The AAIS has never surveyed its membership on the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion. Wishing to respond to and address issues of structural racism within Italian Studies and specifically within the Association, a Task Force of volunteers from among AAIS members came together to recommend a series of actions and inquiries. The survey is one of the fruits of those efforts and sought to establish a baseline reading of the climate on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion within the Association.

The AAIS plans to use the results of the present survey to inform town hall discussions about diversity, equity and inclusion at its May 2021 Annual Conference.

The survey was fielded via email from January to February, 2021. Every member was invited multiple times to complete the survey and provide their feedback on these topics. Importantly, all responses are completely anonymous. No tracking data was saved, so no one person can be individually identified as having provided a particular response.
All members of the AAIS as of December 2020 were invited to participate in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Climate Survey. Emails were successfully delivered to 1,146 valid addresses, and 266 members provided responses, for an overall response rate of 23%.

- Among Active members of the AAIS, the response rate was higher, at 33%. For those whose membership had lapsed or who did not self-identify as an Active member, the response rate was lower, at 17%.
- More women than men responded to this survey (42% vs. 18%), though another 30% of respondents didn’t provide a gender identification.
- 5% of respondents identified themselves as having a disability.
- The largest proportion of respondents identified as "American" (22%), followed by "Italian" (15%), and Italian American (12%).
- Whites made up the majority of respondents by race (37%); non-Whites a definite minority (3%).
- The majority of respondents are in the early- or mid-career stage. 43% of respondents were between the ages of 31 and 50, and another 13% were between 51 and 60 years of age.
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

SOME RESPONDENTS ELECTED NOT TO ANSWER CERTAIN DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS (SURVEY NON-RESPONSES), WHICH MUST BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION

All of the questions except one were optional, in the hopes of eliciting the greatest number of responses possible. Given the sensitive nature of the topics addressed in this survey, the demographic questions saw a large proportion of non-responses:

- Gender: 30%
- Race: 60%
- Age: 34%
- Disability: 35%
- Nationality: 48%

While this by no means invalidates the results, it does indicate that analyses incorporating these demographic variables need to be undertaken with caution.
OVERARCHING THEMES

A NUMBER OF THEMES WERE WOVEN THROUGH THE RESPONSES, ESPECIALLY THE FREE RESPONSE QUESTIONS

DISMANTLE ACADEME’S HIERARCHIES
For example, tenured vs. contingent faculty, and teaching vs. language faculty

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Calls for more diverse panels and topics; increased transparency in the program; and less exclusionist atmosphere

CLIQUISHNESS OF AAIS
Existence of an “in” crowd that isn’t welcoming

AAIS COLLABORATE W/OTHER ASSOCIATIONS

AAIS MODEL DEI IN ACTION
Offer training; hold members to standard of professional conduct

ITALIAN STUDIES AS A DISCIPLINE NEEDS TO BE MORE DIVERSE
In topics like colonialism and racism; in fields or forms beyond just literature or cinema

AAIS PROVIDE ECONOMIC SUPPORT TO MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS
Scholars, contingent faculty, and both graduate and undergraduate students

AAIS PROVIDE GUIDANCE INCORPORATING DEI IN ITALIAN STUDIES COURSES

ALL VIEWPOINTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO BE EXPRESSED
SENSE OF BELONGING

Over two-thirds (70%) of respondents "Strongly" or "Somewhat" agree that they belong in the AAIS.

- Men were more likely to "strongly" agree while women were more likely to "somewhat" agree.
- If we look at the respondents who "Strongly disagreed," the largest group was those who reported another gender option, or who replied they preferred not to answer.
- A solid half of the people with a disability reported "Strongly" or "Somewhat" agreeing they feel included.
  - However, respondents with a disability were more likely than those without to report "Somewhat" and "Strongly" disagreeing with this statement.
  - Only 5% of all respondents self-identified with a disability, so any conclusions based on this group should be approached with caution.

