Dear AAAS Members,

Uncertainty. That may be the word to sum up 2021 because we are still living with the uncertainty of the pandemic (and there are many other words we could be using for COVID). The latest news I heard this week was that the 3rd booster shot (this from Pfizer) seems to provide immunity against the omicron variant. And that's great news—and I hope the other vaccines offer the same kind of protection. But we don't know whether there will be another variant of concern or worse, one that is resistant to the existing vaccines, that comes along and that will cause us to go remote for the April 2022 AAAS conference that is still being planned to move ahead in Denver.

I know this is among the central questions you have—is it safe to fly to Denver? As I signaled in the last newsletter, risk assessment is a personal issue. Currently Denver county has an indoor mask mandate and continues to see good numbers as far as vaccination rates. The hotel has said they can have their staff wear masks. AAAS and our conference co-chairs and site co-chairs are working on protocols for COVID safety. And we are going to ask people to upload their vaccine cards upon registration. So we're doing all we can, but we will prioritize public health and move the conference to remote if we have to, which likely means taking a financial hit to reschedule—which is what we had to do with Seattle.

By the way, if you're wondering why we scheduled the conference in Denver to be in person when there's a global pandemic, we secured the conference space for 2022 in 2019—this has always been the timeline we've worked with since hotels have been booked this far in advance—though with COVID I wonder if this will change how everyone handles conference bookings.

And if you have questions about whether to register and about refunds and what it means to go remote, let me try to answer these below:

**2022 DENVER AAAS CONFERENCE REGISTRATION**

We will have an Event Brite registration link sent out to everyone in the January newsletter and we will also send out the link on social media. We've had to delay the registration until January because we've run into a roadblock with the website (more on that below). There will be 3 types of registration, each with different levels according to status. (1) On-Site Member (2) On-Site Non-Member (3) Saturday Virtual Panels. Anyone who registers for
On the Event Brite page you will be given a link to a google form. We ask that you upload your vaccine card or medical/religious exemption form. We also ask that if you upload a zoom link for the panel or paper presentation, whether you are doing the Saturday virtual day or on-site/in-person conference. Providing us with zoom links now will enable the staff to pivot quickly to a remote only conference using Guidebook in the event we will need to shift to a virtual conference. We will continue messaging about the zoom links when you receive your acceptance letters about the 2022 conference (which should happen in the next few weeks) and in email blasts and future newsletters. For those with fully formed panels, I recommend checking in with one another to see who has an institutional zoom membership and can provide a zoom link. For people who submitted solo papers, you will be on a panel with others, but if you have access to a zoom account, I would set that up and then once you meet your other panelists you can determine which zoom link to use.

I also want to draw your attention to the cancellation message that will be on the registration home page:

"CANCELLATION POLICY: All registrants who cancel prior to the conference or do not attend the conference forfeit their entire registration fee. Once you submit your registration you are not entitled to a refund. Please remember that canceling your conference registration does not automatically cancel your hotel and travel arrangements, individuals are responsible for canceling their own hotel and travel reservations."

We understand that if we go remote, this will feel unfair—however, if we go remote we will have to break our contract, and this means we will have to enter into negotiations with the hotel about rescheduling or taking legal action—all of which means we will lose money, since in both situations with Washington DC and Seattle, where those were the best case scenarios, we still had to pay substantial fees and other losses associated with pivoting to remote or cancelling entirely. And the logistics of trying to issue refunds and then come up with a new registration system for a remote conference is beyond the capacity of our volunteer board and staff. For those who registered for the Virtual Saturday conference, you will have the option to register for single days to attend either/both Thursday and Friday. I want to recognize that none of this is ideal, but we are sincerely trying to do the best that we can with the limited resources that we have and with the big picture financial plan for AAAS sustainability, namely being able to hire a full-time executive director whose work is solely dedicated to AAAS business. I’m trying to be as transparent as possible about the realities of our financial situation and what it means for AAAS to run on the model that we’ve been using.

Which brings me to the website snafu (sigh).

AAAS WEBSITE – STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS

About 3 weeks ago the founder of Yippa, the web development company we had contracted with to redesign our website, pulled out of our project for personal reasons. I and the other AAAS staff have been scrambling to find solutions for registration (thank you to Jenny Alanis for having the Event Brite site ready to go as a contingency) and other things that Yippa had promised us and didn’t deliver. Quite frankly, from the first month of working with Yippa it has been a headache. Jenny, Kat Lewis and Tamara Ko have had to put in extra hours and find solutions and workarounds for our conference proposal site and scheduling—things we had thought Yippa would be providing for us. Yippa also kept pushing back the deadline for when the website redesign would be ready—it went from late August to November to January. It has also been a headache to try to recoup the costs
we had already paid out to Yippa for work that they did not deliver. While this was going on I contacted Bust Out, who was the board's second choice—largely based on price and on the fact that Yippa had a proven track record working with nonprofits. I believe that while Bust Out will be more expensive, we will also be getting what we pay for. Already the relationship is much more professional, and the head of Bust Out, Jeff Lin, is familiar with academia (his father is a retired Asian Studies professor from Oberlin College and Bust Out worked with Rich Lee at University of Minnesota on the website for the Asian American Psychological Association a decade ago) and understands our needs and finding solutions that will help AAAS grow, which includes not tying us to custom or proprietary technology that only Bust Out can control (which had been the problem with our old firm, Kennedy Digital). I am in communication with the Luce Foundation about this hiccup, since they provided the funds for the website redesign. I am hopeful that working with Bust Out will prove to be a far better experience for our staff and that we will have something to show all of you ahead of the 2022 conference.

Since this email has run on long enough, let me just wish everyone a smooth end to your semesters, for those of you working in academic spaces (I’m taking a break from grading to write this newsletter). As we see 2021 recede in the background, here’s to hoping that 2022 may prove brighter and less full of pandemic uncertainty. Something I do as an ice breaker is to do gripes and gratitudes. While I think you can guess what my gripes may be related to what I detailed above with the website, my gratitude for everyone reading this newsletter is enormous. Thank you for your commitment to Asian American studies and to AAAS in particular. Thank you for being the best humans you are—because at the end of the day, that’s really all we can ever strive to be.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ho

Jennifer Ho, AAAS President

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**GET TO KNOW YOUR AAAS BOARD MEMBER**

**Pawan Dhingra**

1. What is your role within AAAS?

I am President-elect until the end of the April 2022 conference, when I will become President. As such I help guide the direction of the organization and its annual conference, working alongside a dedicated team and the elected board members.

2. When did you first get involved with AAAS (what was your first conference?)
encouraged a number of students to attend, which was a great experience. I got to meet people I had read and looked up to, while getting to know peers who similarly have stayed with the association for years.

Pawan Dhingra

3. What do you appreciate or love about AAAS?

There are many aspects to the association that I value. First and foremost, it is an intellectual space that is generative in its scholarship. I learn when at the conference and have become a better scholar through my engagement with it. I also have come to appreciate the colleagues I have met through attending. The academy can feel like a lonely place, but the connections I have made give me a sense of community despite not being at the same institution. The association also advances the place of Asian American Studies in higher education, which is more important now than ever.

4. What's an Asian Pacific Islander American film/tv series/novel/short story/book/article that you would recommend members check out, and why are you recommending it?

The number of books I would recommend is too long, but I’ll offer one that I just finished teaching, *Unruly Immigrants* by Monisha Das Gupta. It makes a powerful argument of how South Asian American activists draw from traditions outside of the mainstream U.S. non-profit industry to push against nationalist policies and cultures, to the aid of multiple kinds of immigrants. It is an excellent sociological study.