

2019 AAUS Board of Directors Elections Secretary Nominees



Robbie Christian

ADSO, University of Miami

After earning my BS in Physics, I traveled the world working as a recreational instructor in the Philippines, Indonesia, St Maarten, and Egypt until I discovered scientific diving and settled down in 2011 as the ADSO at the University of Miami. The vast majority of my dives are scientific or scientific training (as the instructor). My diving skills range from regulator repair to rebreather diving and tank inspections to cave diving. My non-diving expertise includes shooting and editing video, developing online courses, and public speaking to small groups as well as groups well over 100. Furthermore, I play viola in a local symphony and actively volunteer at my church.

At the University of Miami, I have contributed to the program's success in a variety of ways. I initiated and organized international training to Bonaire for the past 7 years and helped double the number of scientific diving students to 48 per year. I provide about 50 DFAPro certifications annually. I created online learning modules for all academic topics and regularly manage them. I digitized the program equipment inventory as well as track training and academic performance metrics online, analyzing the data to determine the best training strategies. I film, edit, and post videos on social media for the University of Miami that have reached millions of viewers.

1. In your vision, in what direction should the AAUS be heading in the next decade?

My vision for AAUS in the next decade is to bring greater value to the academy by focusing on both incoming and existing DSOs. I hope to see a more formal training curriculum for incoming DSOs than we currently have. The training would include skills, dive knowledge, understanding of the scientific diving community, mastery of AAUS standards, and include a mentorship component. Furthermore, my vision includes more support from AAUS to all DSOs in times of need, such as when uninformed DCBs make decisions against the recommendations of the DSO. If AAUS trains DSOs to a high and uniform standard in order to be best equipped to run scientific diving programs and then provides them support, AAUS will have its greatest impact on underwater science. With the implementation of this stronger focus on a more qualified and more supported DSO, AAUS will deliver greater value to DSOs and therefore organizational members. With a greater value, organizations will have a higher willingness to pay, it will make the academy more attractive to new organizational members, benefit AAUS financially, and promote underwater science worldwide.

2. Describe your scientific diving experience and indicate its relevance to AAUS governance.

I have eight years of experience working in a large and very active scientific diving program. With a program that conducts an average of over 4,000 open water dives per year, I have been able to help oversee a wide array of diving modes in a range of environments (rebreather, open circuit, shallow, deep, mixed gas, air, nitrox, decompression, caves, fresh water, salt water, blue water, back mount, side mount, double tanks, hookah, scooters, and so on). I have learned not just the diving itself, but for each one I have learned the unique challenges, the training tactics, equipment, written and unwritten qualifications, and the ways to manage the different types of diving including when the modes mix. As a result, I have a broad understanding of the diving modes used across AAUS. The other benefit to being part of an active program is that I have been able to work on collaborative projects as well as work with divers who come from a wide variety of scientific diving programs. I regularly take the opportunity to communicate with them about their experiences as science divers, the challenges they face(d), and how AAUS fits into it all. These opportunities have allowed me to get an

understanding of issues faced by different programs of all sizes, their needs, and the role of AAUS. In terms of my experience with AAUS, I have attended 6 symposia in the last 7 years (I presented at two of them) and I have also served on the standards committee for a few years, so I am well connected and committed to the academy's success.

3) What relationships/networks/professional contacts/nonprofit board experiences do you have that will benefit AAUS by electing you to the AAUS BOD?

While I do not have extensive formal board experience, I do have strong relationships within the scientific diving community and have connections that extend into other fields and disciplines. I have just completed my master's degree in management and leadership at the University of Miami's Business School and I therefore have a fresh connection to the faculty in a wide variety of disciplines of business such as marketing, finance, statistics, consulting, public speaking, leadership, etc. I built very solid personal connections to the faculty; they have already told me on multiple occasions that they would be thrilled to provide their expertise upon request. I served on the AAUS standards re-write subcommittee that produced the latest version of the AAUS manual. Additionally, I am the head coordinator and facilitator a 9-week personal finance course for members of the community on a voluntary basis that is offered 1-2 times per year. I look forward to having the opportunity to strengthen my board experience by serving as the secretary of AAUS.