MEMBERS AGREE THAT THEY FEEL LIKE THEY BELONG IN THE AAIS, WITH NOTICEABLE DISTINCTIONS AMONG SUBGROUPS THAT BEAR ON THE REASONS THE ASSOCIATION SOUGHT TO SURVEY MEMBERS
BROAD INCLUSION, YET UNDERLYING DIFFERENCES

Almost two-thirds (62%) of respondents reported they’d been meaningfully included in the AAIS "Always" or "Most of the time." Only 4% reported they’d "Never" been included. (See chart below)

Digging into several of the subgroups of respondents, we see the following:

- The largest share of men (40%) reported "Always" being included, while the largest share for women (44%) was "Most of the time."
- Non-whites and those who didn’t provide a race were much more likely to report "Never" having been included than Whites.
- Those with a disability were less likely to have "Always" been included and more likely to have "Never" been included.
Two-thirds of members (66%) agree "Strongly" or "Somewhat" that their colleagues in the AAIS respect and value them. Only 11% disagreed with this statement.

Gender

- Women were more likely to either "Strongly" or "Somewhat" agree with this statement (78%) than were their male counterparts (71%).

- Those respondents who reported a gender other than male or female were much more likely to disagree "Strongly" or "Somewhat" with this statement.

Disability

The majority of respondents with a disability reported agreeing with this statement, but one quarter disagreed, compared to just 9% of those without a disability.

Age Groups

Across all age groups, respondents were more likely to agree that they're respected and valued by their colleagues. However, among the youngest (22-30) and the oldest (71+) respondents, that support is more tempered.

- Both these age groups saw larger proportions of respondents feeling "Neutral" about this statement or disagreeing with it.

WOMEN WERE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT BEING RESPECTED AND VALUED BY THEIR COLLEAGUES THAN WERE MEN
Respondents voiced concerns over several types of marginalization within the AAIS. First and foremost was marginalization based on gender. Women report being subjected to "handsy men," and "older white male colleagues" who made them feel uncomfortable. One woman reported having been verbally harassed at the Conference. Women who had children reported being questioned as to why they had a full-time job; being "mansplained" on panels; and having their work used without citation by male colleagues.

Marginalization based on sexual orientation was also reported by respondents. Members whose sexual orientation differed from the mainstream reported marginalization, as did respondents whose scholarly work treated topics about gender, sexuality, queer studies, and race.

A third type of marginalization centered on scholarly work. Respondents whose scholarly work was outside of 19th or 20th century literature or cinema felt left out or overlooked. Respondents advocated a broadening of the topics considered within the AAIS to include medieval and early modern time periods; interdisciplinary pursuits; and race, colonialism, and gender, among others.

A fourth type of marginalization was voiced about those whose positions weren't full-time tenured or tenure-track. Respondents reported that graduate students and contingent faculty especially were marginalized and excluded.

Non-native Italians reported being marginalized. Microaggressions like, "ma come un'americana" were said to them; similarly, one member reported being badmouthed in Italian to their face, as if they wouldn't understand what was being said.

Finally, a number of respondents voiced their feelings of marginalization from the AAIS itself. Many described it as "cliquish," "exclusionary," and "elitist."
When asked to what extent they had experienced marginalization in the AAIS, fully half of respondents (52%) responded they’d "Never" felt marginalized. 5% or less responded either "Always," "Most of the time," or "About half of the time" each. Just 8% of respondents declined to provide a response. (See chart below.)

- Respondents who either responded they preferred not to provide a gender, or had a non-binary gender identification, were similar to men and women in their responses. However, this group had a larger proportion of having been marginalized "Always" or "Most of the time" (8% and 17% respectively).

Disabilities

The respondents who reported having a disability of some type mirrored the overall result. The largest proportion of them (41%) had "Never" experienced marginalization, and none reported having "Always" experienced it.

Age

When looked at by age group, respondents' most frequent response across all age groups was "Never" having experienced marginalization.

- Slight differences were seen in the youngest and the oldest age groups, which each had between 15%-20% of their respondents answering "Always" or "Most of the time."
REPORTING INSTANCES OF MARGINALIZATION

RESPONDENTS HAD SEVERAL IDEAS ABOUT WHETHER/HOW TO REPORT

LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS
The AAIS leadership needs to be open, inclusive, welcoming, and discourage cliques.

CREATE A SAFE SPACE
No retaliation against any member bringing such instances to AAIS leadership; non-judgmental perspective; reporting member believed.

WOULDN’T EVER REPORT TO AAIS
Several respondents said that nothing would convince them to report any such instances to the AAIS.

DEI COMMITTEE OR OMBUDSPERSON
Respondents suggested a separate committee or even an ombudsperson be created, to whom any such instances would be reported.

