

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
August 17–18, 2015  
Renaissance Cleveland Hotel  
Cleveland, Ohio**

**Arrangement and Description Curriculum and Certificate Program  
(Prepared by Committee on Education Chair Shelby Sanett, Committee  
Vice Chair Jennifer Pelose, and Education Director Solveig De Sutter)**

**BACKGROUND**

At its May 2015 meeting, the SAA Council reviewed a recommendation from the Committee on Education (CoE) that SAA offer a curriculum and certificate program in Arrangement and Description (A&D) modeled on SAA’s highly successful Digital Archives Specialist (DAS) Curriculum and Certificate program.<sup>1</sup> The Council approved the curriculum component of the recommendation and asked for further analysis of the recommendation that the program include a certificate component.

**DISCUSSION**

The Council’s Strategic Plan 2014-2018, activity 2.1.1., states the following: “Refine SAA’s education program based on DAS model: Develop training plans for archivists, integrate courses across realms of archival knowledge, and continuously improve offerings and training materials based on attendee and instructor feedback.

With that priority in mind, the Committee on Education outlined for Council consideration in May 2015 an Arrangement and Description Curriculum and Certificate program. We firmly believe that providing a certificate is a critical component of an effective and successful program of this type. Discussed below is our rationale for the recommendation that SAA proceed with a certificate component to an Arrangement and Description program.

**Continuing Professional Development, Academic Programs, and Positioning of the SAA A&D Curriculum and Certificate Program**

Continuing professional development provides a way for professionals to continue to learn and develop throughout their careers, to keep their knowledge and skills up to date, and to ensure that they are able to work effectively. Importantly, continuing education also provides a means to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0515-III-E-A&DCurriculum.pdf>

*demonstrate* an ongoing commitment to learning. As noted by Gracy and Croft, continuing education "should not be considered a substitute for graduate education, but ideally, a supplement that builds upon a foundation already laid by LIS programs, and a path towards specialization. 'Continuing education' aims to close the gap in the knowledge base of LIS practitioners that cannot be filled satisfactorily by formal education programs or on-the-job training alone."<sup>2</sup> They add: "Continuing education is picking up much of the slack that LIS programs are creating, offering programs on multiple topics not given sufficient coverage at the graduate level."<sup>3</sup>

Every library and information science (LIS) graduate archival program teaches arrangement and description, often in an introductory course in which this topic area is "lumped in" with other basics of the profession. When covered in these courses, the focus tends to be narrow and chiefly on describing large manuscript or analog collections. The on-the-job reality, however, is that archival material is unique; collections can range from a single letter to an album of photographs to email. Expertise in arrangement and description is gained through exposure to different formats and standards – as addressed in the A&D curriculum.

In their discussion of preservation curriculum content, Gracy and Croft found that, "the data suggests that faculty continue to add topics in their courses in response to the increasing number of formats for which librarians and archivists are responsible." SAA's A&D track allows archivists to immerse themselves in a single topic at a time when the field is changing quickly, resulting in the need to cover more content than is provided in graduate archival programs. Our curriculum approach provides archivists with extended descriptive training to expand the skill set gained in graduate school, and it also can facilitate career shifts within the archival field (for example, moving from public services to processing/cataloging).

The data Gracy and Croft (2007) compiled<sup>4</sup> about audiences for continuing education courses suggests that it is not graduate students who take these courses, but professionals and paraprofessionals. Anecdotal information indicates that those who have attended SAA's A&D workshops are overwhelmingly professional archivists and paraprofessionals, many of whom are seeking to enhance their descriptive skills due to upcoming projects or needs.

Per the Council's request, we consulted with SAA Archival Educators Roundtable (AERT) Chair Cecilia Salvatore to discuss the certificate component of the A&D curriculum and potential partnerships to offer the workshops at AERT members' institution locations. After raising the issue with her colleagues at the Archival Educators Education Symposium, Ms. Salvatore reported that the consensus from that conversation "is that they would like to focus on graduate archival education only. So there is no feedback on this." Note that two members of the Committee on Education (Olliff and Sanett) are archival educators and AERT members.

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<sup>2</sup> Karen F. Gracy, Jean Ann Croft. "Quo Vadis, Preservation Education?: A Study of Current Trends and Future Needs in Continuing Education Programs." <http://journals.ala.org/lrts/article/view/5290/6446> (ALCTS vol 51[2]) 2007. (Accessed July 1, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> Karen F. Gracy, Jean Ann Croft. "Quo Vadis, Preservation Education?" <http://journals.ala.org/lrts/article/view/5447/6684> (ALCTS vol 50(4)) 2006. (Accessed July 1, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> Excerpted from the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA) Guide to Understanding Credentialing Concepts. [www.cvacert.org/documents/CredentialingConcepts-NOCA.pdf](http://www.cvacert.org/documents/CredentialingConcepts-NOCA.pdf) (Accessed June 22, 2015)

## Certificate Versus Certification, or Why Offer a Certificate Program?

A certificate program is not equivalent to certification!

