

**Report of the 2023-2024 Digital Archives Specialist Subcommittee  
to SAA Committee on Education  
Submitted by Katherine Fisher, September 2024**

This report documents the DAS Subcommittee's activities, including ongoing and completed goals, from September 2023 through August 2024. This year the committee welcomed two new members, Brandon Jackson and Angela Fritz (a previous member returning to fill a vacated seat for a partial term). An early focus was facilitating a smooth transition from the previous subcommittee and leadership team and laying the groundwork for the year's work, while in subsequent months we focused on regular program business as well as priority projects.

Activities of the leadership team for the subcommittee as a whole included the following:

- Hosting an onboarding session for new members in August to introduce subcommittee responsibilities, procedures, and resources.
- Assigning working groups, based on programmatic needs for the year and members' interests, to undertake projects or oversee specialized functions. These teams remained the same as the previous year: Course Development, Comprehensive Exam, and Documentation.
- Holding a virtual retreat in October.
- Training members in course liaison and audit duties.
- Conducting monthly meetings of 90 minutes to allow time for reports from SAA Education staff, discussions of course audits, planning for program updates, and team breakouts and reports.
- Contributing to CoE's revision of the audit form and harmonization with the DAS version.

Subsequent sections of this report summarize further activities that warrant more detailed reporting.

### **Working Group Goals**

The subcommittee's working groups made significant progress toward the goals each established during the October 2023 retreat:

#### *Course Development Team*

- Completed audits of prerecorded DAS webcasts still in active use.
- Developed preliminary action plan for updating and re-recording webcasts.
- Prepared survey about DAS program and curriculum to distribute to SAA members and other stakeholders.
- Proposed subcommittee focus areas and DAS program revisions based on survey results (proposed actions: overhaul webcasts and explore new course offerings, review accessibility feedback, update web presence, evaluate program structure).

#### *Documentation Team*

- Reviewed and revised DAS handbook to reflect current responsibilities.
- Inventoried documents and forms used by subcommittee to confirm accessibility.
- Began process of transitioning Documentation to ad hoc team to support periodic handbook updates and documentation needs of other working groups.

### *Comprehensive Exam Team*

- Documented exam-related responsibilities, including subcommittee's relationship with psychometricians, and worked with Documentation team to add to DAS handbook.
- Updated comprehensive exam reading list.

### **DAS Courses**

The frequency of post-pandemic in-person courses increased again, while interest in virtual courses remained strong. Course enrollment overall was up compared to the previous year. The subcommittee continues to evaluate the relevance of course content and the efficacy of formats, with a particular interest in adopting new online modes (such as self-paced modules or synchronous class meetings divided into two-hour segments over several days or weeks).

The subcommittee worked with instructors to add two new courses to the DAS program:

- A required OAIS prerequisite (delayed due to revisions of the OAIS standard and an instructor change, but slated to launch in early 2025)
- Project Management: Fundamentals and Advanced (revised with more digital archives content and made available for DAS credit)

Several existing DAS courses were updated or prioritized for revision soon:

- Accessioning and Ingest of Digital Records (revised)
- Appraisal of Digital Records (revised)
- Introduction to PREMIS (revised)
- Foundational tier webcasts (first batch up for revision in the coming year)
- Introduction to XML Analysis and Manipulation (to be revised during next review cycle)

### **Comprehensive Exam Creation**

Working with the psychometric consulting firm SAA engaged in 2023, we created a new comprehensive exam. After authoring, reviewing, and revising exam items last summer, the 2023-2024 subcommittee underwent training on standard setting in September. We then tested and assessed the difficulty of new and existing items in the bank. After the standard-setting sprint, we spent the fall in continued discussions with the psychometricians about problematic questions requiring revision or exclusion, an appropriate passing score calculated based on the questions selected and their degree of difficulty, and details of the new exam form, all with an eye toward ensuring an accurate, fair, and defensible comprehensive exam. The new exam launched in January.

A total of 92 people passed the comprehensive exam and received the DAS certificate over the course of the year (36 in September 2023 using the old exam form, 31 in January 2024 with the new exam form, and 25 in May 2024), slightly fewer than the 102 new certifications granted in the previous year.

