BACKGROUND

At its February 2010 meeting, the Council reviewed and discussed inconsistencies regarding the benefits of institutional member primary contacts, specifically as they relate to eligibility to be nominated as an SAA Fellow.¹ Subsequently, the Council approved a motion to propose to the membership, for consideration at the August 14, 2010, Annual Membership Meeting, an amendment to the SAA Constitution reflecting 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.

In order to inform and help prepare supporting materials (e.g., talking points, background information, etc.) for the Annual Membership Meeting, staff reviewed the history of this issue. During the process, we discovered a number of contradictory considerations that were identified and expressed by past leaders that we feel should be brought to the Council’s attention.

Changes in institutional member benefits were provisionally approved by the Council in August 2006,² (pending a formal constitutional amendment in September 2007) and were prompted by two factors: 1) migration to SAA’s new association management system, which necessitated clarifications in the e-commerce business logic related to institutional members; and 2) several instances of appointment of institutional member “designees” to committee positions – in contradiction to established policy.

The “primary contact” role was created for two reasons: to clarify who is entitled to receive and exercise benefits on behalf of the institutional member and to extend appropriate leadership opportunities to those individuals. To achieve these goals, the Council approved as a single

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recommendation to grant “eligibility to vote, to hold office, and to serve on appointed groups” to an institution’s designated primary contact.

Immediately following the September 1, 2007, Annual Membership Meeting at which the constitutional amendment was approved, the Council discussed a question raised on the floor during the meeting: “…whether an institution’s primary contact would qualify for SAA Fellowship if that individual remained a primary contact for seven consecutive years.” Pending further investigation, the issue was tabled.

The question was presented again in February 2008 in a report prepared by President Mark Greene. The Council considered and approved the following motion:

**THAT the SAA Council affirm the current Constitutional provision that Fellows must be Individual full members of SAA, and therefore a primary contact of an Institutional member is not eligible to become a Fellow unless that individual is also an Individual full member who meets all other eligibility requirements.**

**Support Statement:** There is no compelling reason to change the Constitution. The Fellows Steering Committee expressed opposition to such a change.

**Fiscal Impact:** None.

Moved by Miller; seconded by Ambacher. PASSED. (6 in favor, 4 opposed)

Greene’s February 2008 report presented the following arguments for and against allowing primary contacts to be eligible for Fellowship:

**In favor of allowing primary contacts to be eligible for Fellowship:**
The reasoning for this is the same as the arguments for creating the primary contact status in the first place—it encourages Institutional membership without penalizing the very individuals who probably signed off on Institutional membership in the first place. “If they are a ‘member’ in whatever category, they are a member.”

**Opposed to allowing primary contacts to be eligible for Fellowship:**
The Constitution is clear that only Individual members are eligible for Fellowship. The Fellows Steering Committee is opposed to allowing primary contacts to be eligible for Fellowship, and the Fellows should be the determinants of their own membership. Being a primary contact does not represent the same level of commitment to SAA as becoming an Individual member. There is nothing to prevent a primary contact from also being an Individual member.

A key purpose of the primary contact role is to clarify who is entitled to exercise the benefits of institutional membership. The staff has understood that any such benefits attach to and are exercised by the primary contact on behalf of the member institution. Primary contacts are not individual members. Nor are they institutional members per se—a view that is supported by the provision that a primary contact who also maintains individual membership may cast two ballots.

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3 [http://www.archivists.org/governance/minutes/min0807.asp](http://www.archivists.org/governance/minutes/min0807.asp)
5 [http://www.archivists.org/governance/minutes/min0208.asp](http://www.archivists.org/governance/minutes/min0208.asp)
in elections—one for herself and one for the institution. This is an important distinction that challenges the argument, “if they are a ‘member’ in whatever category, they are a member.”

Clearly, the SAA Council was strongly divided when it deliberated on this question in February 2008 and the issue remains a concern. The challenge is due in large part to the unusual and exceptional nature of SAA’s membership structure—which includes both individual and institutional membership—rendering the Society somewhat of a hybrid between a professional association and a trade association. In this context, staff feels strongly that it is important to maintain a clear distinction between the functions of individual and institutional membership (not to mention institutional journal subscriptions, which on occasion have also been conflated with member status).

In August 2006, in an effort to clarify these distinctions, the staff prepared and presented to the Council the recommendation to grant “eligibility to vote, to hold office, and to serve on appointed groups” to an institution’s designated primary contact. In hindsight, it appears that the results of this approved recommendation have been only partially successful. Comments offered by past presidents and by Council members in February 2010 suggest that, among other reasons, the eligibility of primary contacts to hold office produces the need for further clarification. As the Committee to Select SAA Fellows wrote in its February 2010 report to the Council:

> 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.  

**FOR COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

Having helped draft the approved language of the September 2007 constitutional amendment, I will be the first to acknowledge that I was not cognizant of the full implications of including eligibility to hold office in the recommendation. Nevertheless, as the Council prepares to facilitate deliberations at the August 2010 annual membership meeting, I suggest that all of the considerations identified by past leaders and outlined above may help inform a fruitful discussion and resolve questions regarding leadership opportunities for primary contacts:

1. **Is the eligibility of primary contacts to hold office appropriate?**
   If not, the Council may wish to consider an additional and/or alternative constitutional amendment to rescind that benefit.

2. **Is the eligibility of primary contacts to hold office the foremost and/or exclusive reason for recommending extension of Fellowship eligibility to primary contacts?**
   If so, and if the Council deems that eligibility to hold office is not appropriate for primary contacts, the Council’s finding in February 2008 that “there is no compelling reason to change the Constitution” may still be valid.

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