

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
August 6, 2012
San Diego, California**

**Discussion: Assessing and Addressing
SAA Student Members' Needs
(Prepared by: Terry Baxter, Aimee Felker,
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BACKGROUND

This discussion item resulted from a number of different data points and conversations concerning SAA's student members and student chapters that have come to the attention of Council members, including (but certainly not limited to):

- Growth of the percentage of SAA members in the student category (see Appendix).
- Concern that SAA may not be adequately addressing the needs of student members.
- Concern that it is unfair that student members can't hold elected office, per the SAA Constitution.¹
- Desire to develop leadership skills, foster a better understanding of how SAA functions, and provide a stake in the association's future for student members.
- Planned survey of student chapters, developed at the June 2012 Council meeting, to assess how SAA's governance structures can most effectively communicate and interact with them. (This raises different, but perhaps similar, issues than with individual student members.)
- Desire to ensure that SAA is adding value for students during their post-graduation transitional period to "new archives professionals."

This discussion item assumes that the needs of students and early-career archivists, especially when transitioning from a graduate program to a first professional position, may overlap but are not identical. The purpose here is to focus on students, with the expectation that any resulting changes may benefit new professionals as well.

¹ See article III.A.3 of the SAA Constitution, where the eligibility "to hold office" is not stipulated explicitly for individual student members as it is in article III.A.1 (for individual full members), III.A.4 (for an institutional member's identified primary contact), and III.A.5 (for honorary members, to whom are extended "all the privileges of full individual members").

DISCUSSION

In considering the needs of student members of SAA and the organization's duly constituted student chapters (there are currently 34), some fundamental issues and questions should be considered. Many of these will require more focus and analysis than the Council will be able to give them. These issues and questions include, but are not limited to, the following:

Understanding the needs of student members:

1. Is it true that the Council (and perhaps SAA members more broadly) does not fully appreciate and understand the issues and concerns of student members? Were these effectively captured in the recent member survey? Are the needs of student members significantly different than those of other SAA members? If yes, are there other formal mechanisms that would help to surface them for Council in the future?
2. How does SAA's relationship with student chapters affect its relationship with individual student members? What is the ideal principal communication channel between student chapters and the Council?
3. What is the purpose of designating a student membership within SAA? For example, is it primarily to provide students a window into the profession and discounts on books, or is it to extend to them the full benefits of an SAA membership?
4. What role can and should archival educators play in conveying or representing student member needs?
5. Is there more that SAA could do to add value for students, between graduation and obtaining a first professional job, to assist in their transition into early career archivists, records managers, and other allied professionals?
6. Do student members feel disengaged from SAA's governance and leadership? If this is an issue of concern, can steps be taken to address it?

Representing student viewpoint and concerns:

1. Are SAA and the Council adequately addressing the needs of students? If not, what more could be done?
2. Would the Council benefit from hearing the point of view of a student member as part of its deliberations? If so, how could this best be achieved?
3. Could participant observer² status for a student member provide better guidance to the Council in its routine activities and deliberations? If so, would the benefits of this opportunity outweigh the costs? Or is it effective for the Council simply to seek student input through organizational channels only when it perceives that an issue may be of interest to or have an impact on SAA's student members?
4. The SAA Constitution does not allow student members to serve in elected offices. Should this be reconsidered?

² For a definition of *participant observation* see Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participant_observation, accessed 14 July 2012.

RECOMMENDATION

One logical way of addressing the issues raised in this Discussion Item would be to appoint a task force, with both student and governance representation, to explore and consider these issues. The following draft charge for a **Task Force on SAA Student Members and Student Chapters** is provided should the Council choose to take this option.

I. Purpose

The Task Force on SAA Student Members and Student Chapters will consider and analyze data sources, including those that SAA has already gathered or is gathering (e.g., Member Satisfaction Survey, Survey of SAA Student Chapters, SAA governance documents), with a focus specifically on student members. Additionally, the task force may, if it chooses, gather additional data or feedback from targeted groups within the Society. Guided by, but not limited to, questions identified in this charge, the task force will recommend to the Council specific actions that SAA can consider to improve engagement and communication with and support for student members, both while they are engaged in graduate education programs and during their transition to a first professional position.

