps for themes that transcend disciplines and geographies would better reflect and enrich scholarship and teaching in ways that are much less likely to happen at disciplinary conferences. Our conversations highlighted a need for reps for each of the following: Asia; Africa; Disability Studies; Queer Studies/ Sexuality Studies; Indigenous Studies/ Ethnohistory; Pre-modern Critical Race Studies or ‘Renaissance now’; Global Comparative Literatures; Global Renaissance; Global Iberia; Material Culture; Theatre & Performance Studies; and Future Directions (two interdisciplinary reps). A number of discussants observed that there is a culture at the RSA of dismissing engagement with the present as “anachronism”. Yet if recent years have taught us anything, it is that myths about the premodern lie at the heart of numerous systemic injustices in the present. Thus the RSA also needs visible structures for transtemporal work on why Renaissance studies helps us to understand the present.

The uncertain future of in-person conferences in an era of climate emergency and shrinking budgets adds environmental and economic reasons to think creatively about reps and the ways in which they assemble panels. If the RSA does not expand its thematic and methodological reach, it is likely to have diminishing membership and attendance in difficult years to come. Premodern studies is under threat everywhere. The RSA could become even more of a hub for this by drawing in (for example) pre-1700 scholars of the early Americas.
It is also important that diversifying the RSA is seen not just from the point of view of what this would offer to existing constituencies, and the political and ethical expediency of including BIPOC and Global South scholars. RSA governance should ensure that the conference is one to which it is worth scholars from, say, Asian Studies, attending. Panels should be assembled to benefit new participants, rather than making them simply the target of an extractive industry.

It is vital to have genuine elections (with choices!). Candidates could write short pitches: reflections that speak to their visions for their panels; and concrete plans for diversifying the area of responsibility (types of institution, demographic range of panelists, methodological, thematic and geographical range), with indications as to why we should believe them. Guidelines for evaluating the long-list should include criteria like demonstrable breadth of scholarship. The RSA should provide reps with concrete responsibilities and best-practice requirements (e.g. panels that are diverse in multiple ways), & tips for finding scholars, beyond circulation of a CfP in the usual places or calling up their friends. Continuation/renewal should be conditional on satisfactory performance.

3. Pedagogy

Recommendation

The RSA should develop structures to support the pedagogy of its members with an eye toward issues of diversity and inclusion.

Brief Report

One of the clearest outcomes of the workshops run by the Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion has to do with pedagogy. Numerous participants expressed an interest in developing new courses on topics like “Early Modern Race, Racialization, and Ethnicity,” “Early Modern Comparative Slaveries (Global),” and “Minorities and Subalterns in Early Modern Europe,” or in revising their course syllabi to reflect new and more inclusive ways of teaching the early modern period. They nevertheless noted that the ways they wanted to teach the period today had little to do with the training they had received when they were graduate students, and that the RSA was not doing anything to help them make the change. They suggested numerous ways that the RSA could support its members in their efforts to steer their teaching in new directions, by creating infrastructure that would allow members to share bibliography, syllabi, and methods. Their suggestions are enumerated in the recommendations below.

Although, historically, the RSA has not served as a platform for matters related to pedagogy, the Working Group strongly recommends that the organization change course on this point, and engage with teaching in a robust and visible way that offers answers to the stated needs of members. Not everyone will turn to issues of diversity and inclusion in their research, but everyone
can do so in their teaching. They can also look for ways to make their pedagogy more accessible to differently abled people. Attention to pedagogy, therefore, has tremendous potential for deep and extensive impact on the culture of the society and on broader understandings of what the Renaissance means. By facilitating the efforts of members to transform their teaching, the RSA would signal that it takes diversity and inclusion seriously, would support and amplify the work of BIPOC and white scholars who are reconceptualizing the way we teach our period, and most importantly, would help remake the way our students understand the period and the breadth of recent scholarship in the field. This may be the most significant way in which the RSA can help redress the “whiteness” of the Renaissance and Renaissance studies, and contribute to the future viability of the field.

4. Mission and Vision

Recommendation

The RSA must develop a vision statement that articulates its intention to prioritize diversity and inclusion, and the mission statement must be revisited to indicate how this vision will be realized.

