

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
December 3-5, 2019
Chicago, Illinois**

**Final Report: 2019 Program Committee
(Prepared by Joyce Gabiola and Rachel E. Winston)**

2019 Program Committee members: Linda Barrett, Wesley Chenault, Roger Christman, Joyce Gabiola (co-chair), Rachel Howard, Jennifer Johnson, Harvey Long, Cinda Nofzinger, Suzanne Noruschat, Tanya Marshall (co-chair), Cathy Popovitch, Michelle Sayers, Annie Tang, Derek Webb, Rachel E. Winston (co-chair). [Note: Tanya Marshall, CoSA Co-chair, was unable to attend the Joint Annual Meeting.]

The SAA Co-chairs would like to extend our immense gratitude to Dr. Meredith Evans, Nancy Beaumont, Felicia Owens, Matt Black, Carlos Salgado, and Barbara Teague for their guidance, expertise, and support throughout the process.

Conference Theme and Call for Proposals

From the start, the co-chairs acknowledged the discomfort and disappointment among members about the decision by the SAA Council to keep the annual meeting in Austin, Texas, in the midst of pending anti-trans legislation in 2017. Throughout the planning process, the co-chairs were intent on creating a conference environment that was as equitable, accessible and welcoming as possible within a state that upholds laws that discriminate against the LGBTQ community.

The Program Committee (“Committee”) selected “*TRANSFORMATIVE!*” as the theme for the 2019 Society of American Archivists (SAA) and Council of State Archivists (CoSA) Joint Annual Meeting. In the Call for Proposals (CFP), we first acknowledged the importance of confronting issues—whether new or longstanding—that arise or are systemic in our work as archivists and records managers and in the relationships that we build. Potential presenters were encouraged to consider the ways in which they work across, between, and through boundaries to navigate archives and the ever-evolving societies in which we live and engage.

Aligned with acknowledging systemic issues that influence our work, committee members agreed to recognize and consider powerful factors that may not be explicitly stated in a proposal. To this end, we provided example questions that committee members may ask while reviewing and selecting educational sessions for inclusion in the program, such as:

- Is/are the presenter(s) proposing a topic that places them in a vulnerable position?
- Is/are the presenter(s) challenging dominant or “status quo” ways of thinking and doing?

- Is/are the presenter(s) addressing traditional positions of privilege and power (eg, whiteness, ability, heteronormativity, cis-gender identities, class structures) when discussing diversity and inclusion?

For transparency, this information was included in the CFP for potential presenters to consider while shaping their proposals. In addition, a new element was added to the submission form in which potential presenters were required to include a diversity and inclusivity statement. (We have noted that the 2020 program committee has retained this requirement as part of the submission process.) SAA published the CFP on its website in November 2018 and included a link to a Google spreadsheet for potential participants to find collaborators.

The dream team of co-chairs authored an article about the 2019 SAA/CoSA Joint Annual Meeting for the February 2019 issue of *Archival Outlook*. It was important to acknowledge the power structures that underlie our collaborative work as a committee as well as the emotional and invisible labor for some of the committee members.

Education Sessions, Posters, Pop-Ups and Working Groups

The 2019 Program Committee received 168 education session proposals and 26 poster proposals. Following the 2018 Program Committee, the 2019 Committee took note of proposal feedback during the program selection meeting in January. This feedback was included in selection and decline notifications, with co-chairs providing specific feedback from declined proposers upon request.

During the review process, submitted proposals were evaluated in relation to five themes: Leadership Development and Retention; Invisible Labor; Instruction and Pedagogical Practice; Diversity/Whiteness, Normativity, and Cultural Humility; and Spaces, Places, and Margins. Additionally, proposals were evaluated based upon their level of inclusivity, per the diversity statement included in the proposal, during program selection meeting that took place at SAA's Headquarters in Chicago from January 14-16, 2019. Thanks to the help and support of SAA staff, committee members were well prepared before, cared for during, and ultimately had a successful selection meeting.

