

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
February 2 – 4, 2010  
Washington, D.C.**

**Change in Criteria for Fellowship  
(Submitted by Past Presidents Tim Ericson, Rand Jimerson,  
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**BACKGROUND**

During its deliberations in 2008-2009, the Committee to Select SAA Fellows (comprising the five most immediate past presidents of SAA as well as three Council appointees) encountered several issues that we think require clarification from the SAA Council. The first regards the eligibility of primary contacts of institutional members to be nominated and elected as SAA Fellows. The second is similar but relates to the eligibility of associate members. Third, the committee feels as though we need clarification on who can nominate Fellows.

**Eligibility of Primary Contacts of Institutional Members to be Nominated and Elected as Fellows**

We understand that the Council has recently visited this issue, but we respectfully request that further discussion and study is needed.

At the core of the committee's discomfort with the current guidelines (that primary contacts of institutional members are not eligible to be nominated as SAA Fellows) is the fact that primary contacts have all the other rights of full SAA membership—including the right to be appointed to committees, to be named as official SAA representatives, and to stand for election to SAA offices—even to be elected as SAA President. Given these facts, it is difficult to understand, or to explain to others, why such people should be denied the chance to become an SAA Fellow.

The major challenge that SAA faces in administering the eligibility of primary contacts for Fellowship is that the "primary contact" designation (and attendant benefits) was implemented in 2008 with implementation of the new association management software system. At that time, there was no need to track the history of primary contacts and thus SAA has not implemented a procedure to track primary contacts over time. This makes it impossible to verify the "continuous membership" requirement for existing (or previous) primary contacts. All that SAA can do is implement going forward. If the requirement is seven years of continuous primary contact status (for example), the clock would start

ticking upon approval by the membership of this recommendation and the first primary contact would be eligible seven years from then.

### **Eligibility of Associate Members to be Nominated and Elected as Fellows**

The current language of the Fellows nomination Web page indicates that nominees must be “individual members,” but it is not clear whether associate members, as individuals, are eligible. The SAA Constitution names three categories as “individual full members,” “individual associate members,” and “individual student members.” Further, although the definition of an associate member in the SAA Constitution is brief, the SAA Web page on membership states:

**Individual associate membership** is limited to: *individuals living in the United States* who support the objectives of the Society but who are either not professionally responsible for custody or control of records, archives, or private papers or who are not engaged in the study or teaching of archives; **and** *individuals living outside the United States* whose primary allegiance is to their own national archival association.

### **Eligibility of Who Can Nominate Fellows**

The language in “How to nominate a Fellow” states:

Each year the Committee on the Selection of SAA Fellows invites members to nominate colleagues for selection as fellows of the Society of American Archivists.

But there is no clarification on what we mean by “member.” (Can it be an associate member? A student member? A “primary contact”?) The result in 2008-2009 was that a nominee who was a primary contact of an institutional member was deemed ineligible to be considered as a legitimate candidate and yet another candidate, nominated by a primary contact of an institutional member, was deemed valid because the problem with the nominator not being an individual member of SAA was seen as a technicality that could have easily been remedied had the question been raised earlier.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Eligibility of Primary Contacts of Institutional Members to be Nominated and Elected as Fellows**

During our discussion, some committee members thought it was good for the committee to have “some flexibility” in interpreting rules and guidelines, but the majority opinion seemed to be that clear rules and no inconsistencies was preferable. Other committee members felt as though Fellows ought to have the commitment to “go the extra mile” and be individual members even if they were primary contacts of institutional members. However, others noted that many individual members have their dues paid by their institution, so this so-called “extra” commitment was not a meaningful criterion for selecting Fellows unless we demanded that all nominees pay their own dues—a position for which there was no support on the committee.

The Council will have to determine if this is a matter of the SAA Constitution rather than of any guidelines in the Council Handbook. The Constitution uses the term “full member[ship]” just twice: 1) at III.A.1., “Individual full membership shall be open to those....,” and 2) at III.B., “....No member of the Society shall be elected a Fellow who has not been a full member of the Society in good standing for at least seven (7) years immediately preceding election.” This implies the need for an amendment by the membership at the annual business meeting. However, when other matters of interpretation brought about by the 2008 changes were considered and discussed by the Council, we believe it was decided that Handbook changes would suffice.

### **Eligibility of Associate Members to be Nominated and Elected as Fellows**

Several distinguished non-U.S. archivists have been made Fellows. We do not know whether they were all “full members” or whether some were foreign associate members. There is no language in the Fellow guidelines that distinguishes between the possible eligibility of an American associate member or a possibly distinguished foreign associate member whom we might well consider as a legitimate Fellow nominee.

### **Eligibility of Who Can Nominate Fellows**

Certainly if it is decided that a primary contact is eligible to be a Fellow, it follows logically that a primary contact should be eligible to nominate a Fellow. However, the negative need not apply. Even if the decision is made that primary contacts are ineligible to become Fellows, we believe it still makes sense for primary contacts to be able to nominate Fellows—just as primary contacts are eligible for every other opportunity of individual membership.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**THAT the SAA Council revise the charge to the Committee to Select SAA Fellows to reflect the following:**

**Primary contacts of SAA institutional members are eligible to be nominated as Fellows. As with individual members, primary contacts must have been so designated for seven years immediately prior to their nomination in order to be eligible. A combination of seven years as an individual member or primary contact will be acceptable to meet this requirement.**

**Support Statement:** This change will remedy the current situation in which primary contacts have all of the rights of individual membership, including the right to hold appointed or elected SAA office, except the right to be named an SAA Fellow. It removes a seeming inconsistency that is difficult to explain and allows the Committee to Select SAA Fellows to judge each nomination on its merits.

**Fiscal Impact:** The fiscal impact could be significant if a system reconfiguration is

required, and unclear in terms of staff time if SAA must develop a manual way of tracking primary contacts' continuous status.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

**THAT the SAA Council revise the charge to the Committee to Select SAA Fellows to reflect the following:**

**Foreign associate members who are engaged in archival work but whose primary affiliation is as individual members in their own national archival associations are eligible to be elected as SAA Fellows. Foreign associate members must have held this membership, or full individual membership, have served as the primary contact for an institutional member, for the seven years immediately prior to their nomination. American associate members are not eligible to be SAA Fellows.**

**Support Statement:** SAA should be able to honor foreign associate members who have made a substantial contribution to the Society or to the archives profession. Such members regularly attend SAA meetings in addition to the meetings of their own national associations.

**Fiscal Impact:** None.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**THAT the SAA Council revise the charge of the Committee to Select SAA Fellows to reflect the following:**

**Individual members, primary contacts of institutional members, student members, and associate members are eligible to nominate SAA Fellows.**

**Support Statement:** This clarification would have assisted the 2008-2009 committee when a primary contact of an institutional member (formerly an individual member) nominated a Fellow candidate. The lack of clarity on this point raised questions regarding whether the nomination was eligible. This change will also make it easier on the SAA staff doing "background checks" on nominations.

**Fiscal Impact:** None.