II. Task Force Selection, Size, and Length of Term

The task force will comprise six members appointed by the SAA Vice President, three of whom represent the perspectives of student members and three the perspectives of SAA's governance infrastructure (SAA's officers³ should not be task force members). All task force members must be current members of SAA.

Governance perspective:

The SAA Council, Membership Committee, and Finance Committee will recommend candidates from their membership when so requested by the Vice President, who will appoint one task force member from each of these groups.

Student perspective:

The Students and New Archives Professionals (SNAP) Roundtable will recommend candidates from its membership for one member of the task force when so requested by the Vice President. Following an open call to current SAA student members by the Vice President, two additional task force members will be appointed.

One member representing the governance perspective and one the student perspective will serve as co-chairs of the task force, to be appointed to this role by the Vice President.

A member of the SAA staff will serve as a liaison to the task force to assist it in accomplishing its work.

The length of term for task force members will be through the end of February 2014, unless altered by Council.

³ See SAA Constitution, article V.A.1.

III. Reporting Procedures

The task force will provide interim reports on its progress in accordance with the deadline for submitting such reports for the January and May 2013 Council meetings. These interim reports may identify specific questions for Council consideration and feedback.

A draft final report and recommendations will be delivered in accordance with the deadline for submitting such reports for Council consideration at its August 2013 meeting. The final report and recommendations, addressing any feedback from the Council, will be delivered in accordance with the deadline for submitting such reports for the Council's January 2014 meeting.

IV. Duties and Responsibilities

Task force activities:

- The primary responsibility of the task force is analyzing existing data sources, considering pertinent issues and questions identified in this charge and others if relevant, and making concrete recommendations to the Council for possible action relating to SAA student members and student chapters.
- The task force will gather existing data sources concerning student members and services targeted for them, including surveys in which student member and/or student chapter input was identified, with the assistance of the SAA staff liaison, and analyze those data.
- A limited amount of additional, formal data gathering may be useful for the task force, but the Council does not envision this as a major focus of the task force's work.
- The task force may, if it chooses, use social media to solicit informal feedback from SAA members as it considers issues and questions and shapes its recommendations for Council consideration and action.
- The task force may make a request, in accordance with the timetable set forth by the Executive Director, for a lunchtime brown bag forum during the 2013 Annual Meeting in New Orleans to solicit in-person engagement with SAA members.

Issues and questions for task force consideration:

Understanding the needs of student members:

1. Is it true that the Council (and perhaps SAA members more broadly) does not fully appreciate and understand the issues and concerns of student members? Were these effectively captured in the recent member survey? Are the needs of student members significantly different than those of other SAA members? If yes, are there other formal mechanisms that would help to surface them for Council in the future?
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6. Do student members feel disengaged from SAA's governance and leadership? If this is an issue of concern, can steps be taken to address it?

Representing student viewpoint and concerns:

1. Are SAA and the Council adequately addressing the needs of students? If not, what more could be done?
2. Would the Council benefit from hearing the point of view of a student member as part of its deliberations? If so, how could this best be achieved?
3. Could participant observer⁴ status for a student member provide better guidance to the Council in its routine activities and deliberations? If so, would the benefits of this opportunity outweigh the costs? Or is it effective for the Council simply to seek student input through organizational channels only when it perceives that an issue may be of interest to or have an impact on SAA's student members?
4. The SAA Constitution does not allow student members to serve in elected offices. Should this be reconsidered?

V. Meetings

The task force will accomplish its work primarily through email, conference calls, Skype, and/or Google+ hangout sessions. Should it desire to do so, the task force may make a request, in accordance with the timeline set forth by the Executive Director, for conference hotel space for an unfunded, in-person meeting at the 2013 Annual Meeting.

⁴ For a definition of *participant observation* see Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participant_observation, accessed 14 July 2012.

Growth of SAA Student Membership 2002 December-2012 June (Quarterly)

Data compiled and figures prepared by Brian Doyle, July 2012.