CONFIDENTIALITY AS TABLE STAKES
Any such reports would need to be confidential at a minimum, anonymous if possible. Respondents also voiced a fear of retaliation, especially those without tenure.
More than four in ten respondents (41%) said that diversity within the AAIS is "Extremely" important, and another 26% "Very important.

- Fully two-thirds of respondents strongly support diversity in the AAIS.

However, caution is advised in drawing conclusions based upon the responses to this question:

- The AAIS members who took the time to respond to this survey are likely the ones who already believe in the importance of this topic.
- Over a quarter of survey respondents didn’t respond to this question.

Over half (54%) of the respondents rated the AAIS's efforts around DEI as "Good" or "Average." Another 10% rated them as "Excellent."

- Non-White respondents, however, were more likely to rate the AAIS’s efforts as "Poor" or "Terrible."

Gender

Women are more supportive overall of diversity than are men in this survey.

- 59% of women think diversity is "Extremely important," but just 46% of men do. A majority of each, yet women are 13 percentage points higher than men.

Disabilities

Respondents who reported they have a disability responded in much the same way as the overall population did. The largest proportion found diversity in the AAIS to be "Extremely" important, followed by "Very" important.

- It's interesting to note that 8% of the respondents with a disability said it was "Not at all" important to them, compared to <1% of those without a disability. Because of the very small number of respondents with a disability, this finding would require further investigation.

Age

With just two exceptions, all age groups replied that diversity is "Extremely" important, followed by "Very" important.

- The youngest and the oldest respondents were more balanced in their support of diversity, with fewer answering "Extremely" important and more answering "Very."

- Among the oldest respondents, 17% didn’t answer this question, by far the largest proportion of non-responses of any age group.
ISSUES FOR AAIS TO ADDRESS

SEVERAL THEMES AROSE FROM RESPONDENTS’ FEEDBACK

MULTIPLE FACETS OF “DIVERSITY”
Diversity encompasses gender, race, and sexual orientation, but respondents were clear that other types of diversity were just as important and needed to be considered: economic status, native/non-native Italian, tenured or contingent, faculty or student.

LACK OF DIVERSITY AT CONFERENCE
Suggestions to ameliorate this include more diverse speakers, panels, keynotes, and topics addressed. Scheduling of DEI-focused sessions should be optimized. Economic diversity could be addressed by offering a remote option to attend.

BIAS IN AAIS
Respondents look to the leadership of AAIS to address issues of bias, discrimination and marginalization within the Association.

CLARIFY DEFINITION OF DEI
Respondents called for a clear definition of what constitutes "DEI" and what doesn't. Several respondents answered that DEI isn't useful, and advocated diversity of viewpoints within the Association.
ISSUES FOR AAIS TO ADDRESS

OUTDATED CANON
Many respondents answered that the Italian Studies canon is outdated and needs revising, becoming more inclusive in terms of diverse authors and topics. These include:

- African-Italian Studies
- Italian Colonialism
- Arab-Italian Studies
- Asian-Italian Studies
- Immigration in Italy
- Italian Diaspora
- Race and Racism in Italy
- Southern Italy
- "New" Italians

DISCIPLINE-WIDE ISSUES
Respondents would like the AAIS to address issues of bias and harassment within the larger discipline of Italian Studies.

RECRUITMENT AND HIRING
Given its position in the discipline, AAIS should promote diversity in institutions' recruitment and hiring, and offer training for members serving on search committees at their institutions/organizations.
Respondents were clear in their expectation of the AAIS to play a role advocating and educating about diversity, equity and inclusion.

- AAIS could offer various training programs in this sphere: interpersonal training for members; and, how to incorporate in recruitment and hiring at members' institutions.
- Support economic equity through assistance with the cost of Conference attendance for marginalized populations.
- Utilize the Conference as a platform: panels that address DEI; use the Book Prize to highlight DEI.
- Provide resources to members to help include DEI in their teaching.
- Promote DEI in the broader Italian Studies curriculum.

Members would like the AAIS to collaborate with other associations in terms of DEI resources and best practices.

- Some advocate reaching out to disciplines outside Italian Studies, and even to the general public
- Diversity among the members of the Executive Council was mentioned by several respondents.
- Respondents requested AAIS to measure and track DEI on a regular basis.