

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
March 17, 2021
Virtual Meeting**

Proposal to Discontinue the Research Libraries Section

**(Prepared by Council Liaison Ricardo Punzalan and
Governance Manager Felicia Owens)**

BACKGROUND

All SAA sections are held to a basic set of requirements to ensure a strong experience for the respective section members. Section IX. C.2 of the [Governance Manual](#) outlines the following requirements for all sections to remain in good standing, including holding an annual business meeting, conducting an annual election, and submitting an annual report by September 1.

DISCUSSION

The Research Libraries Section has not met the basic requirements to remain in good standing. In summer 2019, Section leaders were unable to secure any candidates for the annual election, and the election was never conducted. From that point, the steering committee fell into inactivity, as critical positions were not filled.

In the section's 2018-2019 annual report, the current chair noted that the section had fallen into inactivity and recommended that the section be discontinued. When the Council reviewed this report, members agreed that research libraries have significant overlap with other current SAA sections and perhaps do not need this specific space to connect.

As of September 2019, the last chair rotated off of the group and no election was held in 2019 to fill the vacancies. The section did not hold an election or submit an annual report in 2020, and has not held any meetings in conjunction with the Annual Meeting in that time.

In its 2018-2019 annual report, the outgoing Chair noted that the Section mainly functioned as a vehicle for OCLC to maintain a relationship with SAA. Thus, in March 2020, Ricardo Punzalan, Council liaison to the section, met with OCLC representatives Merrilee Proffitt and Chela Weber. At this meeting, Punzalan gave an update on the Section's inactivity and discussed the perception that it serves as OCLC's main connection with the Society. Proffitt and Weber clarified that while they have in the past worked closely with the Section, they will work with any SAA sections or committees, the Council, and staff should this section be discontinued. In that same month, Punzalan also met with the chair, Anton duPlessis, who confirmed the lack of enthusiasm and inactivity from section membership.

On February 17, 2021, Punzalan sent a message to the Research Libraries Section discussion list to notify section members of the impending Council decision and welcome their feedback. As of March 8, Punzalan received one response from a section member. Punzalan's message, as well as the response, are included in the appendix below.

Punzalan and staff recommend that the Research Libraries Section be formally discontinued, given the lack of steering committee leadership and overall lack of activity on the section's general discussion list.

Upon the Council's approval, Punzalan and staff will communicate this decision to the main section discussion list and encourage members to subscribe to alternate, related sections. Staff will provide a transition window before removing the section from SAA Connect. History from the discussion lists and the section's microsite will be maintained in the SAA Archives.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Research Libraries Section be discontinued.

Support Statement: Discontinuing inactive sections will refocus attention and engagement on our more active sections and allow SAA to provide more resources to those groups.

Impact on Strategic Priorities: Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs.

Fiscal Impact: Reduced staff time to manage running annual election, scheduling meeting at Annual Meeting, etc.

SUBJECT: Motion to Discontinue the Research Libraries Section - Soliciting Comments for SAA Council

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to let you know that the SAA Council, during its next meeting on March 17, 2021, will discuss and potentially vote on a motion to discontinue the Research Libraries Section. This is due to the Section's inactive status. The Section has not had an election since 2018 and thus lacks an active Steering Committee. No annual report for the section has been submitted since 2018, and the Section microsite has not been updated since 2018.

As the Section's Council liaison, I would like to hear your thoughts and comments on the proposed motion. If you have any questions or concerns, please reply to this message or contact me directly at ricpunz@umich.edu by March 15. I will be happy to compile and present your responses to the SAA Council, which can inform Council's deliberations.

Following the Council's discussion at the March meeting, I will share any decisions with all of you via this list. Should the Council vote to discontinue the section, I will work with staff on next steps and provide suggestions for other sections you may wish to join to stay connected with news and information related to research libraries.

For reference:

Section IX. C.2 of the [Governance Manual](#) outlines the following requirements for all sections to remain in good standing:

- a. Posting of standing rules on the section's official microsite to serve as a supplement to the Governance Manual, Section IX. Sections.
- b. Submission of a proposal for the section's annual meeting (including agenda, description, preference for onsite/offsite location, AV needs, duration, and indication of whether it is a solo or joint meeting) by March 1 each year.
- c. Conduct of an online election for the section's leader(s) using SAA's process, with submission of the slate due by June 1 each year. The ballot should include a simple questionnaire asking for member feedback on the effectiveness of the section.
- d. Submission of an annual report and a complete leader roster by September 1 each year. The report should be prepared by the outgoing chair. Reports will be submitted via an online form created by the SAA staff and will include an indication of how the section addressed SAA's strategic priorities in the last year.
- e. Responsiveness to SAA Council requests for assistance in conducting research, drafting expert comments, or undertaking other activities related to the section's area of special interest.

Furthermore, Section IX. C.3 of the Manual states: "Sections may be discontinued if they do not meet one or more of the requirements stated above. Inability to meet a requirement will lead

to a conversation between/among the section chair and/or steering committee, the Council liaison, and the executive director to determine 1) why the group is unable to complete the activity, 2) what might be done to assist the group in moving forward (e.g., combine with another group, change leadership), and 3) whether the section might function more effectively as a special interest discussion list. The Council will decide if a section is to be discontinued."

Best,
Ricky Punzalan, Ph.D.
SAA Council Liaison to Research Libraries Section

Response from Section Member:

Hello Ricky,

Thank you for your request for feedback regarding the discontinuation of the Research Libraries Section. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective.

First, a little background: I work at a small, independent nonprofit library/archives/museum. We are dedicated to local history and genealogy. We have both a reference library and a circulating library. Housed in a historic building, we serve hundreds of researchers and hundreds of other visitors each year. The total number of staff is five, which means we all do a little bit of everything and our time is very limited. I'm primarily responsible for reference, cataloging, and providing access to library and archival resources.

Since joining the Research Libraries Section last year in hopes of connecting with people who work at institutions similar to mine, I was of course disappointed to find that the section was not very active. But I do enjoy being subscribed to the section listserv because sometimes I receive relevant emails there that I otherwise wouldn't have received through other listservs.

I completely understand the reasoning for dissolving the section since it's clearly not thriving, although I was saddened by your email. My main concerns are: 1) I would like to be able to connect with colleagues who work in research libraries and 2.) I am interested in leadership and publication opportunities. For example, if the section had a newsletter/blog, I would have considered writing and/or editing for it. I like having the ability to engage with a smaller group of people, maybe where I could even get to know some of my colleagues. Due to the lack of inactivity, the Research Libraries Section as it currently stands obviously doesn't fulfill my needs.

Without the Research Libraries Section, I would say that the closest alternatives for me are the Lone Arrangers Section and the Reference, Access, and Outreach Section (both of which I'm a member of); however, these sections have a large number of members and the discussions and activities don't always meet my needs.

Despite its faults, I think the strength of the Research Libraries Section is that it's based on institution type. I find that I like some of the activities of the College and University Archives

Section (which I'm not a member of), but I often have a hard time relating because my institution isn't academic focused. Many archivists work in a college or university setting, but for someone like me, this can be a bit overshadowing.

So, I wonder if the Research Libraries Section could be absorbed into another section as some sort of a subgroup (but how would that work?), or if the section could still maintain a listserv with information and announcements specifically geared toward research libraries (but how would that affect the ability to engage with others?). This may even be a bigger issue than just the Research Libraries Section: is there a way to create a space for SAA members to connect better based on institution type or geographic location?

Let me know if you have any follow-up questions. Thanks again,