

**Society of American Archivists
Council Conference Call
October 14, 2019
3:00 – 5:00 pm EST**

Report: Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment
(Prepared by Paul Conway and Jennifer King, Co-chairs)

We write to provide a progress report on the formation, initial activities, and plan for the year ahead for the SAA Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment (CORDA).

Formation and Initial Activities

The SAA Council formed CORDA in November 2018, appointed the co-chairs in January 2019, and completed the committee appointments in March 2019. The co-chairs have been in regular contact with each other since the committee formed. CORDA itself has met monthly via the BlueJeans conferencing service, with documented meetings in April, May, June, and July.

Over the course of the monthly meetings, conference call participants reviewed the work of TF-CORDE, examined and embraced the CORDA charge, and established the broad outlines of a work plan for the coming year. Accomplishments include the following:

Co-chair Paul Conway arranged for access by the committee to an online Box repository to hold the committee's working documents. Although the Box repository is restricted to CORDA members, the committee maintains a publicly accessible [microsite](#) through SAA. The committee makes meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and brief status reports available through the microsite.

The committee established a microsite on the SAA website and obtained a dedicated email address: corda@archivists.org.

The committee completed the following outreach and data gathering activities:

- Published a [Column announcing CORDA](#) in the May/June 2019 issue of *Archival Outlook*.
- Presented a Research Forum session at the 2019 SAA Annual Meeting
- Emailed members of the Regional Archival Associations Consortium (RAAC) to gather feedback on the following questions:
 - o What tools do archivists need to perform better at their jobs? What data do they need to better understand the professional landscape?
 - o What training do they need in conducting and assessing practical research?
 - o Would they like to see instruments for institutional self-assessment?

- Reached out by email to SAA leadership for help in identifying operational and research data, data-gathering instruments, or reports on findings in any form collected by SAA committees or sections.
- Sponsored a noontime Open Forum at the 2019 SAA Annual Meeting on Sunday, August 4.

In addition, the Committee conducted research into data repositories with which SAA might collaborate, leading to initial interest in Dataverse and a collaboration with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Committee Membership

The co-chairs formally requested the addition of Sarah Pratt, incoming faculty member at the Simmons Graduate School of Library and Information Science, who was appointed. Committee members are:

2019-2020

Paul Conway (co-chair)
Amanda Hawk
Courtney Dean

2019-2021

Sarah Buchanan
Cristina Horak
Sarah Pratt
Dennis Meissner (liaison to A*CENSUS II Task Force)

2019-2022

Chris Marino
Erin Paschall Stoddart
Jennifer King (co-chair)

2019 SAA Annual Meeting

The SAA Annual Meeting in Austin provided CORDA with its first in-person committee meeting, affirming committee membership and commitments and signaling significant forward momentum.

The co-chairs presented a well-received talk at the SAA Research Forum. The leaders of the Research Forum are particularly pleased with the formation of CORDA. They have expressed a strong desire to coordinate the communication and training activities that we envision with the work of the Research Forum. For example, Nance McGovern reminded the committee of her long-standing expectation that SAA would provide training on research methods for SAA members. CORDA will pursue a strengthened connection with Nance McGovern and the work of the Research Forum.

Co-chair Paul Conway used the Research Forum opportunity to develop a draft position paper on the role that research, assessment, and evaluation play in the context of the archival profession. He drew on the long history of evaluation efforts in the Society and called for a reinvigoration of program evaluation.

We expect that CORDA will discuss the position paper and help improve it for publication.

CORDA held its first annual committee meeting in Austin. The meeting was energizing for the committee and for the small number of guests who attended. The business meeting resulted in a first-year plan of action centered around three clusters of activities: 1) developing a pilot data repository; 2) preparing a workshop on research methods for next year's annual meeting; and 3) identifying the variety of datasets, data-gathering instruments, and reports appropriate for assembling in a repository and identifying gaps in the coverage of important archival issues.

The attached minutes from the committee meeting provide more detail on the action plan. The minutes also are available via the CORDA microsite:

<https://www2.archivists.org/groups/committee-on-research-data-and-assessment>.

CORDA hosted an Open Forum for SAA Annual Meeting attendees on Sunday, August 4, at 12:00 pm. The meeting was well attended (ca. 40 people) and elicited a lot of good conversation and good ideas regarding all three of the committee's priority actions.

Activities through the SAA 2020 Annual Meeting in Chicago

CORDA will continue to meet monthly by videoconference. We wish to draw attention to the following priority list of activities that we hope will culminate in a number of activities at the 2020 SAA Annual Meeting.