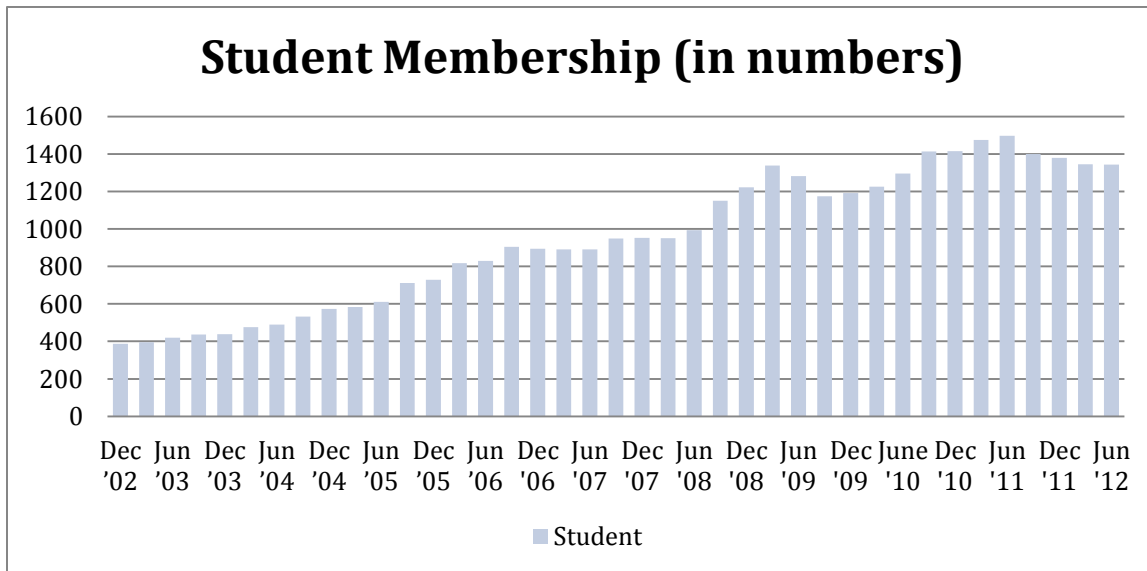


Figure 1. Student membership in numbers (quarterly).

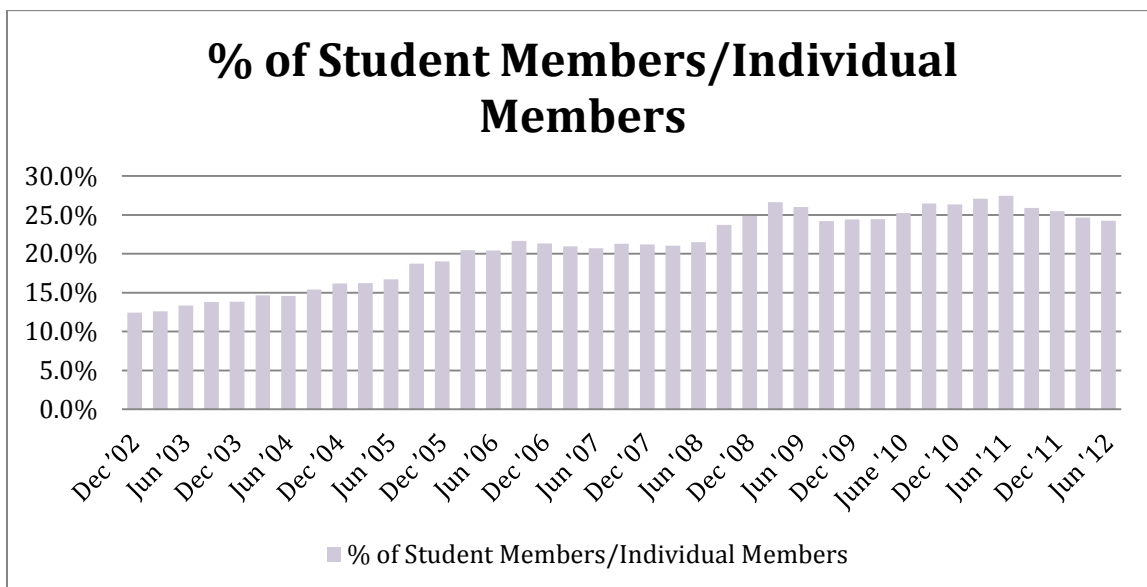


Figure 2. Student membership as a % of Individual membership (quarterly).