

Archives Management Roundtable Annual Meeting

August 3, 2016

6:00

Chair Sherry Williams introduced herself and explained that the business section will come first today due to one of the program speakers being delayed at another session.

She introduced the members of Steering Committee:

Jelain Chubb - Vice Chair

Ann Case - Secretary

Mott Linn

Daria D'Arienzo

Lynn Eaton

Tamara Livingston

Susan Malbin

Caryn Radick

India Spartz

She then reviewed the results of our recent election:

Jelain Chubb - Chair

Nancy Lenoil - Vice Chair

Ann Case - Secretary

Chrystal Carpenter – Steering Committee

Lynn Eaton – Steering Committee

Thanks to everyone who voted.

Sherry introduced Amy Schindler, who gave an update on the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on the Development of Standardized Statistical Measures for Public Services in Archival Repositories and Special Collections Libraries.

The task force has been working for the past two years. They are still collecting comments and would love to hear more. The task force would be meeting the following day at the lunchtime open forum to discuss the standards. Members could comment on Version 1 by August 22 in three ways, by going to their website, emailing Amy or Christian DuPont directly; or by going to the SAA website and offering comments there, or going to the RBMS website and offer inline comments there. The metric is broken into seven basic domains; those domains include one basic measure and other advanced measures. The idea is that any repository should be able to collect that basic measure, and then it will be up to the individual repositories to decide which of the advanced measures it is appropriate to count. The domains include User Demographics, Reference Transactions, Reading Room Visits, Collection Use, Events, Exhibits, and Online Interactions. A basic measure would be to “count the number of reference transactions received from users, regardless of methods of transmissions used to receive the request.” An advanced measure for reference transaction would be

to categorize the method of transmission (e.g., email, phone, on site, fax). Version 1 will be revised after comments have been submitted and discussed.

Following Amy's report, Pam Hackbart-Dean, our liaison with SAA Council, reported that the SAA Council Working Group on Member Affinity Groups has decided to eliminate the distinction between sections and roundtables. She presented these specifics:

- SAA members may join as many groups as they choose.
- Nonmembers may be list participants on up to three discussion lists.
- All groups will be required to:
 - Have standardized bylaws.
 - Submit information about the group's annual meeting by March 1.
 - Conduct an online election annually, with submission of a slate by June 1.
 - Submit an annual report and complete leader roster by September 1.
 - Respond to Council requests for research, advice, and expert comments.
- New groups may be formed as they are now, with submission of a petition signed by 100 SAA members.
- Groups may be discontinued if they don't meet one or more of the requirements. This will happen only following significant discussion with the groups' leaders.
- Staff will continue to investigate software options to support more robust online communities.

She also said that they heard an update from the Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion, and they approved a revision of the SAA Statement on Diversity and Inclusion to include "Inclusion."

Sherry then continued with the Archives Management Steering Committee Report. She said that Mott Linn, AMRT past-chair and current ACA chair, had sent out a request on the AMRT listserv that the ACA Role Delineation Statement be forwarded to the SAA to be considered as an external standard. The resulting discussion on the listserv ranged all over the place -- some supportive of the RDS, some not supportive of the necessity of certification itself, citing Dennis Meissner's article in the May/June *Archival Outlook*, which sparked comments, and some of it unrelated, including discussing difficulties in the job market with so many people searching for jobs, diversity issues, inclusion issues, relaxing job requirements for hiring people, and other topics. It was gratifying that so many archivists took time to participate in using the listserv, despite the fact that some of the off-topic subject matters that were raised caused a few heated, and some troubling, exchanges.

Ultimately, the Steering Committee did forward the RDS to the Standards Committee at SAA for consideration as an external standard, but it also informed them, our liaison and Council about the discussions, comments and viewpoints that had been made on the listserv about the RDS proposal, so that Council was aware of how widespread the need for further discussion about these issues throughout SAA is and that we believe that the discussion should be led at the highest level of SAA. Thus far, she has not

heard back from anyone in Council regarding the listserv discussions, even those that were troubling.

Mott said that he had had breakfast with Dennis Meissner that morning {August 3rd} and had apprised him of the situation, so that Dennis would be aware of the topic in case anyone brought it up to him.