1. CORDA will open communication with the Odum Institute at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Our goal is to develop a pilot instance of the Dataverse repository platform and ingest a handful of pre-existing datasets, including data from the 2004 A*CENSUS survey. One of the principal purposes of the pilot is to explore the costs (technology, storage space, tech support, admin support) of building a robust data repository.
2. We will propose, plan, and implement a pre-conference workshop on data research methods for the Chicago 2020 meeting. The workshop will draw on ideas developed by the Research Forum a decade ago, but will focus on the emergent ideas for assessment and evaluation of archivists, archival programs, the users of archives, and the impact of archives worked out through CORDA deliberations.
3. We will establish a good working relationship with the Committee on Education and the Archival Educators Section in order to make sure that CORDA training activities are coordinated with the priorities of these two groups.

4. We will conduct aggressive outreach activities with SAA organized groups, regional archival associations, and other interested parties to identify existing datasets that are appropriate for inclusion in an SAA-hosted data repository. CORDA will accompany this “shaking the tree” activity with a gap analysis and the development of tiered priorities for soliciting datasets. Toward this end, CORDA will build on the work of TF-CORDE’s proposed research agenda and lay the groundwork for an assessment and evaluation agenda for the profession.

CORDA is gratified by the initial enthusiasm for its work from the Council and SAA members. We appreciate the importance of this effort for the profession and we look forward to a successful and productive year ahead.

CORDA Business Meeting

Friday 8/2/2019

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

JW Marriott Austin, Level 2, Room 211

MINUTES

Present:

Paul Conway, co-chair

Jennifer Gunter King, co-chair

Sarah Buchanan (by videoconference) Amanda Hawk

Dennis Meissner

Sarah Pratt (by videoconference)

Ricky Punzalan (Council liaison)

Erin Passehl Stoddart

Guests:

Nancy Beaumont (SAA Executive Director, *ex officio*)

Meredith Evans (SAA Vice President)

Kris Kiesling (University of Minnesota)

Lauren Reed (Apple)

Rachel Walton (Rollins College)

Regrets:

Courtney Dean (University of California Los Angeles)

Cristina Horak (Federal Reserve, Dallas)

Chris Marino (University of California Berkeley)

Welcome and Ice Breaker

Meeting attendees introduced themselves and briefly addressed the question: “As a member of CORDA and as an archivist, what does research, data and assessment mean to you?”

A BlueJeans conference call was initiated to provide remote attendance by Sarah Buchanan and Sarah Pratt. The connection worked well throughout the meeting.

Research Forum Update and Framing

Conway summarized the key ideas of his planned briefing at the SAA Research Forum later that day. The critical idea is to assert that “research” should not be principal metaphor (or preferred term) for the critical inquiry that archivists do (and have done historically) to understand the nature of the archival profession, who we are, what we do, and what impact archives and archivists have on people and society more generally. He plans to call for revisiting, reviving, and updating the framework of institutional evaluation that SAA championed in the 1980s, but accounting for an enhanced understanding of archives in contemporary society.

The slides from the Research Forum have been uploaded to the CORDA [microsite](#).

King briefed the meeting on the agenda and on the major outcomes expected, outlining the major areas of CORDA work, and especially the establishment of working teams and developing their agendas for the year to come. The major CORDA initiatives include a data repository, training and education, assessment and evaluation.

Agenda Discussion: Data Repository

Meeting participants had a stimulating and productive discussion of the critical need to establish a data repository. The attending committee members agreed on the advisability of implementing a pilot data repository with a handful of high value datasets in time for the SAA annual meeting in 2020. The repository would include some combination of structured datasets, instruments used to gather data, and reports generated about the data.

There is a strong consensus among CORDA members that the Dataverse platform is appropriate for this pilot. Dataverse is an open source repository platform developed at Harvard University and now deployed by at least 47 institutions on an international basis. The Odum Institute at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill is a major implementation site that also offers space and support for small demonstration projects.

Participants identified a variety of implementation decisions to make in the process of establishing a pilot project or evaluating the pilot, including the scope of the repository's collections; functional requirements for configuration, ingest, and end user tools; storage space and costs; technical and management support requirements; and policy development.

Participants discussed ways to think about the priorities for dataset acquisition. A preliminary model evolved from this discussion that prioritizes datasets of profession-wide value; followed by datasets created by SAA sections, task forces, and committees (past and present); followed by datasets from regional archival organizations; followed by other relevant and high-quality datasets from other sources, including archival organizations, scholars, and individual SAA members.

