

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

**Discussion: Defining Diversity
(Prepared by Nancy Beaumont)**

BACKGROUND

At its August 2009 meeting, the SAA Council adopted a revised Desired Outcome #4 for the Diversity Priority: “SAA will define diversity, develop new programs, and enhance existing programs that promote diversity as a value while fostering an organizational environment of inclusiveness.”

As the Executive Committee discussed the entire Strategic Plan document during the early fall and as the SAA staff attempted to develop activity plans for each measurable activity (including, for example, “fast tracking” development of a new Diversity Award), discussion turned to the first phrase in the new Desired Outcome: “SAA will define diversity....”

In the course of a conference call with the Diversity Committee in early November, Beaumont noted the language in the new Desired Outcome and suggested the possibility that the Council would assign the task of defining diversity to the Diversity Committee.

Committee members acknowledged the daunting scope of the question and expressed concern about creating “laundry lists” and about the exclusivity that may be implied by any given definition. Some commented that it would be important to ground any definition in a survey of members so that it truly reflects SAA’s priorities, and not merely the opinions of a small group of leaders. Council Liaison Deborra Richardson acknowledged these concerns, but affirmed the need for SAA to qualify what it means by diversity in order to properly identify goals and achieve them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

During the course of the Diversity Committee conference call, Doyle suggested that any attempt to define diversity might benefit from consideration of certain questions of principle that would help define the function of diversity efforts for SAA and the profession. We present these questions for Council consideration:

- SAA’s strategic initiatives are intended to address some threat and/or challenge to the community. What is in jeopardy when it comes to diversity? If SAA had no Diversity

Committee and no such initiatives, what would be lost? Conversely, answering this question may illuminate what is to be gained by these initiatives.

- Per current debates in higher education, to what degree should diversity efforts be regarded as “compensatory” in nature? That is, is defining diversity about righting historical wrongs and/or accommodating some existing inequity? Conversely, should diversity efforts be regarded as primarily “enriching” in nature, which does not necessitate compensation *per se*, but simply suggests that a variety of perspectives benefit the intellectual life of the community? (The answers to these questions may inform discussions on such issues as geographical diversity, institutional diversity, diversity of practice, etc.)
- Are there particular areas within the profession in which compensation and/or enrichment are needed?

All of these issues beg the question: Can SAA define diversity? If so, which group should shepherd this process?