Brief Report

In general, session participants expressed concern about the fact that ‘Renaissance’ is a loaded category and term that carries a good deal of baggage and implications. They worry that the term is anachronistic, especially in the 21st century, and that it limits the periodization and metageographies that many of us aim to contest and dismantle. What is more, the ‘Renaissance’ leaves out the global as well as the uniquely diverse multi-lingual aspects of early modern studies. Scholars of East Asian Studies, for example, often feel left out and essentialized, only to be invited to the RSA in order to add “flavor” and “spice” to what is already a very white conference.

The problem of naming and vision is especially visible on RSA’s website, which identifies the Renaissance Society of America, not as an “American” organization that studies “the Renaissance,” but as “the largest international academic society devoted to the study of the era 1300–1700.” This apparent contradiction between the name of the society and the way it describes itself reflects the way that the RSA has changed, especially over the course of the last twenty years or so. Its membership has expanded dramatically, as has its intellectual range. The website reflects the piecemeal way in which that change has taken place. The page in question says nothing further about the “international” nature of the society or how it understands the study of “the era 1300-1700.” Instead, it goes on to list the various disciplinary groups to which members belong, a hodgepodge of traditional academic disciplines, geographical areas, and intellectual themes. One could come away with the impression that the RSA is nothing more than the sum of its many constituent parts, that the society had no coherent understanding of its own nature or purpose.
Participants pointed out, in a variety of ways, that it was difficult to address questions of diversity and inclusion without having a clear idea of what the RSA was about.

Several participants proposed that the RSA come up with a mission statement that would clearly define its intellectual scope and agenda along these lines. That statement should make clear the society’s commitment to studying “the era 1300-1700,” in ways that account for its global nature, as well as for its colonialism, racism, sexism, etc. The statement should also commit the society to expanding its international scope beyond the North Atlantic region to more fully include scholars from the Global South. If the RSA is to fully consider the Americas, the Islamic world, Africa, and other regions that are gaining prominence in its expanded disciplinary structure, then it must make room for scholarly voices from those regions, and not just scholarly discourse about those regions.

Finally, the statement should speak to the importance of early modern studies for today’s world. Not only would such a mission statement be beneficial to the RSA, but it would also be helpful to its members in their efforts to push the field in new directions. Early modernists eager to tackle issues like race, gender, and colonialism in their scholarship and research often face resistance from powerful individuals at their home institutions who do not think that “the Renaissance” is about such things. By making a powerful statement that it believes “the Renaissance” – or whatever we choose to call it – to be a global phenomenon with important power dimensions, the RSA would lend support to such efforts far and wide. The RSA’s statement might even serve as a model for other institutions eager to redefine the study of the early modern period along the lines we are suggesting.

5. Annual Conference

Recommendation

The Annual Conference must become more demographically, economically, intellectually, and geographically inclusive and accessible.

Brief Report

As the marquee event administered and hosted by the RSA, the annual meeting must be reorganized in order to reflect and support increased diversity. To achieve this goal, the entirety of the conference, from the proposal process, through scheduling and publicity, up to and including events occurring during the meeting must be reviewed. Long-standing structures, such as the designation and role of Discipline Representatives/Associate Organizations, must likewise be reorganized to achieve greater diversity and inclusion, of topics, participants and attendees. At present, the conference presents as many, if not more, challenges than opportunities for BIPOC scholars. Repeated concerns and criticisms focused on the size of the meeting, a sense of alienation for BIPOC scholars and scholarship, lack of collegiality from senior members, and the exorbitant cost of attendance.

At present, research on Western Europe dominates the conference program. Not only does this
continue to promote the notion that the scholarship of our members is narrowly defined, it likewise strengthens the structural impediments that exist against BIPOC scholars and those who work on issues of race and diversity. By continuing to organize a conference according to a formula that has been in place for at least thirty years, the RSA continues to perpetuate a scholarly model with methodological, scholarly, and racial biases that have no place in the twenty-first century. Such organizational changes extend well beyond the reach of the Discipline Representatives (see section 2). The growing number of AOs leaves us but two options: continue to expand the size of the conference or continue to decrease the number of members who participate via individual panel and paper submissions. Current economic, environmental, and political circumstances render the continued expansion of the conference impossible. Thus, if the RSA wishes to remain relevant within a diverse, international scholarly community, we must make concerted efforts to eliminate the imbalance between Western European and global topics, and scholars. To achieve this, we must evaluate the role and priority given to DR/AO over individual members.

