Society of American
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Hybrid Meeting (Chicago, IL)

Annual Report: 2023 Program Committee
(Prepared by: Shannon O'Neill and María A. Matienzo, co-chairs)

2023 Program Committee Members: Cara Bertram, Caroline Daniels, Marcella Huggard, Warren Lambert, Jennifer Langford, Julia Larson, María A. Matienzo (co-chair), Lopez Matthews, Katherine McBrien, Katie McCormick, Catherine Newsome, Elizabeth Nosari, Shannon O'Neill (co-chair), Gina Rappaport, Miriam Sappington.

The Program Committee extends its gratitude to all of the SAA staff who supported us in creating a successful 2023 Annual Meeting. Thank you, Carlos Salgado, Michael Santiago, Rana Salzmann, and Jacqualine Price Osafo. We also recognize and give thanks to Felicia Owens who guided us through many of our initial conversations.

Conference Theme and Call for Proposals

In September of 2022, Program Committee co-chairs, Shannon O'Neill and María Matienzo, met with SAA staff to discuss responsibilities, roles, and timelines for the Committee. Our first meeting as a full Committee occurred on October 3rd, where we began brainstorming ideas toward a theme that would shape our call for proposals. We discussed a desire to highlight collaboration in the field and a desire for sessions that would allow more space for in-depth engagement. María and Shannon synthesized these points into a draft call for proposals, and feedback was solicited through the document. The CFP was distributed on October 26.

Our call for proposal asked participants to respond to the following:

> *Our worlds, and our profession, have been reshaped not just by ongoing public health crises, but by racial and gender violence, climate disasters, political stratification, and economic upheavals. In many ways we cannot return to what was before, and perhaps—in some ways—we should not desire this return. As we reflect on the reshaping of our lives and work, we are called to ask: what are we building together? In refusing to accept the "new norm," how can we envision our profession differently? How can the shifts in archives—not just over the last*

two years, but over the last decade—make space for us to examine and radically redefine our approaches to infrastructure, labor, and sustainability (both in terms of archival work, but also in terms of sustaining our own well-being)? We need one another now more than ever.

Commons are understood to be natural, cultural, or informational resources accessible by all members of a society. In many cases, these commons are also governed or managed by their users. While the practice originates historically as the holding of communal land, we want to explore the ways in which archives, and archival work, can be viewed as a form of commons. In a profession that has become increasingly specialized, the theme of this year's conference asks us to consider the ways in which our work as archivists may be distinct, yet intertwined—with one another, with the communities with whom we collaborate, and with allied and adjacent professional fields. Where are these places of overlap, intersection, mutuality, and relation? How do we, or can we, define our work as relational? This year's conference seeks to amplify work that is cooperative, collective, and interdependent. What is common in our work, and how do we shift our work toward cooperation and the commons?

For the 2023 Annual Meeting, the Program Committee also elected to add a new session type, a three-hour unconference session, intended for highly participatory sessions. We chose to include this session type based on the theme described by the call for proposals and based on experience with unconferences and participatory sessions at past Annual Meetings. While there has been an increasing trend of participatory sessions at the Annual Meeting over several years, participants and facilitators are often limited in depth given time constraints. Our intent was to build on these past efforts, most notably including the Liberated Archives Forum at the 2017 Annual Meeting in Portland.

Education Sessions and Posters
The committee met for three days in late January 2023 to review and discuss the proposals we received. In total we received a total of 140 proposals (118 education session proposals and 22 poster proposals). From these 140 proposals, we accepted 40 proposals. This made this year's selection challenging as we only had the opportunity to choose 28% of the proposals we received.

The Program Committee worked with SAA staff and our liaisons to CoSA to ensure the program was balanced to represent various facets of the archives field in terms of both presenters and topics and to reduce scheduling conflicts between sessions with similar topics or intended audiences. We believe that we prepared a well-balanced program that also thoroughly addressed the proposed theme. This was also reflected by our decision to add a small number of

conversation lounges and forums to the program. We did not solicit pop-up session proposals for this year.

Each session block offered up to five or six potential sessions, depending on whether an unconference was scheduled in a given block: 1 hybrid session, 3 in-person only sessions, 1 virtual only session, and 1 unconference session.