A *certificate program* is a training program on a specialized topic for which participants receive a certificate after completing courses with specific focus and passing an assessment instrument. The certificate results from an educational process and is different than a degree-granting program. Certificate programs provide an incentive to work toward a tangible goal in an organized way within a designated time frame.<sup>5</sup>

*Certification* is the process by which an entity grants recognition and use of a credential to an individual after verifying that s/he has met pre-determined and standardized criteria. Certification results from an assessment process, indicates mastery/competency measured against a set of standards, and typically results in a designation.<sup>6</sup>

CoE firmly believes that a certificate program structured per our plan provides a convenient and easy way for prospective students to identify their needs and achieve their professional goals. They will be able to come away with something tangible that is not just beneficial for their professional growth but can be parlayed into recognition by their employers and salary increases. Research<sup>7</sup> conducted at UCLA on hiring managers' perceptions of postsecondary certificate programs found that hiring managers:

- View certificate programs favorably when listed on an applicant's résumé in addition to a relevant degree and experience.
- Consider the reputation of the certificate program provider as part of the value of the certificate.
- Acknowledge many disciplines (e.g., information systems programming, accounting) have well recognized industry-specific certificate programs.
- Believe completion of a certificate program indicates an applicant's willingness to stay current in the field, or as one manager said, "a person who will go the extra mile."

The Academy of Certified Archivists has indicated an interest in partnering with SAA to offer A&D courses. ACA leaders, the current and incoming chairs of the CoE, and De Sutter are scheduled to discuss partnership possibilities on an August 3 conference call. We will provide a report on the conversation at the August Council meeting.

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<sup>5</sup> Excerpted from the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA) Guide to Understanding Credentialing Concepts. [www.cvacert.org/documents/CredentialingConcepts-NOCA.pdf](http://www.cvacert.org/documents/CredentialingConcepts-NOCA.pdf) (Accessed June 22, 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Excerpted from Dean Cathy Sandeen article on Value of Certificates <https://cathysandeen.wordpress.com/2012/09/24/value-of-certificates-by-dean-cathy-sandeen/> (Accessed June 22, 2015)

<sup>7</sup> Excerpted from Dean Cathy Sandeen article on Value of Certificates <https://cathysandeen.wordpress.com/2012/09/24/value-of-certificates-by-dean-cathy-sandeen/> (Accessed June 22, 2015)

## Conclusion

Professional organizations like SAA should not only provide high-quality continuing education to their members and others, but package this education in a way that is attractive to current and potential employers.

Like the DAS certificate program, the A&D track/certificate program would provide a credential to archivists wishing to expand their descriptive skills and advance professionally. The certificate would be a benchmark for achievement in archival description, a part of the field that requires continuous updates of skills and knowledge of standards.

A survey of DAS certificate holders in November 2014 as well as anecdotal communication from them indicate that completing the requirements of the program and receiving the certificate have often resulted in an increase in salary and a promotion. There is every reason to expect that an A&D certificate will give candidates a leg up in the competitive processing/cataloging job market.

CoE believes that a certificate is an appropriate and necessary component of the A&D program and is consistent with the precedent set by the successful DAS program. Without a certificate component to help focus students on a goal and ensure a tangible result, the staff is forecasting the need to reduce revenue projections significantly.

## RECOMMENDATION

**THAT the SAA Committee on Education proceed with implementation of an Arrangement and Description program that includes a certificate component.**

**Support Statement:** Professional organizations like SAA should not only provide high-quality continuing education to their members and others, but package this education in a way that is attractive to current and potential employers. Like the highly successful DAS certificate program, the A&D track/certificate program would provide a credential to archivists wishing to expand their descriptive skills and advance professionally. The certificate would be a benchmark for achievement in archival description, a part of the field that requires continuous updates of skills and knowledge of standards.

**Relation to Strategic Goals:** The proposal addresses Goal 2.1. “Provide content, via education and publications, that reflects the latest thinking and best practices in the field” and responds directly to Activity 2.1.1., “Refine SAA’s entire education program based on the DAS model: Develop training plans for archivists, integrate courses across archival realms of knowledge, and continuously improve offerings and training materials based on attendee and instructor feedback.”

**Fiscal Impact:** The Council-adopted budget for FY16 presupposes a certificate component to the new Arrangement and Description program. The staff believes that revenues will be affected significantly without the incentive of a certificate.