The schedule, organization, and placement of panels continues to privilege the most traditional areas, such as Florentine humanism, or English literature. As a result, innovative, interdisciplinary panels are seemingly relegated to small rooms and unpopular time slots. Part of this stems from the inordinate number of panels devoted to similar, conventional, and quite frankly, overworked topics. In theory, the desire to avoid scheduling sessions on similar topics in competition with one another makes sense, and is highly desired by panel organizers. However, in reality, this practice further marginalizes scholarship focusing on theoretical issues, diversity, and similar innovative research because the vast majority of the panels focus on Western European topics. In addition, the tendency to schedule “big names” in larger spaces further enhances the purported priority of these topics over those which feature emerging scholars and innovative, global scholarship.

Economic inequality at the conference itself must also be acknowledged. The cost of attending the conference is prohibitively expensive for many scholars who live outside the US/Canada/Europe. As one member noted, our registration fee structure is inherently biased as it does not consider local economies. Thus, what the organizers view as a relatively inexpensive registration fee of $185.00US amounts to a far greater out of pocket expense for scholars residing outside of the US/Canada/Europe (regions where, additionally, the conference has taken place). Adjusting our membership and registration fee structure to reflect local economies, in a manner similar to that employed by the Latin American Studies Association, would improve outreach and work toward developing a more inclusive annual event. Fellowship awards to attend the conference offset only a small amount of the conference. Younger scholars, BIPOC members, and members living in traditionally underrepresented areas (Asia, Africa, and the Global South) should receive priority in funding, and such funding should not be limited to speakers only. Registration fees for students should also be offered at highly discounted rates.
6. Renaissance Quarterly

Recommendation

RQ needs a complete overhaul in order to attract and represent the full range of work being done in our field.

Brief Report

The majority of workshop participants clearly believed that RQ does not cover regions beyond Europe, despite the fact that RQ has published articles about the Americas and the Islamic world. Most were completely unaware of the efforts of the current editor to expand the scholarly range of the journal. They suspected that the overwhelmingly white leadership was unaware that RQ was subject to the general perception (often quite justified) that prominent academic spaces and venues that are supposedly “open to all” like RQ, often have no real desire or scholarly preparation to accept or even consider topics having to do with regions beyond Euro-North America, and are hostile to BIPOC scholars when they submit their work. They suspected that the almost exclusively white governance of the RSA did not realize how often BIPOC scholars are mistreated when they enter pre-modern studies. It is not enough, therefore, for RQ to assume an open-door policy to any and all submissions. In a world of comprehensive structural racism and unconscious bias, passive, implicit inclusion is not inclusion at all. The journal must take specific, visible action to engage with BIPOC scholars, with the fields of race and colonialism, and/or with the histories of Africa, Asia or the Americas, in order to change its reputation as a gate-keeper for an outmoded vision of Renaissance studies and become a venue for cutting-edge scholarship. As so many of our participants noted, this requires a “total overhaul” of the journal, addressing its intellectual remit and editorial practices, its resistance to special issues, the composition of its editorial board, the way the journal is presented on the website, and its accessibility to a wide range of scholars.

RQ should work more vigorously to include work on Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. It should be open to a greater range of methodologies. In order to do so, it should expand the number of articles and/or reviews published per year and reconsider its policy on special issues. Numerous participants argued that a special issue on a topic like race or colonialism would do a great deal to signal the journal’s commitment to a more diverse and inclusive intellectual remit. The Working Group concurs. RQ may also want to consider collaborative issues with other journals. Some noted that the editor of RQ should have a space in which to articulate their personal voice and vision, like a webinar, a Twitter handle, or a blog. The lack of such a venue makes RQ seem person-less, and creates a silence that is perceived as a de facto form of gate-keeping. This venue could be incorporated into a revised version of the journal’s website, which would make clear distinctions between the publication’s past and its vision for a more diverse and inclusive future. Many participants noted the urgent need to diversify the Editorial Board in demographic, thematic, and methodological terms. A diverse Editorial Board would send a powerful signal about who and what is included in “Renaissance Studies,” and would provide the journal with the expertise it needs to take Renaissance Quarterly in new directions. Finally, participants suggested that RQ should solicit or even commission work from BIPOC scholars, and create structures to mentor young scholars about how to publish in RQ.
7. Website

**Recommendation**

The website should be transformed to present a more transparent, humanized, and inclusive vision of the society.