1,390 attendees registered for the full access pass (in-person and virtual) while 619 attendees registered for a virtual-only pass.

Ahead of the conference, the Program Committee dedicated time to investigating connections between the Program Committee and the Committee on Research, Data, and Assessment (CORDA). CORDA requested an opportunity to share their *Roadmap* to the Program Committee. Program Committee members Marcella and Shannon met with CORDA on March 7th and offered several points of feedback: we discussed ways that Program Committee and CORDA could work more in tandem together in the development of future conferences and conference themes–with a particular nod to the outsized role that academic settings have in our field and the need to give equal attention to government archives, historical societies, community archives, religious archives, etc. We also discussed the interdisciplinary work that is often inherent to archives and ways that CORDA might further address questions of archival education in its work. Overall feedback from the Program Committee is that, if there is to be more collaboration between CORDA and Program Committee and if the *Roadmap* is to have a greater presence/impact at the annual meeting, then there should be more pre-planning and coordination between the two committees.

In addition to the education sessions and posters, and connection-building with CORDA, we also reached out to Alison Macrina, the Director of the Library Freedom Project, about the possibility of hosting a pre-conference education program focused on privacy for archivists. Following discussion with Rana Salzmann, SAA's Director of Education, we decided to proceed with a reduced-cost, virtual training, "Privacy 101 for Archivists: Understanding Issues and Best Practices." This training took place on July 10, 2023.

Conference Experience
The 2023 Annual Meeting was jointly held between the Council of State Archivists and the Society of American Archivists at the Washington Hilton, in Washington D.C., from July 26th-29th. In keeping with SAA's growing commitments to accessibility, 2023 was a hybrid conference with the possibility to attend many–though not all–sessions remotely.

Committee members Marcella Huggard and Warren Lambert authored an article in the May/June issue of *Archival Outlook* to encourage participation in, and attendance at, the 2023 Annual Meeting.

While the Program Committee has not had the opportunity to review the results of the conference feedback form, anecdotally, we have received positive feedback on the types of sessions offered and the subject matter that was discussed. Multiple attendees expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have conversations about archival labor and archivists as workers.

Observations and Feedback

While the call for proposals was open, some SAA members identified a concern regarding the Diversity Statement section of the form. SAA President Terry Baxter delivered this feedback to the co-chairs, which amounted to concerns about the Diversity Statement including the following question as required (in addition to a free text field):

> *Please indicate how your proposed session provides a diverse, equitable, and inclusive roster of presenters. (Select all that apply.)*
> ● *The panel includes presenters representing multiple types of institutions (e.g., academic, corporate, government, religious etc.).*
> ● *The panel includes presenters representing multiple geographic regions (e.g., Northeast, Midwest, South, etc.)*
> ● *The panel includes presenters representing multiple career points (e.g., mid-career, student, retired, paraprofessional, temporary, etc.)*
> ● *The panel includes presenters representing people with disabilities.*
> ● *The panel includes presenters representing multiple gender identities.*
> ● *The panel includes presenters representing multiple sexual orientations.*
> ● *The panel includes presenters representing multiple racial/ethnic identities or nationalities.*
> ● *The panel includes presenters representing multiple religious backgrounds.*

After receiving this feedback, the co-chairs acknowledged that this question should have been framed differently, and that session proposers should not be expected to "check off" aspects of their identity in the form. We worked with SAA staff to update the form to make the question not required, and followed up in communication with the members that raised the concern. We thank SAA staff, especially Carlos Salgado, for working with the vendor to take quick action. After investigating this, we identified that the question was asked in this form for the last several years. We strongly urge future Program Committees to revisit this question and remove the check

boxes, and to identify clearer guidelines and expectations about how the Diversity Statement will be used to evaluate and prioritize session proposals.

Informal feedback during the conference reflected attendees' continued appreciation for starting the day later. This allowed in-person attendees to have more time to ease into the conference each day, and also accommodated remote participants attending virtually across multiple time zones. With this in mind, some participants noted that the pace of the day once sessions started felt fast, and that they would appreciate more time for socializing throughout the day.

