

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
November 10, 12, 2021
Virtual Meeting**

**Final Report: 2021 Annual Meeting Program Committee
(Prepared by Co-Chairs Pam Hackbart-Dean and Tomaro Taylor)**

2021 Program Committee members: Sharmila Bhatia, Hillary Bober, Mary Jo Fairchild, Pam Hackbart-Dean (co-chair), Steve Hausfeld, Kathleen Hertel-Baker, Dan Noonan, Michelle Peralta, Katie Rudolph, Carrie Schwier, Tomaro Taylor (co-chair), and Laura Uglean-Jackson.

The committee would like to acknowledge and thank Nancy Beaumont, Felicia Owens, Matt Black, and Carlos Salgado for their tremendous assistance, counsel, and hard work. We couldn't have done this without you!!

Conference Theme and Call for Proposals

The Program Committee met virtually in September 2020 to determine the theme of the *ARCHIVES*RECORDS 2021* Annual Meeting. The theme “Together/Apart” was selected to explore changes in the profession caused by the pandemic and social unrest. A Call for Proposals was issued for education proposals and poster sessions on November 10, 2020, with a deadline of January 13, 2021. At the time the Call was sent, it was uncertain if the conference meeting would be held fully virtual or a hybrid.

Program proposers were encouraged to develop educational sessions that went beyond case study scenarios to express and evaluate how the events of 2020–2021 were reshaping the archival profession. The committee felt the events of the past year had required us to reevaluate the work that we do as archivists, the ways in which we carried out that work, and how we promoted the value of our work—both together and apart. We also asked for the profession to question itself, challenge the status quo, and work towards a more inclusive and just world by focusing on our collective professional identity.

Education Sessions and Posters

In February 2021, the Program Committee again met virtually to engage in thoughtful discussions on individual session and poster proposals. We accepted proposals that demonstrated an eye toward SAA's diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. A total of 110 session proposals and 23 poster proposals were received by the deadline. The entire committee selected 30 education sessions and 18 posters. The Committee did not review graduate student session and poster proposals.

Sessions were reviewed carefully to ensure that the program provided a balance of session topics and industries with a focus on diversity and inclusivity. At the end of the meeting, the Program Committee felt confident that we had developed a strong program that would have broad appeal with minimal situations in which sessions of similar topics or industries would compete, and that our objectives to build a more inclusive and open annual meeting were honored.

Conference Experience

The 2021 SAA Annual Meeting had 2055 registered attendees. Twenty on-demand education sessions were released for immediate viewing by registered conference attendees on July 26. Ten scheduled sessions occurred live between Wednesday, August 4, and Friday, August 6. In addition to the education sessions and poster sessions selected by the Program Committee, the conference offered a full range of opportunities, including a keynote speaker, the Research Forum, section and committee meetings, the annual business meeting, and conversation lounges for informal discussions.

The online experience was organized and scheduled to provide a high-quality presentation with appropriate introductory content, scheduling, and follow-up. In addition, the online experience was organized to accommodate the multiple time zones of attendees. We hope this hybrid format of scheduled and on-demand sessions made available the greatest possible number of educational opportunities for our colleagues, accommodated a variety of work and life schedules, and reduced the ever-present risk of “Zoom fatigue.” Most of all, we hope this Annual Meeting engendered a sense of togetherness online even while we remained physically apart.

The conference co-chairs authored an article about the 2021 Annual Meeting for the May/June 2021 issue of *Archival Outlook* to encourage conference participation and registration. Sharmila Bhatia developed an article, “Crafting Your Session Proposal for SAA’s Annual Meeting,” that will appear in the September/October 2021 issue of *Archival Outlook*.

Observations and Feedback

The key take-away from this annual conference experience is that it worked—and worked well. The initial feedback from participants indicates that 87% of attendees rated the education sessions good, very good, or excellent. Fewer than 1% rated the sessions as poor.

General feedback from attendees was generally positive and mostly focused on the virtual aspect of the conference. This may be of interest if the virtual or hybrid conference style is used for next year. These themes were:

- Confusion over the two platforms (Zoom and Pathable), though there was positive feedback about the ability to chat;
- Interest for longer Q&A blocks of time;
- A desire for more “live” content; and
- Difficulty viewing presenter slides because of the large logo/border.

Feedback from one of our education session proposers:

“I wanted to share my thoughts on the recording of conference sessions for this year's (and last year's) conference. Although I appreciate that virtual conferences can be frustrating, prone to technical errors and mishaps such as children and pets blundering into sessions, I feel recording all conference sessions can also have some unfortunate effects. It creates a powerful disincentive to explore topics in a preliminary way, since any comments made, or conclusions drawn in the course of a session will be tied to your name in a highly visible professional forum for years to come. It raises the stakes of exploring topics while early in the research process, where it is so easy to conclude that data may later disprove. Even more so for sensitive topics where participants may not feel comfortable being completely frank in a forum that is tied to their professional identity. This concern weighed heavily in the discussions that led to my group withdrawing our panel for this year, and I can well imagine it would affect the kind of topics other panelists feel comfortable addressing in this forum as well.

“I wanted to share this as I would want to know if I were organizing the conference, that this seemingly convenient and helpful method of making sessions available may actually be shaping the information participants feel comfortable sharing. In future conferences it may be worth having pre-recording as one, but not the only, option for sessions.”

Final Comments

The 2021 Annual Meeting was held as an all-virtual conference. In the future, should the SAA Council decide that future conferences will be entirely online, making the decision sooner would give even more time to bring together an excellent conference. We realize there was a contract discussion with the Anaheim, California, location involved, but it did delay our request for proposals for a few months. At the same time, we encourage continued reliance on a clear call for proposals and organization of a program committee that can bring perspectives representing a variety of topics and industry areas.

Additionally, it would be beneficial for the 2022 Program Committee to have more time to discuss the program proposals—we only met twice (3 hours each time) virtually for 6 hours total. It felt rushed and we did not accomplish everything on the agenda. This was only for accepting 30 proposals. If more sessions are allowed, this time frame would not work.