

Description Section

Report Submitted by: Ashley Gosselar

Council Liaison: Conor Casey

Steering Committee Roster

Position	Name	Term Start	Term End
Secretary	Phoebe Nobles	8/10/2022	9/1/2024
Member-at-Large	Kate Morris	8/10/2022	9/1/2024
Newsletter Editor	Katherine Madison	8/10/2022	9/1/2025
Web Liaison	Scott Kirycki	3/1/2019	9/1/2025
Ex Officio	Regine Heberlein	8/15/2022	9/1/2024

Activities

Completed:

In January, we were proud to announce that SAA Council endorsed the “Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Resources” as an external description standard. The standard “offers metadata recommendations for archival professionals to address racist, particularly anti-Black, archival description, in order to assist archivists who handle collections about, by, and for people of the Black diaspora that are often held at predominantly white institutions.” With the Description Section’s support, an External Standards Working Group collaborated with the A4BLiP Working Group to develop and submit this successful proposal in late 2022. Betts Coup, Member-at-Large on the Description Section Steering Committee, represented the Description Section on the External Standards Working Group. This spring, we partnered with TS-EAS on a three-part webinar series about controlled vocabularies. The series reviewed how to use controlled vocabularies for describing archival collections, relevant encoding options, and the application of controlled vocabularies with an inclusive description lens. Three webinars were offered twice in different time zones to accommodate an international audience. Vice Chair Will Clements and Member-at-Large Kate Morris represented the Description Section on the webinar planning committee. Ashley Gosselar, Chair of the Description Section Steering Committee, moderated the third webinar offered in the Eastern Time zone. The webinars were attended live by hundreds of people from around the globe, and the recordings are available through SAA’s YouTube channel.

Ongoing:

Our Section’s blog, Descriptive Notes (<https://saadescription.wordpress.com/>), has become a powerful tool for amplifying the work of archival description. Since last September, the blog has published 23 posts submitted by our section’s members on topics ranging from inclusive description, to project management, to conference dispatches. Together, these posts have made our “invisible labor” visible to over 16,000 readers from 53 countries. The editorial team consists of Kate Madison (Lead Blog Editor), Ashley

Gosselar, Betts Coup, Will Clements, and Kate Peebles. We strive to make our section's community-driven Documentation Portal (<https://www2.archivists.org/groups/description-section/description-section-documentation-portal>) a trusted resource for locating helpful documentation pertaining to archival description. Noting a recent growth in resources about inclusive and reparative description, the Description Section Steering Committee is taking a fresh look at the Inclusive Description section of our Documentation Portal. This year, we published an overview of the Inclusive Description section of the portal on our section's blog and issued a call for feedback and suggestions for resources to add to the portal. In the new SAA year, members of the Steering Committee will review resources suggested by members, conduct our own literature review, and update the Inclusive Description section of the Documentation Portal accordingly. Our section supports the Technical Subcommittee on Describing Archives: A Content Standard (TS-DACS) which is hard at work on its Principles Project, as well as the Technical Subcommittee on Encoded Archival Standards (TS-EAS), which is working on EAD4. We will continue to support both technical subcommittees as needs arise throughout the new year.

New:

No new projects are planned at this time.

Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists

1.3 The Description Section has provided "leadership in ensuring the completeness, diversity, and accessibility of the historical record" by maintaining and adding to our Documentation Portal on our Section's micro-site. 1.4 Through our blog, Descriptive Notes, the Section provides a publication platform that allows archivists "to articulate the value of archives."

Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth

2.2 The Section provides a publication forum through our blog, Descriptive Notes, about current and evolving descriptive practices in archives. 2.3 Through our blog and our Documentation Portal, the Section provides free and accessible information about archival description and descriptive resources. We collaborated with TS-EAS this year to provide a three-part webinar series on controlled vocabularies. The webinars were offered virtually for free in two time zones, and recordings of all webinars are shared on SAA's YouTube channel.

Goal 3: Advancing the Field

3.1 Through the Section's successful collaboration with Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (A4BLiP) on their endorsed external standard proposal to the SAA Standards Committee, we contributed to the development of "new standards, guidelines, and best practices" for archives. 3.2 The Section "foster[s] and disseminate[s] research in and about the field" through our blog and our Documentation Portal. This year we again included updates from TS-EAS, TS-DACS, and SNAC in our annual meeting to keep our membership informed. 3.3 The Section partnered with A4BLiP in the past year on the topic of anti-racist archival description, and with TS-EAS on a webinar series about controlled vocabularies.

Goal 4: Meeting Members Needs

4.1 / 4.4 The Section membership is regularly kept up to date on activities and opportunities to contribute via the Section's listserv. A report was made to membership at our annual business meeting, where we also invited members to come forward with projects and ideas. Steering committee members are available for questions and comments. Chair Ashley Gosselar published two posts on the Section's blog this year summarizing Steering activities to date and encouraging members to reach out to the Section's Steering Committee with ideas. 4.3 We are strongly considering to again invite an early career member to join the editorial team for our blog. This is something we did in 2022 would like to do again.

Annual Meeting 2023

Number of Attendees: 89

Summary of Meeting Activities:

The outgoing Description Section Steering Committee welcomed 89 attendees to our section's annual meeting on June 26, 2023. Attendees heard a recap of 2022-2023 section business that included a program on the A4BLiP standard given by Betts Coup, updates on ongoing projects, and news about Description Section Steering Committee elections. In addition, representatives from SAA Council, TS-DACS, TS-EAS, and Social Networks and Archival Context (SNAC) provided updates on their groups' activities. If you were unable to attend the meeting live, a recording of the meeting is freely available (https://www.pathlms.com/saa/events/4935/event_sections/13594/video_presentations/265576).

Link to Meeting Minutes:

Self-Assessment

How would you describe the health or energy of your section? How engaged are your members?

The Section's Steering Committee is active in and committed to a number of projects with long-term scope (the blog and updating the Inclusive Description section of our Documentation Portal). This year we had no difficulty soliciting candidates for Steering Committee membership. We had an excellent turnout for our annual meeting and have been able to maintain a regular blog posting schedule thanks to a high response rate to our calls for new content. When we polled our Section's members to determine if they (and not just Steering) were open to proposing A4BLiP's Anti-Racist Description Resources as an endorsed external standard, we again had a good overall response rate.

Questions for the SAA Council

None at this time.