

It's a Conversation

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I am writing this as I am returning from SAA's Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. There were excellent sessions and great posters. Terry Baxter's Presidential Address, which you will read in *American Archivist* 87.1, was thought provoking and compassionate. It was, in most ways, a very typical annual meeting. However, the thing that struck me the most—and this is partly because this was my first in-person annual meeting since the pandemic—was the people. There were almost 1,400 of us in a space that was familiar to some of us and new to others. People were meeting in the lobby, finding lunch spots, and exploring the city together. It was a joy to see folks I hadn't seen since 2019, and it was just as wonderful to meet new colleagues. I was talking to an author at the SAA publications booth about an upcoming article when I noted, "It's a conversation . . ." That is, this literature that we are creating is a conversation—our articles do not stand alone but interact and respond to one another. Our literature mirrors our annual conference—we are in constant conversation with our professional colleagues, our students, our researchers, and our practice.

This strikes me especially as I consider the content for this issue, which opens several avenues for conversation. All the articles in this issue invite us to consider our identity, our practice, and our own social responsibility. As I think about the writing in this issue and the interactions I had at the annual meeting, I can't help but note that our literature is becoming more reflective and broader in its scope. I'm particularly pleased that this issue brings you the Special Section on Middle Eastern and North African Archives, skillfully edited by Editorial Board members Dr. Sumayya Ahmed and Dr. Rebecca Hankins. These articles prioritize archival repositories and practices that American archivists are likely unfamiliar with. While *American Archivist* is not specifically an international journal—like *Comma*, for

example—we must recognize that the world of archives and the work that we do is not insular. Our experience is only deepened when we examine the influences and work of archivists outside of our national boundaries. The goal, then, is to amplify and center voices that we do not typically hear in our literature. The publication of this Special Section is an enriching path for our journal, and I'm very grateful to Dr. Ahmed for bringing the initial proposal to the Editorial Board and for seeing it through. I sincerely hope that the work of Dr. Ahmed, Dr. Hankins, and the authors they mentored through this process engages us and opens a rich cross-cultural discussion.

We are also publishing the A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey. First, let me admit that I've been excited about the second A*CENSUS since I learned about it. A*CENSUS I (published in what I tend to refer to as “the jelly-bean issue”¹) gave us a foundation to start talking about our profession and has been useful for years. The addition of an Administrators Survey to A*CENSUS II continues our self-assessment, bringing to light information about our profession that was not addressed in the original survey. If you read this “second installment” of A*CENSUS II, you'll begin to see some of the broad characteristics of archival administration, as well as some of the constraints that many administrators face on a day-to-day basis. This is a much-needed addition to the conversation that began in A*CENSUS I and continued with the A*CENSUS II: All Archivists Survey Report that was published in the last issue. What I hope is that this serves as impetus for you to write from the data.² The SAA Dataverse³ contains the full datasets from all A*CENSUS surveys, giving us the opportunity to use statistical evidence in consideration of our theory and practice.

I've been writing about how we all contribute to our professional literature in most of my prefaces, and this will always be important to me. In this preface, though, I'd like to end with a question for you. What direction do you want the conversation we're engaged in to take? Think about who you want to be in conversation with. I'd invite you to engage the A*CENSUS II data, to think about a Special Section, or to simply contact me for a chat. One of the things that I love most about sitting in the editor's chair is that I spend a lot of time talking with authors and potential authors. I can always make time for one more conversation.

NOTES

¹ Victoria Irons Walch, Nancy Beaumont, Elizabeth Yakel, Jeannette Bastian, Nancy Zimmerman, Susan Davis, and Anne Diffendal; A*CENSUS (Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States). *American Archivist* 69, no. 1 (2006): 291–419, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.69.2.d474374017506522>.

² The Basics of Quantitative Data Analysis Using A*CENSUS II Part 2 workshop took place at *ARCHIVES*RECORDS 2023*. I'm hopeful that this will bring out some of your ideas about doing a deep dive into the data, and thus, into our professional conversation.

³ SAA Dataverse, <https://dataverse.unc.edu/dataverse/saa>.