Asked by an audience member to describe the difference between the RBMS standards and the RDS standards, Mott said that the RDS is superior in describing what an archivist is and does. RBMS tries to describe what rare books people and archivists do, whereas RDS is solely for archivists. For the next steps, the standards committee will discuss whether the RDS should be a standard. The standards committee could choose to put it out for further review, or if it is found worthy without further review, it would be sent to Council and recognized as an external standard, rather than an internal standard. As an external standard, SAA cannot tweak it.

The final item of discussion was a possible future Certificate in Archival Administration, which Sherry had discussed the day before with Solveig de Sutter, SAA Education Officer. This certificate is in the embryonic stage, which is even before the beginning stage of planning. It is expected that the Education Committee will formulate the program with input from the AMRT and other roundtables, so we should have the opportunity to collaborate on the curriculum or the contents of the program.

Panel Discussion

Managing Your Career: Conversation about Hiring, Salaries, Career Planning and Everything In Between

Beth Myers – Smith College

Christine Zamon – Emerson College

Steven Booth – National Archives, Barack H. Obama Presidential Library and Museum

Stephanie Bennett – Moderator/Commentator

Steven Booth spoke first, with a disclaimer that what he was about to say were his own thoughts, not those of his employers, the White House or NARA - ☺. He said that during their professional careers, everyone learns the importance of keeping an updated CV, doing interviews, being professionally involved, and networking, because that is how you succeed and eventually get ahead. Thinking about his own career and its trajectory, he realized that as a degree-holding, professional archivist who earns a living wage, he has a great deal of privilege due to the opportunities that he has been afforded in his short career. This was brought home to him when he was recently asked to help three of his own family members with their career-planning efforts. In working with them, these are some points that he realized:

We are all on a journey. Everyone's path is different, with no right or wrong way to accomplish our goals.

Have a clear plan of what you want to achieve. Since most things are out of your control, visualize what you want your career to be by deciding what matters most to you.

Know what is valuable to you. What are the trade-offs that you're willing to make - are you willing to relocate or live in a second-tier city?

Experience comes from many places, extracurricular as well as archival. Skill sets can come from experiences that you have gained outside of the archival and library worlds (e.g., educational environment, volunteer organizations, cultural experiences, athletic teams, etc.). Steven told a story about answering all of the questions at his job interview at NARA for an archivists development program by using examples from his undergraduate music degree training from Morehouse College rather than with examples from his experience as a project archivist with the Dr. King papers at Boston University, because the questions were things like "what is your ability to retain information," and music majors must be able to remember a set number of songs in order to proceed to the next level. So his non-archival answers qualified him for an archival position.

Have a strong support system/network and use it; no man is an island. Steven has built a network with others from Simmons College's diversity program, in which they have quarterly meetings and they discuss what's going on to see if they can help each other.

Create your own opportunities. Steven said that there was no social group for archivists in Washington, D.C., when he moved there, so he and another archivist got together and formed one, "Archivists of Metro D.C.". This group grew organically into an advocacy group that works with community-based organizations to help them to preserve their records. They worked with the group "So Others Might Eat," showing them archival principles, giving them workflow charts, and helping to get them started; now the organization has a whole room devoted to their archives, and they have a budget for archival supplies. This shows how a social group just blossomed into a pro bono archival organization for the community.

Be kind to yourself as you go through your career. Sometimes things may not turn out the way that you wish they had, through no fault of your own, but it doesn't mean that you did anything wrong.

Beth Myers, at Smith College, is a former Lone Arranger who moved to a position where she now leads a staff of 15. In the past two and a half years, she has faced the challenging task of hiring 10 full-time positions, most of which are multi-year positions, funded internally. These were all selected through the time-consuming formation and deliberation of hiring committees, some of which were more successful in hitting the

mark than others. A lot of time was spent wrestling with the 'hidden veil' of internal politics around positions, which is often present among hirings.

Beth feels that the sheer amount of hirings that she has done over the past two years makes her somewhat qualified to speak on the topic, although she still feels challenged by the process. She feels privileged to be at a university that enables her to fill so many positions, but is surprised to have to wrestle with her own ideological beliefs, who she is as a person, how she got to this stage, and how she wants to build her team to move forward.

The team-building is the best part, and Beth has done it 'out of lane.' The archives world is set up in 'lanes' – public services, technical services, etc. If someone wants to get out of a lane and wants to do something else, it's difficult for them. When Beth would receive a resumé, she would look for keywords that would reflect that their talent would exceed the 'lane.' It wasn't just about people who could check all of the boxes; she would look for people who would be a productive and positive member of the whole team. Were they enthusiastic about whatever they would do? Would they bring that enthusiasm to the team?