Selecting rooms for sessions can be complicated based on the potential interests of attendees. We noted that several in-person or hybrid sessions were extremely popular, leading some rooms to be incredibly crowded to the point where questions of safety were expressed (people having to sit in aisles, doors being blocked, etc.). We know that some annual meetings previously allowed participants to register their interest in specific sessions, and if possible, we recommend using these sorts of insights to better inform room assignments. If the Whova app is utilized in the future, the Program Committee recommends that SAA utilize the function showing session interest to potentially re-assign rooms for sessions with a day or two advanced notice.

Similarly, the Program Committee recommends that for solely virtual sessions that there is dedicated space for in-person attendees to potentially watch together (perhaps with limits on capacity). Attendees and Program Committee members noted feeling as though there was not a good location (other than one's room) where one could watch these sessions.

Hybrid sessions, and hybrid annual meetings in general, have also received positive feedback. While hybrid meetings are still costly to support, we encourage SAA to identify ways to allow more remote options for attendance.

While the 2023 Annual Conference had only three unconference sessions, participant feedback suggested that they were popular. We encourage SAA and future Program Committees to consider including unconferences as an option for upcoming annual meetings. If they are included, we recommend structuring them similarly to workshops, perhaps towards the beginning of the conference; unlike workshops, however, some unconferences may have their topics influenced by participants within the session itself. Informal feedback suggested that some attendees were also confused about whether they could drop in and out of sessions, or had to commit to a full three-hour session, and this confusion persisted on the last day of the conference. With this in mind, we recommend avoiding scheduling unconferences on the last day of the conference if possible.

Expressed amongst some Program Committee members was a question of the necessity of conference session shepherds. This is a liaison model wherein at least one Program Committee

member is self-assigned to attend a session and commits to ensuring that the needs of that session are met. We were fortunate that the hotel provided abundant AV staff (although there were still some AV issues that were beyond what Program Committee members could control or mediate), which made our roles as session liaisons feel unneeded at times. The Program Committee does recognize that it is helpful to have peer support, especially if there are needs around moderation or facilitation; however, we were not given any advance direction on how to intervene as Committee members. We recommend that, if the session shepherds model continues, a checklist is distributed that lists possible scenarios (broken mics, crowded rooms, disruption), who to call for back-up, and how to address the situation until back-up arrives. Alternatively, SAA may consider an on-call model, where session presenters are provided with contact information for Program Committee members to reach out should an issue arise. This would allow Program Committee members to more freely move between conference sessions at their discretion.

Finally, while we know that the Program Committee operates much differently from other SAA committees, we nonetheless would benefit from better connections to them. In particular, we encourage SAA and future Program Committees to connect and interact with Host Committees more regularly. The Program Committee would like to suggest that coordination between the Host Committee and Program Committee might aid in the thematic connections between conference sessions and local activities. This may invite a more holistic experience to the SAA annual conference.

As an aside, the Program Committee co-chairs would like to call to the attention of Council language in our by-laws that is fuzzy and may be inaccurate.

Section VII, Program Committee, II.E states:
"The chair of the Program Committee **for the following year** serves as an ex officio member of the current Program Committee to ensure continuity and experience. The SAA President, Executive Director, and appropriate staff liaisons also are ex officio members of the Committee."

The language "following year" suggests that 2024 chairs should have been ex officio on the 2023 Program Committee; however, process-wise for how chair selection happens according to the bylaws (Section VII, Program Committee, II.A), this logic does not follow. Chairs are chosen "Vice President/President-Elect for the Annual Meeting for which she/he will preside as president." That is, the 2024 Vice President/President-Elect chooses the Program Committee chair(s) for the 2024 annual meeting.

We recommend that more accurate language is "The chair of the Program Committee **for the previous year** serves as an ex officio member of the current Program Committee to ensure continuity and experience. The SAA President, Executive Director, and appropriate staff liaisons

also are ex officio members of the Committee." This language would suggest that 2023 Program Committee chairs serve as ex officio on the 2024 Program Committee–process which is currently in action.

If we have misinterpreted the language of the bylaws, and our recommendation is erroneous, we humbly accept and welcome correction and feedback.