**Brief Report**

The RSA website is the public face of the association, and as such, the Diversity and Inclusion Working Group recommends that the website be completely transformed to present a more transparent, humanized, and inclusive vision of the society.

The website content and design should reflect our diverse membership. Showing faces and people on the website supports a humanized online presence. Content and material should be accessible and inclusive, and RSA news and webinars postings should be intentional in representing diverse scholars and backgrounds. Resources and materials on critical race and gender theories and anti-racist teachings should be made available to support pedagogical efforts. A space for collaborative syllabi will foster continued conversation on diversity and inclusion. The current tabs on organization and bylaws do not explain how governance works or how to get involved with the RSA. For further recommendations relating to the website, please refer to the Renaissance Quarterly section.

The Working Group strongly recommends that the RSA spend considerable time reviewing all website sections to ensure accessibility, diversity, and inclusion in all its textual and visual content.

8. Advocacy and Outreach

**Recommendation**

The RSA should take on a greater role in advocacy and outreach.

**Brief Report**

In order to expand its membership and to diversify the voices in Renaissance/early modern studies, the RSA's activities should also move beyond its organizational parameters, with a view to seeking out and educating external constituents. The working group strongly suggests developing a robust outreach program for K-12 students as well as college students, in order to widen the pipeline that eventually leads to PhDs in early modern studies. The RSA should develop and contribute to current and innovative ways in which early modern/Renaissance studies is taught and perceived in schools in an effort to change the image of the period in the eyes of the public. The
RSA could create public-facing pages online, with open access to leading and impactful scholarship written in accessible language.

By showcasing the wide range of current scholarship as the field’s public image, the RSA would demonstrate to hiring committees that newer areas of scholarship are indeed part of the field. This would help to promote scholarly inclusion of global themes related to the Renaissance in the broader academy. The RSA should take a greater role in creating and publicizing resources that would foster diversity and inclusion in academic departments (see, e.g., CAA’s glosses on how to evaluate art historical publications and activities, e.g. writing for museum catalogs, for promotion and tenure). The RSA’s website should thus represent, for example, global, interdisciplinary scholarship and the work of scholars from diverse backgrounds.

The RSA should develop resources for academic inclusion, which would cultivate talent and facilitate scholarly programming across generations and education levels. These resources should support a diverse range of practical needs and strategic priorities, such as childcare costs, socioeconomic diversity, elder care, supporting non-traditional students, residential vs nonresidential students, and in language training/instruction.

Apart from its professional conduct policy, the RSA had maintained a relatively low profile in terms of advocacy for our members. We have been joint signatories on various social statements (e.g., the August, 2020 ACLS statement on COVID-19), but even these documents are not easily found on our website. The RSA should be at the forefront of these discussions, and develop and share documentation that educates the public in general, and the academy in particular, on global inclusion, diversity, and critical engagement of our members on issues from the early modern period. Failure to update the image of Renaissance studies for the twenty-first century would reinforce long-standing misconceptions about race and diversity in our scholarship and within our membership.

9. Mentorship and Professional Development

Recommendation

RSA should develop more robust mentorship structures, including support structures that foster the professionalization of BIPOC scholars.

Brief Report

Mentorship

While the new mentoring program appears to have already addressed some of our members’ recommendations, members do not seem to be aware of these recent changes, and, as such, their suggestions and recommendations on how to improve the mentorship program reflects this gap. The Working Group stresses that more can be done to raise public awareness of the RSA's
mentoring program and expand diversification and inclusivity.

The Working Group recommends making future mentoring programs more inclusive by not restricting eligibility, minimizing the mentor/mentee criteria, and diversifying how the association describes the mentor/mentee profile. The current mentoring program aims “to help RSA members make contacts [...] wherever they may be in their careers,” and strives to include scholars “at all career levels.” Yet, undergraduate and early graduate students, many of whom are first-generation college students, are significantly ineligible to apply. Additionally, the Working Group recommends the mentoring-program committee to target mentoring more appropriately and effectively, through deliberate matching between mentor and mentee. Specifically, the RSA should give BIPOC scholars a voice in choosing their own mentors, and offer participants a selection of three mentors from whom to pick. Members also suggested offering more training for mentors. Finally, the Working Group recommends that the RSA diversifies the mentoring program, by including fields beyond academia, and by actively connecting individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. Members also expressed particular interest in mentoring programs aimed at preparing graduate students for the job market.