Jessica Keller
Training Specialist, NOAA

Jessica Keller recently joined the NOAA Diving Center in Seattle, Washington as a training specialist. In this new role, she is one of five instructors teaching the NOAA diver course and supervising hyperbaric operations during offshore research operations. She previously worked as an underwater archaeologist with the National Park Service Submerged Resources Center. Jessica was elected as Secretary for AAUS in 2018. During her time on the BOD, she has served as secretary and taken the social media initiative for AAUS. Jessica attended Indiana University for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees: BA's in Anthropology and Underwater Archaeology with a certificate in Underwater Resource Management and a Master's of Science degree. Between her degrees, Jessica worked as a dive instructor at Quiescence Diving Services in Key Largo, FL. While attending graduate school, she was hired as a visiting lecturer to teach scientific diving, underwater archaeology, and assisted the DSO for the Academic Diving Program. Jessica has continued to gain dive experience, and has received certifications in Open Circuit Trimix, Open Circuit Cave, Evolution Closed Circuit Rebreather, and Closed-Circuit Rebreather Cave. She is also a DAN Instructor, SOS Hyperlite Emergency Hyperbaric Stretcher Operator, NBDHMT Diver Medic Technician (DMT), and a NREMT EMT-B, and is a past recipient of the Women Diver's Hall of Fame Scholarship. Jessica would be honored to serve on the AAUS BOD again and continue contributing to growth and safety of the scientific diving community.

1) In your vision, in what direction should the AAUS be heading in the next decade?

The next decade contains great potential for development, partnerships, and collaborations for AAUS, not only through OMs and members, but also with outside and international organizations and communities. The ability to conduct science and research underwater is known to a relatively small percentage of the population; however, reaching out to broader audiences and younger generations are the best way to keep AAUS relevant for the future. We can accomplish this through a variety of ways including educational outreach, a stronger public presence through presentations and booths, utilizing social media, and international collaborations. I

would also like to see AAUS create and encourage a just and safe culture. A just culture is one where individuals can talk about incidents or near-misses without judgement as a learning tool for all fellow divers. AAUS tracks incidents but sharing near-misses or other learning lessons could be discussed more often and more openly. Safety is expressed through standards and procedures, but culture is seen and developed on an individual basis. AAUS members should be strong dive industry mentors and role models for safety and a just culture, not only to other organizational members, but also to all divers.

2) Describe your scientific diving experience and indicate its relevance to AAUS governance.

I began my diving career in a non-AAUS scientific program. Now, being a part of AAUS and becoming more familiar with the standards, not only do I have an appreciation for all aspects and programs in the scientific diving world, but also, truly recognize how important reciprocity is for an exchange of information and collaborations between universities and organizations. I believe having experience in both AAUS and non-AAUS provides me with a unique insight.

My new position at NOAA will also provide a irreplaceable experience to bring collaboration and understanding across programmatic lines. In my past, I also had the ability to assist the DSO at Indiana University with students and teaching for the Academic Diving Program, to see the hard work and time needed to become an OM during the National Park Service's application to join AAUS, and the differences between operating procedures between government agencies, universities, and recreational dive shops.

I have also had the privilege to work and dive with volunteers and international partners and agencies from South Africa, Senegal, and Mozambique, while conducting various aspects of scientific diving such as underwater archaeology, marine biology, sedimentology, and invasive species removal. These scientific opportunities have taken place in local and expeditionary settings and in a variety of environments with open and closed-circuit diving. Running successful large projects with multiple partners requires an incredible amount of logistics and planning. I believe my past experiences combined with my organizational skills, love of diving, and scientific background makes me a good candidate to serve the AAUS community and BOD.

3) What relationships/networks/professional contacts/non-profit board experiences do you have that will benefit AAUS by electing you to the AAUS BOD? (Maximum 300 words)

My position and experiences with NOAA, the National Park Service, and serving on committees for DEMA have expanded my abilities for collaboration, organization, and conducting projects both small and large with numerous people and organizations. For those projects, networking is key to successful organizations like NOAA and NPS as dive teams and personnel are spread across the country. Through my experience, I have come to truly appreciate the importance of establishing working relationships, providing good training, and following standards and operating procedures especially after diving accidents occur. I would like to dedicate my time to help AAUS expand their network and create new working relationships. Network expansion could be accomplished through attending shows and conferences like DEMA or the Society for Historical Archaeology, which highlights underwater archaeologists throughout the world.

The time and effort that members of the board dedicate to the organization is admirable and has a large impact on divers and programs around the country. I would like to offer the AAUS BoD and the organization my assistance, experiences, and dedication as secretary. I have volunteered and worked for numerous programs and companies that required a highly organized and thorough person to accomplish tasks. Such tasks include staffing EMS personnel for large scale events, leading 60 servers in catering operations, creating and managing a Junior Ranger Program for the National Park Service, and assisting the logistics for the NOAA diver course. In light of my proven experience, I believe I could greatly contribute to this organization. Thank you for this opportunity and your consideration.