### **Renewal by Petition**

In November 2023, Council approved the DAS Subcommittee's revised recertification proposal designed to provide certificate holders a way to renew after exhausting the available courses.

The revamped renewal process provides an alternative pathway: petitioning to substitute certain other courses or professional service for two of the four DAS courses normally required for renewal. Council recommended that we 1) maintain a list of approved substitution activities to minimize time involved in reviewing petitions and 2) launch the option initially as a pilot to evaluate workload and ensure sustainability. With this feedback in mind, the subcommittee developed guidelines, a rubric, and a petition form; beta tested them with two former members due for renewal and eligible to use the new pathway; revised the procedures based on subcommittee input; and planned a two-year pilot to be advertised to DAS certificate holders and launched in fall 2024.

### **Stakeholder Survey**

A highlight of the year was the invaluable survey the Course Development team designed to obtain actionable feedback about the DAS curriculum and program. They launched the survey in February, then analyzed the results and presented detailed findings along with astute recommendations to the subcommittee in May.

The survey elicited 380 responses (compared to ~100 responses to similar surveys conducted in 2014 and 2016). Analysis of the results revealed positive views of the program overall but also recurring criticisms accompanied by strong interest in helping to drive improvements. Findings and feedback that should inform the subcommittee's future work include the following:

- Courses are not offered frequently enough.
- Course content is not varied enough or revised frequently enough.
- Cost is a barrier, especially for in-person courses.
- Courses and exams have accessibility issues.
- Preferences for online vs. in-person and synchronous vs. asynchronous courses vary.
- There is significant interest in and an unmet need for tool-specific courses, as well as content related to AI, information security, technology and project management, and vendor procurement/management.
- The comprehensive exam is a source of particular dissatisfaction. Responses indicated opportunities for improvement, such as a clear policy for accommodations and more exam prep resources.
- Negative experiences with the program or the bureaucracy around it have additional consequences. (One respondent wrote that because of their frustration with the program and the exam process, they not only "gave up on earning the certificate" despite having completed the coursework, they also discontinued their SAA membership.)

In addition to considering ways to overcome these challenges, the subcommittee might in the future examine options for clarifying program scope, managing participants' expectations, and sharing more information about program mechanics, progress tracking, and support options.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Despite minimal turnover, several initiatives carried over from the previous year, and shared understanding of core functions, members have repeatedly expressed a lack of clarity and confidence about the subcommittee's relationship to CoE, division of responsibilities with SAA

Education staff, and degree of independence and level of authority in managing the DAS curriculum and program structure. I recommend DAS Subcommittee leaders, CoE leaders, our SAA Council liaison, and SAA Education staff continue to attend to these concerns through transparent communication and consultation, increased participation in each other's meetings, and consideration of governance changes if warranted.

Another topic of concern and frequent discussion was the scope and purpose of the DAS program itself, which warrants careful consideration and possible reimagining to ensure it informs relevant, meaningful subcommittee functions that make the best possible use of members' expertise and shapes a robust, up-to-date curriculum that serves the profession effectively.

Although the subcommittee's size increased in 2020 in response to an expanding catalog of courses and individual volunteers' limited capacity, there is still room to improve our organization and management of liaison work and course audits. This could involve assigning a team or individual member as audit coordinator, implementing a more formal liaison training process and checklist, making audit management an official responsibility of the vice chair or immediate past chair, or another solution not yet considered. In any case, frequent, robust audits and timely revision of course content are crucial for the program's effectiveness, professionalism, and reputation and should be a top priority for all members even as special projects come and go.

The incoming chair's priorities for the next year will include curriculum enhancement, organizational efficiency, and communication. Work in these focus areas might include an RFP and detailed plan for Foundational tier webcast revisions, a redefined team structure to reflect current needs and lessons learned in previous years, outreach to and collaboration with component groups, more frequent web page updates, improved communication channels, updates to standing rules, active recruitment of volunteers during the next cycle, and revisiting feedback obtained through the curriculum survey and during the subcommittee's annual meeting in July.

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- Lauren Burroughs
- Sally Benny
- Larissa Krayner