

**2009
Midwest Archives Conference
Annual Meeting, St. Louis
Program Co-Chair Report**

I. Members

Co-chairs

Adriana Cuervo, University of Illinois
Joshua Ranger, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh

Committee Membership:

According to MAC oral tradition, this was the first time a PC was formed after a request for volunteers was made to the membership at large. A blast email was sent to all members and we heard from approximately 28 interested individuals. These individuals were coded by state, type of institution and gender and a representative initial group was formed. After some time, some individuals expressed in words or actions a need for less responsibility, and to compensate two individuals were added to the committee.

Members included:

Janet Carleton (ex officio), Ohio University
Shelly J. Croteau, Missouri State Archives
Chris D'Arpa, University of Illinois
Mary Ellen Ducey, Nebraska Historical Society
Deborah I. Gouin, Michigan State University
Joseph Laframboise, Kansas State Historical Society
Alexis Braun Marks, Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History
Colleen McFarland, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire
Maren Read, Ball State
Bart Ryckbosch (ex officio), Art Institute of Chicago
Craig Simpson, Kent State University

II. Overall Assessment

We were very pleased with the program which was particularly strong in technological issues, as well as those to do with assessment and donor relations. Sessions related to history topics or specific collecting areas were less well attended.

III. Special Acknowledgments

Special thanks go to Doug Bicknese, the MAC VP, for his efforts in coordinating the work of the PC and the LAC.

IV. Communication with LAC

With a single chair in charge of local arrangements, communications were very streamlined. Both the PC and LAC made use of Google Documents to share resources. It was used little for inter-committee collaboration, however, within our own it worked very well to share proposals, program drafts, etc.. There was some delay on the PCs part in getting all AV information to the LAC. This was due in part to presenters realizing their needs later in the development of their program. There was also some confusion of the responsibility of assigning room monitors. Both PC and LAC members were present at the sessions, each believing they were in charge of the room monitor duties. While the PC appreciated the double coverage, the PC recommends that this be clearly indicated as a PC responsibility to avoid any confusion and additional requirements made upon the taxed local arrangements volunteers.

V. Plenary

Charles N. Davis, Associate Professor of Journalism Studies and Executive Director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition at the University of Missouri (Columbia), School of Journalism, spoke on the need for greater transparency in government. The – co-chairs took responsibility for this session and agreed early on that government transparency would be a good topic after the presidential election of 2008. An earlier attempt to secure a Steven Aftergood, Director of Project on Government Secrecy of the Federation of American Scientists, was unsuccessful and after more research discovered that Missouri had its own leader in this issue in the person of Dr. Davis.

Dr. Davis's speech dealt with the broader issues facing journalists in an era of increased secrecy in government and talked specifically on the role archivists must play in advocating for access with their own collections of government records and beyond. The plenary was well received and we heard from many members of the timeliness of the talk. We were proud to be able to present a Missourian as a plenary speaker in St. Louis.

VI. Sessions

Call for Papers

The Program Committee committed to a call for papers and session proposals (CFP) from the outset, when the co-chairs were appointed in April, 2007. The co-chairs from the beginning wanted the majority of the program to come from the membership rather than the PC itself. Ideas for sessions were requested from the PC to ensure a healthy amount. Some of these ideas went on to become proposals and two became part of the program.

The deadline for submissions, originally August 15, was extended until September 15. This was important as several submissions received in that time were prefixed by pleas from members thinking they had missed the deadline. With preparations for SAA and summer vacations taking up many peoples' Augusts, the PC suggests that future calls for papers use a mid-September deadline.

In the end, the PC had 40 proposals to consider at its first conference call in September. Many incomplete proposals were eliminated at this time (including most of the PC's own ideas) and two proposals were combined into one, bringing the number of proposals in development to 25. PC members were then each given responsibility over two or three proposals to confirm information in the cases of fully developed proposals or, more commonly, to work with the individuals to fully flush out the message, panel, etc. of their session.

The 25 finished proposals were put to the PC for a vote, individuals ranking using MAC's 5 point ranking form to determine the 18 accepted and 2 alternate sessions needed. From that list, the co-chairs made one executive decision to swap out a borderline accepted session for an alternate one to create more diversity in subject matter in the program.

Session Attendance

The sessions were well attended, with the typical drop off on Saturday's second round. Technically oriented sessions were a large draw but sessions on assessment/metrics and donor relations also had strong appeal.

