

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
November 14–16, 2016  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Reconvene ALA/SAA Working Group on Joint Statement on  
Access to Research Materials in  
Archives and Special Collections Libraries  
(Prepared by SAA Committee on Public Policy)**

**BACKGROUND**

The original American Library Association (ALA)/SAA Joint Statement on Access to Original Research Materials in Libraries, Archives, and Manuscript Repositories was developed jointly in 1978 by the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and the SAA Committee on Reference and Access Policies. In response to an ACRL request for periodic review, RBMS established a Committee on Access Guidelines in 1993. This committee prepared an initial revision and then referred the document to the ALA/SAA Joint Committee in 1994. A final compilation was prepared by a working group appointed by the Joint Committee.

In 2006, an RBMS committee was created to prepare an initial revision mandated by ALA standards policies. When that draft was brought to SAA's attention, SAA President Mark Greene, in October 2007, charged a new joint task force with preparing a statement for Council's consideration that addressed as comprehensively as possible the issues and policies related to researcher access to archives and manuscripts collections. According to the task force report, minor revisions were made to the 2006 RBMS draft, which was publicized widely within SAA. The Council considered a draft presented to its February 2009 meeting, asked for revisions, and adopted the current statement<sup>1</sup> at its June 2009 meeting.

**DISCUSSION**

At its August 2016 meeting the Committee on Public Policy (COPP) discussed the need to update the existing language and suggested that the statement should be revised in two areas:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www2.archivists.org/statements/alasaa-joint-statement-on-access-to-research-materials-in-archives-and-special-collection/>

**1. Born-Digital Materials:** The last revision of the Joint Statement (2009) was approved prior to the growth of the use of digital forensics software in cultural heritage institutions (see, for example, *Digital Forensics and Born-Digital Content in Cultural Heritage Collections* by Kirschenbaum, Ovenden, and Redwine, 2010<sup>2</sup>) and the development of the revised OAI reference model (2012). Software used by creators often collects additional information about the document without the creator being aware of its collection. This information can be retrieved by the use of digital forensics software. The Committee suggests that input on the Joint Statement be collected from individuals who are familiar with the capture of born-digital documents to ensure that the general tenets of the Joint Statement are revised to adapt to an increasingly digital world.

**2. Existence of Research Materials:** Point 2, regarding Intellectual Accessibility, states that a repository “should inform researchers...of the collections in its custody...The existence of original research materials should be reported, even if they are not fully accessible.” However, Point 1 on Responsibility states that a repository “should not...conceal the existence of any body of materials...unless required to do so by law, institutional access policy, or donor or purchase stipulation.” This last qualifying phrase established a seemingly contradictory standard wherein legal, institutional, or donor restrictions could eclipse a researcher’s right to basic knowledge about the existence of materials as stipulated in Point 2. COPP suggests that the Joint Statement be revised to clarify this issue.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT SAA convene a working group with the American Library Association to revise and update the Joint Statement on Access to Research Materials in Archives and Special Collections Libraries.**

**Support Statement:** This recommendation supports SAA’s Public Policy Agenda by seeking to update its position in relation to making accessible evidence of the diverse and complex elements of the human experience and preserving historical documentation for the next generation. Of particular note is the need to address 1) the capture of born-digital documents and 2) the apparently contradictory standard wherein legal, institutional, or donor restrictions could eclipse a researcher’s right to basic knowledge about the existence of materials.

**Impact on Strategic Priorities:** Addresses Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists, Strategy 1.1 Provide leadership in promoting the value of archives and archivists to institutions, communities, and society, and Strategy 1.3. Provide leadership in ensuring the completeness, diversity, and accessibility of the historical record.

**Fiscal Impact:** None, provided that no travel support is needed for working group members.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub149/pub149.pdf>