

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
November 5-7, 2017
Chicago, Illinois**

**Final Report: 2017 Program Committee
(Prepared by Terry Baxter)**

2017 Program Committee Members: Natalie Baur, Terry Baxter (chair), Jim Gerenscer, Bob Horton, Stephanie Kays, Christian Kelleher, Jessica Lacher-Feldman, Donna McCrea, Jennifer Meehan, Jennifer O'Neal, Meg Tuomala, and Olga Virakhovskaya.

Liberated Archive Forum Subcommittee: Natalie Baur, Itza Carbajal, Jarrett Drake, and Jennifer O'Neal.

Local Steering Committee: Alicia Byrd (Multnomah County Library), David Lewis (Ethnohistory Research), Todd Mayberry (Oregon Heritage Commission), and Teressa Raiford (Don't Shoot PDX), Robin Will (GLAPN).

As the list above indicates, the program for the 2017 SAA Annual Meeting was the product of a number of bright minds and strong hearts and I want to thank all of these comrades for the dedicated and difficult work put in to make the 2017 SAA Annual Meeting a success. Every person on these lists opened up to challenge themselves and each other and I think the program reflects that.

I would also like to publicly thank Nance McGovern for the opportunity to build this program. When I approached her initially with some murky ideas, she was open to an evolving conception of the program and to letting it develop without much guidance. I appreciate the courage it took to move forward without a clear roadmap and the trust she had in the committee to craft something new.

Educational Sessions and Posters

The Program Committee met in person in Chicago to select educational and poster sessions on January 9-11, 2017. There were 160 session proposals (to fill 50 available slots) and 36 poster proposals. The committee decided to leave a handful of the available slots open for pop-up session proposals. The selection process appeared daunting given these numbers, but the selection process allowed for deliberation and discussion of sessions and for the straightforward selection of the final program.

There were several processes that helped make the selection a success. The spreadsheet used to rank proposals is an efficient way for each committee member to perform an individual evaluation of each proposal and to aggregate those evaluations in ways that enhanced the committee's ability to discuss session rankings, subject and proposer diversity, and thematic coherence. SAA staff were also instrumental in presenting spreadsheet data in a number of ways (even on the fly) to assist committee members in their work.

It was also helpful to have the program chair attend the previous year's program committee meeting. Observing the process, seeing how the 2016 chairs managed the meeting, and gaining familiarity with the evaluation spreadsheet were invaluable to keeping the 2017 meeting focused and on schedule. Cheryl and Barbara were also generous with their time and expertise as I chatted with them several times during the process for advice.

Liberated Archive Forum

This part of the program development was the most difficult. There were a number of things that influenced the forum's development—two standing out to me in particular. The content and structure of the forum differed from previous SAA educational opportunities and parts of it were unfamiliar to most of us on the Program Committee. Second, there were a number of moving parts in the Forum's development. In addition to the Program Committee, there was a Forum subcommittee and a steering committee comprised of Portland community members. All of these groups did both independent and collaborative work. While I think that the process was sometimes frustrating for all involved, I also think that the end result was better for having all three groups and their respective roles involved in creating the final product.

The Forum subcommittee was given a loose charge to come up with the basic design for the Forum. They were given the freedom to develop this concept without much intervention from SAA. They passed this concept on to the Program Committee which, with the assistance of the local steering committee, fleshed out the content, located speakers, and selected the 10 discussion sessions that were used to build the day's conversations. The steering committee was essential in making sure that the Forum had direct and useful impact on Portland communities.

Observations

The following observations are made with the hope that future committees can build on the successes of the 2017 program.

I was not very familiar with the role of posters presentations in SAA's educational programming. Several committee members pointed out that they are standard presentation methods in other disciplines and that there is an expectation of peer review for them. I do not believe that we have very effective criteria for choosing poster sessions and generally just chose all posters that weren't egregiously incomprehensible. My understanding from staff is that poster use and evaluation is an evolving process. For posters to be seen on par with session presentation, I believe that submitter and the Program Committee need clearer evaluation and acceptance criteria.

One of the complaints I heard from both SAA members and community members is that the Forum was not effectively advertised to Portland communities. I think that is a valid critique. One problem was that the steering committee was smaller than it could have been. Much of the community advertising was via steering committee members, and while they had good reach within their communities, there were many communities that did not get information. I also thought we started advertising to communities later than we should have, and I don't think we thought broadly enough when looking at target communities.

The tension between having fifty educational sessions and the forum versus having seventy educational sessions was clear. I understand the concern of members needing to justify their attendance to their institution. I also understand the frustration of trying to get a proposals accepted in 30% fewer slots. But I also heard a lot of positive response to the new format and content. The relationship between archives, archivists, and communities is key to the future of the archival endeavor. I would encourage future program committees to continue to interrogate that dynamic with other innovations.

One of the ways to attract community members to an event like the Forum is to offer entertainment. The committee attempted to do both but was not successful on either front. There were fruitful connections made, though, and I'd encourage future program committees to investigate ways to connect with communities in this way. I'd be happy to discuss specifics with interested parties.