Workshops

The PC worked with the Education Committee (Chelle Somsen, Chair) to assemble a slate of workshops for the conference. The LAC felt strongly about a preservation workshop at the National Personnel Records Center to which the PC and EC heartedly agreed. This was the first—again according to MAC lore—workshop held at an off-site facility. This workshop was free but attendees paid for their transportation and lunch.

Also innovative was the PC/EC creation of a seminar in lieu of a workshop. The seminar was born from proposals and/or requests for sessions on both Archon and Archivists Toolkit. The PC decided that a longer session was necessary to cover both but we were unwilling to modify the schedule during the meeting. Instead, a seminar-style program was pitched as a pre-meeting alternative to a true workshop. It was unlike a workshop in that it was not direct instruction but a panel made up of programmers and implementers to demonstrate the software programs and to make testimonials and answer questions.

The full slate of workshops were as follows:

- Program Workshop: Disaster Preparation and Wet Salvage of Materials Sara J. Holmes and Gretchen Shoemaker,
- MAC Workshop: Ethics and Legal Issues in Archives. Lynn Smith
- Program Workshop: Electronic Records Management and Preservation. Mark Meyers
- Seminar: Archon and Archivist Toolkit Seminar. A cast of several.

Recommendations for Future Meetings

What Worked

Extension of deadline for Call for Proposals (CFP) to September 15th.

Again, extending the deadline into mid-September helped bring in some proposals in which individuals would have given up on if the August deadline was kept.

PC Communication Technologies:

The PC used Google Groups effectively to send emails to the group and share documents and also FreeConference.com to hold teleconferences.

Abandoning Themes for Sessions:

The co-chairs decided against themes for the sessions although general categories that emerged (assessment, fundamentals, digital/electronic and topical) were used to make the schedule. This seems unavoidable if the membership continues to provide the bulk of session ideas.

Seminar:

The seminar for Archon and Archivist Toolkit was a success, it was well attended and from all reports its format (longer than a session, but not individual instruction like a workshop) worked for the subject matter. The PC recommends that this seminar like format be considered in the future for appropriate subjects. Compensation, however, was and will remain an issue without guidance from Council. Should a seminar presenter or organizer be compensated? If so should it be at the same rate as a workshop presenter. Also cost to attend needs to be addressed. The PC disagreed with the decision (made by LAC or EC?) to require the same fee be paid to attend the seminar which was open to far more people and did not promise and one-on-one instruction.

Volunteer Members of PC:

The co-chairs enjoyed a good geographic and institution (at least at first) diversity by creating a committee of volunteers. That said, there was also a great diversity in the level of commitment to the responsibilities that came with committee membership. The group were almost complete strangers to each other at first, allowing some MAC members their first opportunity to lend a hand to MAC operations. But such unfamiliarity may not have allowed for personal connections to help encourage some members to produce. Still, the PC recommends this approach or some sort of hybrid with stranger-volunteers and known entities.

What Didn't Work

Allowing PC members to be part of sessions:

In two sessions, members of our committee took part either as a chair or panelist. While these were important contributions that we valued, it created some tension on the committee in which the co-chairs were made to make exceptions to rules. Rules that may or may not have even been codified barring this. The co-chairs recommend that rules be made that restrict PC member roles in sessions to emergencies only (see below).

The Economy:

The PC's biggest frustration was, by far, the economic crisis and its effect on members' ability to travel, or their very employment. Several sessions were missing at least one presenter due to a cut in support. The co-chairs acknowledge the unprecedented nature of the crisis and its devastating effects in cultural and corporate institutions, but they were not pleased with the manner several presenters went about canceling. In one case, two of three presenters pulled out with only one sending the paper she was supposed to have delivered (and that a few hours before the session was to start.) Co-chair Adriana Cuervo read the paper as an emergency back-up. This was not the only case of an individual not sending in their paper/speech. Another session unilaterally made changes to their program allowing a presenter to appear virtually to the session instead of traveling to MAC. The co-chairs accepted this ONLY because the session was appropriate to this form of presentation. They were not pleased that the change was made without consultation but agree the session members went to great lengths to make sure this novel (and successful) approach would work with back-up plans in place if it did not.

The PC strongly recommends that MAC require all presenters and chairs to sign an agreement, similar to what SAA requires, that spells out all of their responsibilities including what accommodations they must make if they are required to cancel. While the PC recommends no sanctions in the event the individual does not honor the agreement, such a form might better educate presenters and reinforce the seriousness of their commitment.

Respectfully submitted,

September 14, 2009
Adriana Cuervo
Joshua Ranger