

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
February 26 – 28, 2009**

Committee on Education: Progress Report on Accreditation Issue

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February 13, 2009

Background

Responding to a recommendation from 38 SAA members to “appoint a task force to explore the desirability and feasibility of accrediting graduate archival education programs composed of a broad cross-section of the SAA membership, as well as members with particular expertise in graduate archival education,” the Council determined at its August 2008 meeting that such an exploration is most appropriately within the purview of an existing appointed group – the Committee on Education – provided that broad comment is sought from the SAA membership.

Council charge: That the Education Committee explore the desirability and feasibility of developing and implementing an accreditation program in graduate archival education, that the Committee conduct a broad-based survey to obtain member input into the question, and that it provide a preliminary report with recommendations to the Council at its May/June 2009 meeting.

Support Statement: Education and training of archivists is central to SAA’s mission. At a time when archival education is the primary form of entry into the field and archivist preparation is becoming increasingly diffuse, it is in the best interest of SAA and the archives profession to reexamine the issue of accreditation of graduate archival education programs. Given its charge, the Committee on Education is the appropriate group to conduct this investigation.

Discussion

This progress report will be presented to the Committee on Education at its February 20-21 meeting in Chicago, and Council will receive a verbal update at its February 26-28 meeting.

Summary of Activities to Date:

The accreditation subcommittee of the Committee on Education met via conference call in September, November, December, and January to address Council’s charge. In attendance were Committee Chair Donna McCrea, Co-chair Katie Salzmann, members Amy Cooper Cary and Patricia Galloway, and staff member Solveig De Sutter. At its September meeting the subcommittee established the following timeline:

- September-November: Inform ourselves about SAAs history with accreditation (when has this issue come up in the past and what was the outcome at those times). Learn about the current landscape of accreditation in general.
- December-February 20: Contact a wide variety of stakeholders, including graduate archival educators and signers of the original petition to Council, to gather feedback on why accreditation was recommended and what underlying issues/concerns they feel accreditation will address.
- February 20-April: working with and incorporating feedback from stakeholders, prepare report for council on the feasibility and desirability of SAA accreditation of graduate archival education programs. If necessary, Committee on Education determines what methods or venues would be suitable to gather additional feedback.
- May: submit final Accreditation Report to Council

Summary of findings to date (February 13, 2009)

Arguments in favor of accreditation:

- Students need a way to measure quality of programs prior to applying. The increase in online programs may be adding urgency to this issue.
- Educators want a way to help prospective students determine the quality of graduate programs. Again the increase in online programs may be adding urgency to this issue.
- Prospective employers (those employers who are not themselves archivists) need a better way to determine the expected skill levels and competencies of graduates of archival programs.

Arguments against accreditation:

- ASIS&T (American Society for Information Science and Technology) recently conducted a survey and published a report about the feasibility of ASIS&T accreditation for programs involved in educating information professionals.¹ They determined that these programs currently participate in very different types of accreditation processes and trying to impose a new structure on top of or alongside existing structures does not seem feasible. It is likely that because graduate archival education programs exist in a number of academic units

¹ "Graduate Information Programs and Accreditation: Landscape Survey and Analysis" available at: http://www.asis.org/Accreditation_Report.pdf

(including library schools, information schools, history departments, and on their own) SAA accreditation would face the same challenges.

- The cost to individual programs to participate in a formal SAA accreditation process would likely be \$25k per 'round'. This includes fees to the accrediting body (SAA) and paying the expenses of the site visit team, as well as time and expenses of graduate program faculty and staff for data gathering and report preparation. Although some data could be repurposed from other accreditation processes (ie. ALA) it is unclear whether SAA accreditation would be presumed to be of enough benefit to these programs to outweigh the anticipated costs.
- The cost to SAA itself for managing an accreditation program would be at least \$67k/yr for staff and increased insurance. Estimates from other sources (including the recent ASIS&T report) place the likely cost much higher when fees for legal counsel, memberships in accrediting organizations, and team meetings to summarize site visits are factored in.
- It appears likely that a process other than formal accreditation could address most of the concerns raised in the petition to council, with significantly less expense to SAA and graduate programs. As an example, ASIS&T is currently exploring what they are calling 'recognition.'

Next Steps

Detailed information in support of the above points for and against accreditation will be presented by the subcommittee to the committee of the whole at our Committee on Education winter meeting February 20-21, 2009.

While it appears unlikely that the Committee on Education will recommend to Council that SAA become involved in formal accreditation, possible outcomes and suggestions from the February Comm Ed meeting could include some or all of the following:

- a call for an open forum on graduate education at the August 2009 SAA Annual Meeting
- an update of SAAs Graduate Program in Archival Studies (GPAS) guidelines
- the creation of a checklist for use by students, employers, etc., and perhaps based on ACAs General Knowledge Statements
- exploration of a 'recognition' process similar to the one being considered by ASIS&T

It is clear that additional feedback from SAA members is needed and at this point the subcommittee intends to follow our original proposed timeline. A final report from the Committee on Education will be presented to Council in time for its May/June meeting.