

Standards Submission Form

This is a form for:

- the development of a new SAA Standard
- the review and adoption of an existing document as an SAA Standard
- the review of an existing SAA standard leading to its reaffirmation, revision or rescission

Date received:

Project #:

Name of Submitting Group: Acquisition and Appraisal Section

Date Submitted:

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Title (or topic) of Standard: Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning

PLEASE INCLUDE A WRITTEN STATEMENT that covers the following:

1. A concise explanation of:
 - a. identified need for the standard
 - b. expected effect/impact on individual archivists and/or archival institutions
 - c. scope of coverage/application
 - d. anticipated format and content of the standard

a. Reappraisal and deaccessioning have been controversial topics in the archival world since at least the publication of the 1984 winter issue of *American Archivist*, in which Karen Benedict, Richard Haas, Leonard Rapport, F. Gerald Ham, and Jutta Reed-Scott debated the practical and theoretical merits of each. To quote an anthology of related essays on the topic, reappraisal and

deaccessioning were largely viewed as a tool for “managing the historical record in an age of abundance.”¹ Twenty-five years later, that abundance has not abated, nor have our resources increased. Consequently reappraisal and deaccessioning are tools more repositories are willing to consider employing. Over the years, and with the example of successful projects at the Minnesota Historical Society and the American Heritage Center, the practice has become more widely accepted. NHPRC’s funding of the latter’s large-scale project also evidences increased approval and support at the national level. Further, if attendance at SAA sessions on the topic in 2005 and 2008 is any indication, practitioners are interested in learning more about reappraisal and deaccessioning and are looking for guidance and resources. Two practitioners who presented their deaccessioning experiences at the 2008 session called for the establishment of profession-wide guidelines for deaccessioning, but as Mark Greene notes in a recent article, the archival profession has not provided guidelines or addressed the question in our code of ethics, as have our colleagues in the allied professions of librarianship and museum curatorship. Projects at archival repositories have had to rely on standards from those fields in creating their own policies.²

b. Such a standard would provide informed guidance and professional sanction for archivists and repositories that choose to manage their collections in this way. Without it, as another author has noted, “The approach to de-accessioning will continue to remain ... confusing and inevitably, ineffective in the management of archival records”³ Not to address the practice with a standard is to continue to relegate it to a process to be carried out quietly and in piecemeal fashion, contributing to the idea it is wrong and inviting public disapproval. Guidelines on deaccessioning and reappraisal would assist archivists to implement transparent and consistent strategic collection management, to husband better their limited resources, and to serve researchers by directing their efforts to retained collections and making transferred collections available at more appropriate repositories.

c. The standard will have broad professional application, but will have a greater impact on collecting repositories where issues of ownership and donor relations often inhibit reappraisal and deaccessioning practices.

¹ *Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance*, ed. Nancy E. Peace (Lexington, 1984).

² Mark Greene, “I’ve Deaccessioned and Lived to Tell About It: Confessions of an Unrepentant Reappraiser,” *Archival Issues* 30:1 (2006), 17 n. 18.

³ May Chan, “Deaccessioning Archives: The Ongoing Controversy,” School of Library and Information Studies, University of British Columbia, March 2004, 25–26.

http://www.slais.ubc.ca/courses/libr559f/03-04-t1/portfolios/M_Chan/Contents/Deaccessioning%20Archives.pdf#search='may%20chan%20deaccessioning, quoted in Greene, “I’ve Deaccessioned.”

d. Format and content:

Introduction

Definitions

Ethics

Literature Review

Process

- Collection Analysis
- Determination of Ownership
- Decision Process
- Disposition
- Documentation at all levels

Evaluation

Appendix: Forms

At present, we see the standard in terms of a guideline for those who wish to undertake deaccessioning and reappraisal, not as a technical standard or rule. Publication online seems the most cost-effective means of dissemination

2. Known existing standards that are closely related to the proposed standards.

- The American Heritage Center's deaccessioning policy, which is part of its collection management policy (<http://ahc.uwyo.edu/about/policies.htm>, p. 11-14), has become the defacto standard for those who undertake deaccessioning projects.

