

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
June 8 – 10, 2012
Chicago, Illinois**

**Discussion Item: Blogs for SAA and Component Groups
(Prepared by Jackie Dooley)**

In my capacity as liaison to the Annual Meeting Task Force, I have become acutely aware of a level of controversy across the membership concerning the value of implementing SAA blogs, including whether or not a component group may implement one outside the SAA domain. Several of our groups have already done so, but not necessarily in compliance with our current Uniform Guidelines for SAA Websites and Online Communications.

Some blog-like capabilities have been implemented within SAA's Drupal website environment: Users may make comments in response to postings on various SAA website pages and may subscribe to an RSS feed from each of those pages.

Are the existing capabilities sufficient to meet the expectations of both component groups and members at large for blog functionality? And what, if anything, should be done about existing component group blogs that do not comply with our Guidelines?

BACKGROUND

As we know, blogs have become both ubiquitous and ordinary for both personal and organizational communication across our social spectrum. SAA members have commented in various contexts that the lack of blogging capability for component groups and on the SAA website demonstrates SAA's inability to be nimble (or even adequately up-to-date) in its use of technology. For examples of such sentiments, see Appendix 1 for comments relating to blogs that were submitted within responses to our 2012 member survey.

The *Annual Meeting Task Force*, for which I serve as the Council liaison, has been vociferous in expressing its need for blogging functionality in order to communicate with and receive feedback from the membership. The chairs have posted several news items on the microsite that have drawn what they feel is minimal response despite strong publicity in *In the Loop* (four comments on the first post, eleven on the second). AMTF members firmly believe that communication with the membership would be more active and effective if they were permitted to set up a "real" blog. (It is too soon to say whether feedback will increase now that RSS feeds are feasible from their microsite.) This is an

important group for the Society, and any conversation that occurs arguably warrants preservation and should therefore take place within our Drupal site.

<http://www2.archivists.org/groups/annual-meeting-task-force>

While this may be slightly tangential, it seems worth noting that the energetic buzz that led to formation of the new *Students and New Archives Professionals Roundtable* (SNAP) was generated by a blog operated by Rebecca Goldman. The blog's very reason to exist was provocative, and virtually every post engendered active comments. Goldman submitted the proposal and became the interim chair of SNAP after the Council established the group in January 2012. Her last post (31 Jan 2012) stated that the blog probably would be retired and communications would move to the new group's SAA microsite, thus adhering to SAA policy (see the Uniform Guidelines below). The SNAP leadership has posted a variety of documents but has not used the "comment" feature. On the other hand, the Roundtable's listserv is extremely active.

<newarchivistsroundtable.wordpress.com/>

Relevant Functionality of the SAA Website

Functionality was recently added to our Drupal-based website (including component groups' microsities) to subscribe to an RSS feed from each of those pages (as well as from the SAA home page and the global news feed page). In addition, comments may be viewed without logging in. Posting of comments requires a login but does not require that the user be an SAA member. These features of our website at least partially address the need for blog-like two-way communication.

Uniform Guidelines for SAA Websites and Online Communications

The "Uniform Guidelines" are published within Appendix A of the SAA Governance Manual and include the following relevant section (Section E, SAA Auxiliary Sites):

SAA boards, committees, subcommittees, sections, roundtables, working groups, and task forces may not create auxiliary sites, including websites, e-mail discussion lists, wikis, blogs, document sharing sites, and social networks, without prior approval from the Executive Director. Approval to create an SAA auxiliary site shall be dependent on:

- The group's demonstration of clear and compelling functional needs that are not or cannot be effectively provided by the SAA office;
- The ongoing identification of an active group leader who will willingly serve as the site coordinator and perform responsibilities appropriate to that role;
- The ongoing provision of complete content access to the chair of the component group;
- Display of an appropriate link and descriptive information on either the component group website or the main website;
- The group's agreement to include and regularly display on the auxiliary site:
 - The uniform SAA logo, in accordance with the policies articulated in *Guidelines for Use of the SAA Logo*;

- A prominent link to the component group website and/or the main website;
- An appropriate disclaimer stating that SAA does not assume responsibility for the opinions and views published on the auxiliary site; and
- If necessary, an appropriate disclaimer stating that references to commercial interests (such as vendor listings or advertisements) does not imply any endorsement by SAA.

Component group leaders should be aware that official content published on auxiliary sites remains subject to the records retention provisions outlined in Article VII of SAA's Constitution and that the SAA office is unable to provide administrative support for content published on third-party servers.

Examples of Approaches Taken by Component Groups

Various SAA component groups have established blogs (and, in some cases, websites) outside the SAA domain. None displays the SAA logo. Some are linked to the group's microsite, while others are not.

I was aware of items 1-2 before starting to prepare this agenda item and retrieved 3-6 by searching "blog" on the SAA website (queries retrieve these because they are SAA subdomains). I stopped my research after finding this list of sites. Are members of Council aware of others?