**Grants and Awards**
The Working Group encourages the RSA to develop more funding and scholarship opportunities for graduate students, especially students of color, and those of under-privileged backgrounds.

Many universities offer no or limited funding for graduate students who wish to attend or present at the RSA’s annual meeting. Because students often do not have the financial means to pay for registration fees out of pocket, they cannot attend the conferences that are essential to their professional development. By developing conference grants, the RSA could alleviate (a part of) these financial burdens, making its annual conference more inclusive and diverse. To accommodate more students, the working group proposes that the RSA develops more scholarships. Other types of funding welcomed by RSA members are those that enable graduate students (and perhaps also advanced undergraduates), and scholars in training, to hone their research skills. These could include grants to finance paleography courses. Finally, the RSA could better acknowledge the importance of graduate students and their work in the field of Renaissance and Early Modern studies by creating a dissertation award.

10. Accessibility

**Recommendation**

RSA should work to become accessible to all members, with or without disabilities, across the full range of its activities and publications.

**Brief Report**

RSA members who participated in the Zoom discussions and/or completed surveys remind us to consider disability as an identity category when discussing diversity and inclusion. The issue was
articulated in terms of policing with the RSA described as a front-facing organization that privileges a certain kind of visible look, a visual aesthetic that can make those with disabilities feel unwelcome in the organization. Multiple people also expressed concerns that the topic of disability does not receive the same level of attention as race, and they worry that the RSA will implement initiatives to address racial climate and push to the margins issues related to disability.

One example follows of how ingrained into the structure the RSA rhetoric of able-bodiedness is. On the survey we sent to participants in advance of the Zoom conversations, we included a note at the bottom of the survey that said: "If you have a request for disability accommodations please email us at rsa@rsa.org." One participant rightly pointed out that this note burdens the person with a disability with extra work, singles them out, and builds on the notion of able-bodiedness as the norm. The point of the example is to encourage the RSA to embrace more tenets of universal/inclusive design that are accessible rather than simply accommodationist.

Several commenters pointed out that now is an opportune time for the RSA to attend to disability as we are grappling with a global pandemic that has created health crises for some and exacerbated health crises for others. If there were structures already in place, the RSA could provide institutional support for its members especially affected by the pandemic. If the RSA wants to foster a better environment of inclusion and diversity, it must take seriously the needs of its members with disabilities. They posed a number of questions that could provide useful frameworks for the RSA.

**Closing Thoughts**

This report includes a broad range of recommendations ranging from simple fixes to deep transformations. The Working Group hopes that the Board will immediately recognize some low-hanging fruit, and take quick action to make those recommendations a reality. It also hopes that the Board will not balk at the more far-reaching recommendations. Their presence in this report signals the depth and breadth of the forms of exclusivity identified by our workshop participants, and the magnitude of the challenge we face in making the RSA a more inclusive scholarly society. The task is great because the problems are so well entrenched. They are a microcosm of the problems facing the United States as a whole, as it struggles with the burdens of the past and attempts to chart a more equitable future. The Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion believes that it is the responsibility of the RSA to do its part in making that future a reality, by cleaning its own house and making it a more inviting place for a diverse group of scholars engaging in a diversity of scholarly projects.

In closing, the faculty and graduate student members of the Working Group would also like to express their sincere gratitude to Tracy Robey, who has handled her responsibilities with exemplary grace, professionalism, initiative, skill, and good humor. Tracy did a lot of heavy lifting in short order, and made a potentially cumbersome and complicated task run very smoothly. We are all grateful for her work and wish to commend her to the Board.
Participant Demographics

Discussion group participants: gender

Discussion group participants: race/ethnicity/region of origin

- Middle Eastern: 1.0%
- North American, White: 5.0%
- Latinx: 2.0%
- Hispanic: 8.0%
- East Asian: 2.0%
- Decline to state: 2.0%
- Asian, BIPOC (Black, African American, Native American): 2.0%
- Asian: 3.0%
- European: 6.0%
- White: 42.0%
Discussion group participants: first generation status

- undergrad & advanced: 13.3%
- undergraduate degree: 6.7%
- advanced degree: 24.4%
- N/A: 55.6%

Discussion group participants: disability, seen or unseen

- Yes: 11.9%
- No answer: 88.1%
Discussion group participants: LGBTQ+

- Yes: 21.5%
- No answer: 78.5%