Beth also had the epiphany that it is our responsibility as archival managers to train people up into positions. We should seek people with the best potential and then teach them. Everyone has skills; whatever skills we lack, we can learn. If someone is taking a leap of faith and jumping a lane, we are taking that leap with them. So far, Beth's team-building approach has turned out very well.

Beth closed out by discussing a concern that she and others have about the future. She and Tanya Zanish-Belcher held a four-hour career workshop at MAC on the state of the profession, how to do transitions, negotiations, etc. She is worried about the extent to which our profession demographically is not prepared for in terms of training people for management. There is a swollen group of newer professionals with 3-5 years of experience on the job, then there is a dumbbell-shaped effect that thins out – a smaller group of folks who are in middle management, or who have interest, capacity, or the ability to be in middle management -- and then another balloon at the other end of that spectrum, those who have already been in the profession for 17 or more years on the job.

She is encouraged by the work of the Committee on Education to take up the idea of a Certificate in Archival Administration because this is the sort of response that will be necessary to address situations like the coming staffing crisis. This would be a way of preparing people like Beth, who moved from a lone arranger position to one where she was responsible for managing a group of 15 staff members. This is a pressing issue that archivists should be preparing people for now, even when hiring them, having frank conversations with people about boundaries and opportunities. What are we doing now, as individuals and as SAA, to prepare people to take this on?

Christina Zamon, author of *Lone Arranger*, has also just moved from a lone arranger background to a staff of eleven. In discussing aspects of hiring, she looks at it from her own experience at being hired and then from a manager's perspective. What are the qualities that she is looking for in a hire? What does the job description need to look like? Is the job description accurate, too vague, too specific, too pigeon-holing? What about qualifications, and to what extent are the qualifications important in the actual hiring process? In academia, the hiring process is by committee, so the person selected has to be by consensus among colleagues, has to be a good fit for the library, the archives, and the university as a whole.

When she rehired to fill a part-time professional positional when it last year, she wondered why someone with a degree would want a part-time position. The position had been created part-time due to funding constraints, and had been originally filled by someone who could only work part-time, so it was the perfect position for that person. Once that staff person left, though, it was a hard hire to fill since most professionals want a full-time job. The university eventually hired someone who was forced to take a second part-time position elsewhere to round out a living wage.

As an aside, Christine said that in order to avoid a repeat of the situation, the position is now being converted to full-time, but Christina just learned that the transition is being held up because the university staff has decided to unionize. Unfortunately, Christina's staff person filling that position, who quit her second part-time job in anticipation of the position being converted into full-time status, is now in limbo because they have been notified that negotiations with the union could take several years.

But, to get back to the hiring part of the story, Christina had to broaden the applicant pool for the part-time professional positional because the pool was so small, so she did outreach and ended up hiring someone who had not yet finished her degree, but was willing, able and capable. The committee was able to waive the MLS requirement for the job, knowing that the applicant was at the end of her program and would fulfill the degree requirements.

Christina added a few final observations on hiring, for people on both sides of the table:

Every situation is unique; no two searches are alike.

You can find people to fill unique holes if you think outside of the box.

Being networked is great, but it doesn't guarantee you a job.

Having connections is a good thing but don't take them for granted.

Stephanie Bennett, Wake Forest University, took questions from the audience:

Tamara Livingston, Kennesaw State University, commented to Steven that she, too, had been a music major and a lone arranger; she wondered where one was to acquire managerial experience in the workplace, with so little opportunities for advancement.

Stephanie rephrased for the microphone: What do you do at a flat organization where there is no way to move up?

Beth: Managerial best practices call for a maximum of only 7 people directly reporting to one manager; if there are more, a hierarchy should be established. If possible, work with HR to create one, because flat organizations prevent people from being able to bloom where they are planted. People should leave to get diverse training. In today's society, when Beth hires someone, she hopes to be able to keep someone for five years. She accepts that they will leave, and will help to prepare them. She recommends that her staff looks at job postings of positions that they aspire to, and they can work one-on-one in preparation.

Stephanie mentioned at Wake Forest that they obtained faculty status, which allowed them to 'move up', even though they are in the same positions, to feel like they are growing, and to obtain professional development, which has helped to prepare them for whatever comes next.