Together, the Committee selected 75 education sessions and 22 posters, and a short list of alternates. Like past years, the Committee left a few available slots open for pop-up sessions and working group proposals. Working Groups were added as a new format for the 2019 conference in order to provide an avenue for attendees to convene over topics of interest and a more structured discussion (see Appendix I). Pop-up Sessions and Working Groups were announced on the same call for proposals, which was issued in March 2019, and put forth for vote by SAA and CoSA membership in May. A total of 23 pop-up and working group proposals were submitted. To ensure that thematic gaps, along with under-discussed, salient, challenging topics and issues directly related to the conference theme were included in the program, Committee co-chairs reviewed and selected two sessions--one pop up session and one working group--immediately following the submission deadline. The remaining proposals were put forth for vote by CoSA and SAA members.

New to the 2019 selection process was a positionality statement (see Appendix II). Session chairs were required to share the statement with their presenters. Additionally, co-chairs suggested the positionality statement also be included in all declined proposal notifications to encourage presenters respond to future CFPs, and to state positionalities as part of those proposals.

Conference Experience

Contractual obligations moved the annual meeting's traditional Sunday-Saturday program to a Wednesday-Tuesday schedule. Anticipating travel conflicts among interested attendees, along with the California travel ban and members in opposition to the meeting being held in Austin, SAA invested in live streaming and on-demand recording for the first time to promote conference accessibility.

With attendee safety, accessibility, and comfort in mind, co-chairs worked with SAA staff to ensure a record number of centrally located gender inclusive restrooms. Co-chairs also provided SAA with a recommendation for a chemical sensitivities consultant to promote a fragrance-free conference. SAA accepted Joyce's recommendation to hire Gracen Brilmyer, an archival studies researcher and current SAA member who has ample experience creating fragrance-free events. As a result, SAA provided fragrance-free soap in designated conference restrooms and signage to highlight the importance to be aware of chemical sensitivities and of maintaining a fragrance-free environment so that it is accessible for all attendees. It is our understanding that SAA will continue to create a fragrance-free environment for future annual meetings.

As in the past, this year's annual meeting included the Navigator Program as a way to mentor new attendees and facilitate their conference experience.

A Conference Disruption

A bit of controversy emerged on social media immediately prior to the annual meeting and intensified during the conference about an article that was/is set to be published in *The American Archivist* and selected as the subject of a scheduled "brown bag" discussion session. In addition to a couple of thoughtful blog posts that discussed the problematic nature of the article and the publication's peer review process, SAA's Archivists and Archives of Color Section issued a statement. Although the brown bag session was created by the publication's editor, Christopher (Cal) Lee, SAA Council decided to cancel the session upon consideration of extensive feedback as well as the purpose and spirit of the 2019 joint annual meeting. Naturally, in response to this decision, people expressed their opposition. During the program committee's last convening at the start of the annual meeting, a committee member expressed concern over this [situation] and asked how it could happen. In the interest of accountability and growth, the SAA co-chairs considered the possibility of securing the same time and room of the canceled brown bag session to instead hold a facilitated discussion with *at least* Cal Lee and a couple of willing Council members as well as informed discussants.

This disruptive situation prompts whether there is a need for the program committee (or just the co-chairs) to review certain sessions that are not submitted through the submission form in order to prevent similar disruptions.

Though a stain on this year's conference experience, this disruptive situation underlines the necessity to reflect on one's positionality as it fuels bias and influences one's decisions. If the editor of *The American Archivist* reflected on his positionality and privilege and made time to take note of the vision and tone for the joint annual meeting, would he still have made the same decision?

Observations and Feedback

Feedback on the 2019 annual meeting was solicited via survey that was distributed to all attendees. Additional feedback was provided by attendees and other program committee members during the conference as well as via email following the conference. Overall, responses were very positive. The co-chairs' intentionality to make the conference feel and actually *be* more inclusive was noticed and well received. Specifically, the co-chairs' intentionality is evident in the content of the CFP, variety of session topics, noticeable increase of presenters of color, and general conference experience.

