Society of American Archivists
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Graduate Archival Education Subcommittee:
Feedback on DEIA Work Plan Assignments
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BACKGROUND

As part of the SAA Strategic Plan and DEIA Work Plan, the Graduate Archival Education Subcommittee of the Committee on Education ["GAES"] has been tasked from FY 22-25 with "advocat[ing] for DEIA informed curriculum at graduate archival programs [Strategic Plan Item 3.3.B; DEIA Work Plan - 3.4]. In collaboration with the Archival Educators' Section, GAES identified a need to aggregate, curate, and make more accessible DEIA-informed teaching resources appropriate for archival education. In consultation with our Council Liaison, the GAES decided to develop a resource kit that organized curricular resources focusing on DEIA concepts into categories corresponding to the core areas of archival knowledge as enumerated in the Graduate Programs for Archival Studies (GPAS) Curriculum standard.

Through initial brainstorming sessions, we brought together a number of resources that would help archival educators integrate DEIA concepts into all manner of archival courses, but we recognized that there are likely more relevant resources that the GAES is not aware of. We also wanted to ensure that the resulting resource kit represented the perspectives beyond the GAES, which is currently exclusively composed of white archivists and educators. To move forward with this project, we invited several SAA sections to the 2023 GAES business meeting and discussed the idea of circulating an open call to various archival groups to solicit a broader range of curricular resources (SNAP, Archival Educators, Archival Management, Diverse Sexuality and Gender, Archivists & Archives of Color, Women Archivists, Native American Archives, Accessibility and Disability). During Fall 2023, we created an open submission form soliciting curricular resources corresponding to the core categories of archival knowledge and circulated that form to the general SAA listserv and the listservs for sections invited to attend the business meeting.

In response to this open call for curricular resources, the GAES received an email from an SAA member expressing concerns about the process for developing the resource kit (an anonymized version of the email was forwarded to the GAES Council Liaison). Some of the critique focused on the DEIA curricular resource kit project specifically, while other aspects of the critique applied to SAA's diversity initiatives more broadly. To

summarize the concerns: they noted a lack of transparency about how the resource kit was being developed and how SAA's diversity initiatives more broadly were being pursued; they were concerned that work for developing the DEIA resources was being put on marginalized and underrepresented individuals without sufficient recognition of the burdens this might create; they felt that certain formal structures should be in place to address these issues, such as an advisory group overseeing DEIA initiatives.

DISCUSSION

Efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are incredibly important for the archival profession, and the DEIA Work Plan ensures that specific, concrete actions are taken to advance these values in line with the overall strategic plan of the organization. The GAES has approached the items assigned to this committee in the DEIA Work Plan with a great deal of consideration, and we have spent significant time and effort accomplishing these items. We discussed the development of the resource kit at length among committee members and consulted external perspectives in the form of our Council Liaison, the Archival Educators section, and the sections invited to the annual business meeting. Despite these efforts, we recognize that the critiques raised by the concerned SAA member are valid and have drawn our attention to gaps both in the approach of the GAES and the SAA overall in advancing DEIA initiatives. We feel that this incident signals a need to critically think through how various sections and committees carry out DEIA initiatives and how the organization approaches DEIA work at an overarching level. In particular, the feedback provided by the concerned SAA member highlights two key sets of issues that warrant further discussion from council.

First, the individual sections and committees carrying out specific items from the DEIA Work Plan do not always have sufficient resources to produce the robust outcomes needed to fully advance the values of diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility. SAA sections and committees are run by volunteers with limited time and limited access to material resources. Without dedicated structures or mechanisms in place at the level of the organization to directly support individual sections in carrying out DEIA Work plan initiatives, DEIA projects may not be fully realized, and thus lead to the marginalization of DEIA initiatives within the organization.

Second, the critical feedback that the GAES received suggests that the nature of the SAA's DEIA work is neither well known nor well understood by the general membership. Individual sections and committees likely understand the particular DEIA projects they are engaged in but may not grasp how their projects relate to the broader DEIA Work Plan and larger strategic initiatives of the organization. For general membership not directly engaged in a particular DEIA initiative, the full scope and intended impact of the organization's DEIA efforts is likely even more obscure. We feel that the SAA needs to practice greater transparency by proactively communicating about DEIA initiatives to members and by regularly sharing updates about progress across these initiatives.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Is it possible to provide clearer process guidance beyond the overall DEIA Work Plan? Can good practices for communication, including potentially templates and suggested means for sharing the process, be shared and modeled for committees?
- A concern was raised about the DEIA Work Plan initiatives, including timelines, processes, and expectations, being generally unclear to the broader membership. How can a broader understanding of SAA's work toward DEIA goals be shared to the whole of SAA's membership? Could existing publication venues of the organization (e.g. In the Loop, Archival Outlook) be used to communicate work happening in support of the DEIA Work Plan?
- How can the DEIA Work Plan efforts be made more equitable and inclusive, but without placing additional expectations on SAA's BIPOC members?
- Beyond SAA Council, is it possible to form a DEIA Steering Committee or other body to help guide work plan initiatives?