The following are less comprehensive:

- Deaccessioning Policy of Marquette University Archives (draft)
- Deaccessioning Policy of the Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/library/arch/gs/rules/appraisal/daccess.shtml>.
- University of Milwaukee-Wisconsin
- University of Texas at Arlington

Codes of Ethics with Relevant Statements:

- International Council on Museums *Code of Ethics for Museums*, 2006, <http://icom.museum/ethics.html>
- American Association of Museums, *Code of Ethics for Museums*, 8–9.
- American Association of Museums, Curators Committee, “Code of Ethics for Curators”
- American Association of Museums, Registrars Committee, “A Code of Ethics for Registrars”
- Association of Art Museum Directors, “A Code of Ethics for Registrars.”
- The American Library Association does not mention deaccessioning in its code of ethics, but its Office for Intellectual Freedom created a *Workbook for Selection Policy Writing*, http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/workbook_selection.html, which notes that policies for “reevaluation” (weeding) are an essential part of a selection policy.
- The Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ALA, however, has a full statement on deaccessioning as part of its ethics document,

<http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=speccollections&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=8969>.

- Association of Canadian Archivists, *Code of Ethics*, <http://archivists.ca/about/ethics.aspx>.⁴

3. List of other SAA subgroups, outside organizations, and/or individuals who will be consulted during the development of the standard or who will be asked to review the standard before it is submitted for adoption.

SAA: Manuscripts Repositories Section, Committee on Ethics and Professional Conduct, Reference, Access, and Outreach Section, Archives Management Roundtable.

Outside organizations: ALA Rare Books and Manuscripts Section

Individuals: Laura Uglean Jackson, Mark Greene, Frank Boles, Karen Benedict, Margery Sly, Todd Daniels-Howell, Mark Shelstad, Michael Doylen, and F. Gerald Ham.

4. Projected timetable for the development and review process.

Not having a point of reference for developing a standard, I am not sure how long to expect the process to take. I've outlined the steps in the process with an estimate of how much time each will take. If the amount of time allotted seems generous, that is based on the idea that participants are volunteers who have full-time jobs and other personal and professional responsibilities.

1. Call for interested parties to participate on the committee (1 month)
2. Identify additional existing policies and literature (2 months)
3. Review additional existing policies and literature (3 months)
4. Draft outline of guidelines (1 month)
5. Assign sections (1 month)
6. First draft of sections (4 months)
7. Review by committee members (1 month)
8. Revision (1 month)
9. Review by committee members (1 month)
10. Review by SAA subgroups, outside organizations, and/or individuals. (2 months)
11. Evaluation of feedback and subsequent revision (3 months)
12. Submit to Standards Committee
13. Open for public comment (TBA by Standards Committee)
14. Evaluation of feedback and subsequent revision (3 months)
15. Submitted to Council for approval

5. Budgetary implications for SAA entailed in the development/review process (including direct costs for meetings, travel, copying, postage of group responsible for the development and review, and such indirect costs as those involved in using SAA staff time and support).

⁴ The items in this section are taken, with permission, from Greene, "I've Deaccessioned," *n. 18*.

Council has already indicated that it will not fund an official taskforce for this project (see emails in appendix). The section, however, would like interested professionals from across SAA, not just those who are members of the Acquisition and Appraisal Section, to be able to participate directly in developing the standard—in effect a taskforce in all but name. Support from SAA remains uncertain; therefore, keeping the demands on SAA resources to a minimum, the following needs are anticipated:

- Use of meeting space reserved by SAA for the annual meeting, enabling the committee to meet face to face during the meeting.
- Assistance and technological infrastructure for sharing documents and communication from the SAA office.

WHEN APPLICABLE, also attach a copy of the existing standard or document.
(see URL's above)

SEND THIS FORM ALONG WITH ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION TO:

Chair, Society of American Archivists Standards Committee
527 S. Wells St., 5th Floor,
Chicago, IL 60607-3922

(Note: Current contact information for the chair may be found online at:
<http://www.archivists.org/governance/leaderlist-index.asp>)