Question from the audience about the dumbbell model: He was in LA with an opening for an upper level position with experience. In going through the applications, he was struck at the lack of completeness of the submissions. Many of them lacked cover letters. Since the requirements asked for a vision statement and asked you to explain how your understanding of your background applied to your qualifications, all of which would have been recorded in a cover letter, the omission of submitting one would seem to speak poorly for a supposedly detail-oriented person...but with today's professionals, maybe we don't have to be so strict with the requirements like cover letters.

Beth added that the statistics show that:

60% of the professionals surveyed have less than 5 years' experience

37% have greater than 5 years' experience

Armed with those numbers, she was forced to lower the amount of experience requested for a recent job posting down to three years' experience from seven to twelve years.

Another audience member commented that some application systems actually strip cover letters (and maybe reference letters) from resumé's so that hiring managers may never see them.

Susan Malbin added that when she returned to the workforce after raising children, she mentioned in an interview that she had led a Cub Scout troop of eight year old boys and directed them through a soap carving project with only five knives between the eight boys, and there were no incidents. From that, the employers understood that she had the art and skills of negotiation, and she got the job. Susan also wanted to point out, regarding cover letters, that they served the additional purpose of demonstrating the ability of the applicant to communicate clearly, which is also a part of being an archivist, whether you are a manager or not.

Jelain Chubb said that each institution has its own methodology for how they want their own applications submitted. Most want a resumé and a cover letter. There are regulations and specific ways that the information should be submitted, but most graduates are not taught this in graduate school. They are being told to go out and get a job, but they are not taught *how* to apply for a job. Newer graduates may need to be told how to sell themselves. She hopes that his group, over the course of the year, might be able to work on putting together some tools or tips to help the newer graduates, who may have never been in front of a hiring committee.

One audience member brought up the fact that different stages of life may require different information or ways of marketing yourself differently on an application.

Beth said that there needs to be a recognition of bias in our process; this gets to the heart of Dennis Meissner's article. Any position is political, because it is in an institution made of people, and the ways in which we measure ourselves and measure others are flawed because of bias. We need to start from a premise of owning or acknowledging our own biases and working past them, and not just rejecting people automatically. That's why forming the right hiring committee is so critical as well.

Stephanie: What would help the hiring committees to be more effective?

Beth: There really is no magic bullet. Devoid of requirements, what would be the soft-skills that we want this person to have? How soon can we hope to find someone to fill the position?

Tamara says that they try to do a multi-part interview: a telephone interview followed by a Skype interview, then an onsite presentation, a social lunch, etc.

Beth: What is our ethical responsibility to the applicant? Should we offer them comments when we can teach them something, like the applicant who took a Skype interview while sitting in her car? Or someone whose delivery style was really flat. As

competitive as the market is, what is the ethical and moral responsibility, what is the proper frame for giving feedback, so you can help someone get a job?

Jelain said that you can call the HR office and offer feedback and they will find certain language that they can use legally to provide the applicant with some sense of how well they did.

Christina added that applicants need to inform former employers or teachers that they are being used as a reference. If you were an employee, send along a job description along with your notice, so the person being asked to provide the reference can be reminded about what the applicant did and can give a good recommendation. The employer or teacher should also give an honest recommendation.

An audience member reminded the group that new archivists are in the midst of a cutthroat environment, trying to get a job right now. Are we as understanding as we should be towards them? We want them to be perfect for our institution, but in reality, we need to realize that they may not be perfect now, but they can certainly learn what we want them to know. We ask so much of them, with three letters of recommendation, a cover letter, resumé, etc. Should we be grumpy if they forget to send in a cover letter? Did we tell them about every step of the application process and what we're going to do with what they submit, e.g., that we're going to call their references? In many ways, we dehumanize the applicants, and then we are surprised when they don't meet our expectations of what a good applicant should be. Perhaps we need to try to be a bit more understanding during the hiring process, and look at the process from the applicant's perspective.

Beth was brought back to the story she told of the person who gave the Skype interview from her car. Beth's bias clicked in and she thought "this is weird; weird is bad" without stopping to wonder about the circumstances about why this person may have needed to do the interview from her car in the first place. The more we can try to keep the HUMAN-ness in the hiring equation, the better we will be.

The annual meeting ended at 7:30.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann Case
Recording Secretary