

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The African Studies Association, founded fifty years ago in 1957, has become a premiere source of scholarly and professional expertise about Africa in the world. In thinking about the top ten reasons for joining and remaining a member of the ASA, an initial impulse is to list membership benefits, i.e., members:

1. Vote to elect officers and members of the Board of Directors.
2. Serve on the Nominating Committee.
3. Serve on the Prize Committees.
4. Serve on the Annual Meeting Program Committee.
5. Serve on the Annual Meeting Local Arrangements Committee.
6. Nominate individuals for the Distinguished Africanist Award.
7. Receive a subscription to the African Studies Review.
8. Receive a discounted rate to purchase *History in Africa*.
9. Receive a discount rate to attend the Annual Meeting.
10. Are published in and receive access to the Association's membership directory.

The catalyst for members to join the ASA and to renew their membership, however, is based on an essential question: How do the benefits contribute to the ASA's mission of "promoting African studies?" Some reflections:

1. By voting, ASA members select the Association's leaders, who set the policy for implementing the Association's broad mission of "promoting African studies."
2. By serving on the Nominating Committee, ASA members define the qualities and the criteria for Board members, thereby influencing the ASA's leadership.
3. Collective celebration of individual achievement is critical to valuing members' contributions to scholarship and to the profession – and to galvanizing them for ever greater endeavors.
4. The Program Committee shapes the contours of scholarship that pushes the boundaries of knowledge, including shifts in paradigms and methodologies, and policy and professional innovation. The rich intellectual insights that result invigorate presenters and participants alike when they return to their daily responsibilities.

5. The Local Arrangements Committee facilitates opportunities for personal networks to form and to grow. The extraordinarily popular Welcome Reception and Dance Party are wonderful venues for renewing and appreciating the sense of community that arises from a shared enterprise.
6. The Distinguished Africanist Award highlights a lifetime of outstanding contributions to African studies that others can emulate.
7. The *African Studies Review* encourages scholarly debates across disciplines.
8. *History in Africa* promotes attention to the role of theory and non-historical data in historical investigation.
9. Participating in the Annual Meeting's intense, four-day immersion in interdisciplinary scholarship and professional work by some of the finest minds in the world is an unparalleled experience. The Exhibit Hall's wealth of Africa-related books, materials, and films is complemented by a congenial atmosphere for advancing a publishing career and locating information about job prospects and funding sources.
10. The membership directory enhances professional networks, alerting colleagues to promotions, new appointments, and other accomplishments.

More than an outline of tangible benefits, the "Top Ten Reasons" is thus a reflection on how the African Studies Association can transform not just members' careers, but also their very lives. I am delighted to be serving as the ASA's Executive Director during its 50th year, and I am tremendously proud of the many positive contributions that have been made by the Secretariat staff, which includes Kristina Carle, Program Manager, Publications and Information Services, Kimme Carlos, Program Manager, Annual Meeting Services, Elizabeth Ciccone, Senior Program Manager, Financial and Administrative Services, and Margaret McLaughlin, Program Manager, Member Services, and by my fellow officers and the members of the Board of Directors with whom I've had the pleasure of working. This collectivity, and the unparalleled energy of the ASA's members and coordinate organizations, has done much to ensure that the ASA community will celebrate many more years in the uniquely satisfying endeavor of "bringing together people with a scholarly and professional interest in Africa." Congratulations to us all!