1. The *2012 San Diego Host Committee* requested and was granted permission to establish a blog, which links to the home page for this year's Annual Meeting. The temporal need for local information obviates the need for long-term preservation of the content. <http://saa2012sd.wordpress.com/>
2. The *Lesbian and Gay Archives Roundtable* established a blog early in 2012 without being aware of the Guidelines. As a result, the SAA office was unaware of the blog, and no link had been made from the LAGAR microsite. The Executive Director recently contacted the LAGAR chair and provided a copy of the guidelines, at which time he agreed to link to the microsite. No comments have been posted to any of the dozen or so posts done since the first one on 26 Oct 2011. <http://lagarroundtable.wordpress.com/>
3. The first link on the *Women's Collections Roundtable* microsite links to the group's blog. The earliest post is from September 2009, and about 100 informational posts have been done since then; comments seem to be rare, though the posts are not meant to be provocative. <http://wcrs-saa.blogspot.com/>
4. The *Reference, Access and Outreach Section* has a blog that dates back to 2008 and has about 65 posts, some of which pertain to RAO business (such as the agenda for the 2010 RAO meeting at the SAA Annual Meeting). Comments are rare but somewhat more common than on the blogs mentioned above. I don't see a link from the RAO microsite. <http://raonews.blogspot.com/>

5. The *Visual Materials Section* has a website that is outside the SAA domain <<http://archivesinaction.com/VMS/>>. It is linked from VM's unused microsite. VM also has a blog for its 2012 midwinter meeting, located in yet another domain, on which the comment feature is actively used. <<http://saavmsmidwinter2012.wordpress.com/>>
6. The *Indiana University student chapter* has a website outside the SAA domain that has no link from the group's unused microsite. <http://www.indiana.edu/~saarchiv/> The chapter also has a blog that goes back to 2011. <<http://saaiu.wordpress.com/>>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Please consider the following questions for discussion:

1. Is it reasonable to expect SAA component groups to adhere to the Uniform Guidelines, particularly given that some already exist that do not adhere?
2. What are the features of a blog that attract an active readership? Are these features available to us within the Drupal CMS at a reasonable cost?
3. How important is it that SAA-related blogs be situated within the Drupal site to enable preservation of their content and to ensure that staff, leaders, and component group members can locate them?
4. Do reasons other than the above exist that argue for use of the Drupal site?
5. To what extent does our use of subdomains obviate the need to situate sites within Drupal?
6. Are there reasons to deny use of an external blog to some groups while approving some other requests?
7. Should SAA retroactively seek compliance to the Uniform Guidelines on the part of the groups that already have a blog?

SAA Member Survey Verbatim Comments Relating to Blogs

Q13. What additional benefits would you like SAA to offer its members that it currently does not offer?

1.entry-level to publishing articles or case studies; possibly in online or electronic form 2.online blog /community site beyond listservs, perhaps broader or conceptual as well as more focused 3. lower cost annual convention/meeting 4. steeper discounts on continuing education
A more robust website, perhaps with blog entries by various contributors reflecting on a wide variety of political, theoretical, and international issues.
I'm not sure...maybe a stronger online presence. For example, a blog area for roundtable memberships. The email listservs seems quite outdated.
Maybe consider establishing a blog (or something similar) with the purpose of providing individuals a central place to contribute their repositories policies.

Q48. If you could suggest one thing to improve the benefits, products or services you receive from SAA, what would you suggest?

Get rid of print copy of Archival Outlook and switch over to a blog format with RSS feed. Please. Would save a ton of \$\$\$ that could be used for something more valuable.
I do love the weekly email updates. I wish more SAA council members were on the A&A list or Twitter. (Hats off to Kate T who is active on a blog and Twitter!) It's nice to know what some council members are thinking.
More online resources such as recorded webinars, a vibrant blog following news, and more introductory materials for archival students.
there should be Wi-Fi at the conference, and it should not cost me any extra to get online. if you want to generate buzz about the conference, let people live blog and tweet and post pictures from the conference itself
Would like to know how to join discussions, blogs , about topics I am involved in. At this time, physical preservation of collections and management of an archive.

Q55. This is the last question. Do you have any additional comments that you would like to share with SAA?

I will be very honest. While I do enjoy your publications, I have no on-site time to read and often feel overwhelmed by the volumes of information delivered by email especially when the roundtable discussions get started. I might be more likely to participate if they were conducted in chat room that one could enter or leave as needed, or by blog . I would probably read the publications more if I could get them on my Nookcolor - then I would have them with me most of the time and could access them while waiting somewhere or when I only had a few minutes. Because of a medical condition, traveling is difficult for me - it is highly unlikely that I would fly to anything, especially to attend a one/two-day workshop or even the annual gatherings. I would be willing to drive a reasonable distance (up to 6-7 hours) to attend a week long workshop or event.
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The cost of membership in SAA is high relative to the value of services. Keeping up with the field happens on **blogs** and twitter not the journal or listservs. The annual meeting is very expensive especially with travel and hotel. This could be addressed by making audio/video of conference sessions available free (or very cheap) online as many other conferences do. Yes, this would cost SAA, but SAA should exist to serve its members and the profession not solely to make money. I am sensitive to this issue of cost because I finally just got a full-time archives job after 2 1/2 years of unemployment. Also, it is very difficult to break into SAA in a networking sense. I have tried several times unsuccessfully to serve on an SAA committee though I am VERY active with my regional archival professional organization.