Sessions were well attended, including those designated as pop-up sessions and working groups. Minimal feedback was received specifically on working groups, making it hard to determine their usefulness or how well they were received. As such, to better measure their effectiveness, it may be worth continuing to include them for the next several conferences.

Overwhelmingly, attendees were dissatisfied with the altered meeting schedule. Attendees expressed appreciation for the Sched app, noting that while there were some issues and missing information, it was easy to use and helpful in navigating the conference. Also, a significant number of attendees stated their interest in hearing from the Archivist of the United States again.

Ultimately, 35 individuals purchased the live stream package and an additional 52 individuals purchased the on-demand recordings following the meeting. Attendees felt favorably about the live stream option, so continuing to offer the service for subsequent annual meetings may prove to be beneficial.

Parting Words

“This is my 13th SAA and it's the best I've ever attended.”

- Ryan Hendrickson, Assistant Director for Manuscripts, Boston University

“Before I begin, I just want to say thank you to the program committee for centering so many conversations around ethics of care and radical empathy at the conference; it's really beautiful. And for also giving so many archivists of color a platform to talk about their work and their research. This is my 11th SAA and I have to say that this is like THE most diverse conference and program I've seen, so thank you so much.”

- Steven Booth, Archivist for the Barack Obama Presidential Library (Session 904)

Overall, it was/is imperative for a transformative (or any) annual meeting to recognize and amplify the work and research of archivists of color. Diversity and inclusivity are actually possible as long as decision-makers are intentional about it. Booth's statement sums up the outcome and impact of the 2019 co-chairs' intentionality and the collaborative work of the Committee as a whole. Yeeee haaaaaw!

Working Groups

We're experimenting with Working Groups, so you should feel free to do so, too! The purpose of Working Group sessions is to provide time and space during the Joint Annual Meeting in which a more focused, intentional conversation is facilitated in order to generate action items from which we can learn and/or identify potential archival pursuits or projects. We hope Working Groups will help to build on and sustain collaborative work in an effort to advance various interlocking goals in archives and records management.

Minimum requirements:

1. Working Group sessions require a minimum of two individuals: ***one session chair/facilitator and one note-taker***. Additional facilitators are optional and we ask that the note-taker is part of the official Working Group team, not a random participant. The chair/facilitator(s) is/are responsible for guiding the conversation and related activities of the Working Group session, and the note-taker is responsible for recording notes and action items generated during the session.
2. Shortly after the Joint Annual Meeting, the Working Group session chair will provide CoSA and SAA with a deliverable (polished notes, outline, workflow, an established working group or research team—the possibilities are endless!—toward sustainable collaborative work). The deliverable(s) will be shared and publicly accessible via the conference website.

Positionality Statement for Notification Emails

Speaker Notification — ACCEPT

As presenters at the Joint Annual Meeting, it is important to reflect and acknowledge your positionality as it relates to your chosen topics. At the basic level, this involves reflecting on and acknowledging power structures and your social location (intersecting identities) as it relates to your topic. To not acknowledge the power structures that control our work reproduces that power, and depending on the topic of your presentation, erases the contributions and voices of historically marginalized people and communities.

On a related note, we'd like to remind you that the SAA Council voted in 2017 to keep the Joint Annual Meeting in Austin, despite anti-trans legislation in process at the time. Currently there are no civil protections for our trans colleagues in Texas as they engage in everyday, natural activities that the rest of us take for granted, such as using the restroom. In regard to your presentations, we ask that you reflect on and acknowledge the ways in which any aspect of your presentation may cause harm for our colleagues/attendees and/or the community that you and your institutions serve. Please be aware that the conference organizers and the hotel are making every effort to ensure the safety and comfort of our attendees.

Speaker Notification — DECLINE

If you do intend to submit a proposal for the 2020 annual meeting, it is important to reflect and acknowledge your positionality as it relates to your chosen topics. At the basic level, this involves reflecting on and acknowledging power structures and your social location (intersecting identities) as it relates to your topic. As the nature of archives is a colonialist project, to not acknowledge the power structures that control our work reproduces that power and, depending on the topic of your presentation, erases the contributions and voices of historically marginalized people and communities.