Based on this discussion, CORDA established the following priority for the coming year:

1. Develop a pilot implementation of a data repository
 - a. Negotiate an agreement with the Odum Institute at UNC Chapel Hill to create a prototype instance on the Dataverse platform. If Odum cannot accommodate CORDA in the short run, explore opportunities for building a pilot on another Dataverse instance.
 - b. Populate the pilot repository with five or more datasets (and documentation), beginning with the data from A*CENSUS (2004), currently held by the University of Michigan. Other datasets will be identified from the results of ongoing outreach activities, but should include a representative example of datasets from the four priority areas identified above.
2. Establish a CORDA sub-committee to carry forward the work of repository

development. (CORDA Repository Subcommittee members: Erin Paschel Stoddart, Sarah Pratt, Rachel Walton [volunteer]). Cal Lee will provide appropriate liaison with the Odum Institute.)

Agenda Discussion: Training and Education

The participants discussed the need for and scope of training to support the reuse of data in a repository, along with broader continuing professional education on assessment and evaluation research methods. The group agreed that such needs are long-term in nature and necessarily involve activities in a variety of modalities (online tutorials, webinars, in-person workshops, pamphlets and manuals, etc.). The committee discussion emphasized that the most important need is training on the reuse of the data in a pilot repository (or similar datasets) to investigate questions and issues that the original data may not have been designed to address.

Based on this discussion, CORDA established the following priorities for the coming year.

1. Set up mechanisms to teach and train assessment and evaluation activities.
2. Establish connection with the Committee on Education. Erin Faulder is chair, Ricky Punzalan is SAA Council liaison.
3. Archival Educators – the Committee on Education manages graduate education guidelines; the Archival Educators Section is the group of people who are teaching in the area. There is some overlap between the two groups.
4. What is realistic to accomplish in one year?
 - a. Preconference workshop in Year 1.
 - b. Open the door with Committee on Education and Task Force.
 - c. Session on research for the profession, possibly in association with the SAA Research Forum.
5. The big numbers/facts and figures website at SAA to demonstrate value and impact of archives in the world.

(CORDA Training and Education Subcommittee members: Paul Conway, Sarah Buchanan, Courtney Dean, and Sarah Pratt.)

Agenda Discussion: Assessment and Evaluation

The participants had a wide-ranging discussion of priorities and a way forward for establishing priorities for assessment and evaluation activities in a professional context, some of which may be characterized as research, others as straightforward data gathering and analysis. The group agreed that much work is needed to establish a framework and priorities that are appropriate and reasonable for an SAA committee to champion and support.

The participants discussed an ambitious but possibly phased set of priorities for establishing an evaluation and assessment agenda:

1. “Shake the tree” within the archival profession to identify datasets, research instruments, and gray literature related to professional archival issues. CORDA has

- already initiated this work through outreach correspondence with SAA leaders and RAAC organizations.
2. Identify what is relevant, normalized.
 3. Separate out what is no longer relevant.
 4. Organize into:
 - Data sets (A*CENSUS + others to be identified)
 - Data-gathering instruments
 - White papers and reports
 5. Assess and conduct a gap analysis to identify research needs, and develop a process for analysis that will yield research priorities. The gap analysis will prepare CORDA to establish priorities that will become the CORDA Research Agenda.
 6. Conduct a review of the SAA Facts & Figures website to determine ways to enhance the usefulness of that website and develop a plan to update the information.

(CORDA Assessment and Evaluation Subcommittee members: Amanda Hawk, Cristina Horak, Courtney Dean, Sarah Buchanan, Chris Marino, Jennifer Gunter King, and Dennis Meissner)

CORDA will continue to hold monthly meetings and the subcommittees will report to the entire committee at that time.

TF-CORDE Research Agenda

The committee began with the agreement that the Assessment and Evaluation Subcommittee will conduct a gap analysis of available research and identified research needs. The committee reviewed the TF-CORDE report and proposed Research Agenda. Attendees discussed briefly the structure and content of the Research Agenda that the TF-CORDE developed for its report. Sarah Buchanan (a member of the Task Force) briefed the meeting on the origins, structure, and purpose of the Research Agenda. CORDA agreed to fold the Research Agenda developed in 2018 into the work of the Assessment and Evaluation team. Sarah Buchanan agreed to deposit background materials into the CORDA working files.

CORDA Open Forum

The meeting wrapped up with a brief discussion of the structure of the Open Forum for SAA meeting attendees scheduled for Sunday, August 4, at noon. CORDA members recommended focusing most of the 75-minute session on feedback from Forum attendees. The co-chairs agreed to put together a brief presentation on the CORDA charge and on the outcomes of the committee's meeting.

The slides and a brief report on the Open Forum will be uploaded to the CORDA microsite.