South Asia Open Archives (SAOA)
Annual Activities Report
March 2023

Executive Board

The Executive Board is responsible for overseeing SAOA's activities and operations. The board works in conjunction with the working groups to conduct SAOA's business on behalf of the membership and works with the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), SAOA's administrative home, to fulfill SAOA's mission.

Members

- Ryan Perkins, Stanford University, SAMP Representative (2022–2024) (Chair)
- Abhijit Bhattacharya, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (2021–2024)
- R. Prakash, Roja Muthiah Research Library (2022–2025)
- Laura Ring, University of Chicago (2021–2023)
- Elizabeth Lhost, Center for Research Libraries (ex officio)

Update

Over the past year, the Executive Board has been working to guide SAOA from a visionary start-up project to a sustainable program. In Fall 2022, the Executive Board reassigned working group chair responsibilities and invited working group members to change, recommit, or resign from their groups. Rather than losing participants, the reshuffle and recommitment increased member participation, bringing new energy and new ideas to SAOA. The board has also been working to strengthen SAOA's organizational culture, so that SAOA's operations reflect its programmatic commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The board held an open meeting in November to discuss implementing a community agreement and held follow-up discussions about norms, behaviors, and expectations within each group. This work will continue into the next fiscal year. The board has also been instrumental in steering SAOA through a number of organizational and staffing changes at CRL and continues to work with CRL leadership to ensure that SAOA rests on firm administrative footing moving forward. The board will continue these efforts as CRL recalibrates its hosted programs and reboots the area materials projects (AMPs) over the next several months.

For FY24: The Executive Board plans to work with CRL to formalize the roles and responsibilities associated with SAOA's operations in conjunction with the planned reboot of CRL's area materials projects.

Content Curation Working Group

The Content Curation Working Group (CCWG) solicits ideas for new SAOA content from scholars and librarians, reviews and vets proposals for digitization, and prioritizes new content for inclusion in SAOA.

Working Group Members
- Ryan Perkins, Stanford University (Chair)
- Sohaib Baig, University of California, Los Angeles
- Brent Bianchi, Yale University
- Deepa Banerjee, University of Washington
- David Magier, Princeton University
- James Nye, University of Chicago
- Jeffrey Martin, University of Michigan
- Gautham Reddy, Emory University

Update

Over the past twelve months, the Content Curation Working Group has been working to balance SAOA's demands for collection growth with its interests in identifying and digitizing high-value materials. To that end, the CCWG recently completed a review of proposed and pending projects and provided prioritized recommendations to the Executive Board. These recommendations account for SAOA's Selection Guidelines and Selection Principles alongside recent changes in vendor pricing and availability. They will constitute SAOA's next round of new digitization projects. To support the growth and development of SAOA's digitization capacity, the group has also been reevaluating SAOA's digitization providers (including vendors and partners) to account for speed, cost, and completeness. At present, the group intends to move forward with several new digitization projects in the coming months and to continue to strengthen SAOA's digitization workflows in collaboration with the Infrastructure Working Group.

For FY24: The CCWG plans to facilitate the digitization of over 100,000 pages of new content across multiple genres and languages for inclusion in SAOA. These new digitization projects will supplement additions to SAOA's collection through collaborations and in-kind contributions.

Funding Working Group

The Funding Working Group provides recommendations to the Executive Board on all matters associated with the financial wellbeing and sustainability of SAOA, including fundraising, membership, and external collaborations.

Working Group Members
- Abhijit Bhattacharya, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (Chair)
- Gary Hausman, Columbia University
- Michael Hopper, Harvard University
- Laura Ring, University of Chicago

Update

The Funding Working Group has been working to strengthen and expand SAOA's financial resources in three important ways: expanding membership in North America, facilitating partnerships in South Asia, and identifying and applying for external funding to support SAOA. To strengthen SAOA's overall operational resources, the group has been working to expand SAOA's membership. In October, UCLA became SAOA's newest member, reconfirming SAOA's appeal to large research organizations in North America. The group plans to continue these efforts to expand SAOA's North American membership with an outreach campaign directed toward institutions that participate in SAMP but have not yet joined SAOA. Second, the group is working to remove the administrative barriers that institutions from South Asia face when trying to join SAOA. To that end, the group presented a proposal to the SAMP Executive Committee that would allow South Asian institutions interested in joining SAOA to apply for a SAMP membership fee waiver. A review of SAMP's membership revealed that this change would have little impact on SAMP's budget but would make it easier for institutions in South Asia to participate in both programs. Finally, the group has been working to identify grants and other funding sources to support SAOA's work. The group recently completed and submitted a grant application to the Modern Endangered Archives Program at UCLA to digitize the private collection of artist Shanu Lahiri and her brothers. If that application is successful, it will support eighteen months of digitization onsite at the family's residence beginning in late 2023.

For FY24: In the coming year, the Funding Working Group aims to add four new members (two in South Asia and two in North America) and to work with our members to identify and apply for two (smaller, institutional) grants that will support SAOA's work.

Infrastructure Working Group

The Infrastructure Working Group provides recommendations to the Executive Board on all matters associated with supporting the technological framework of SAOA.

Working Group Members

R. Prakash, Roja Muthiah Research Library (Chair)
David Faust, University of Minnesota
Adnan Malik, University of California, Berkeley
Jef Pierce, University of Pennsylvania
Mary Rader, University of Texas at Austin

Update

The Infrastructure Working Group continues to address SAOA's infrastructure needs, keeping both back- and front-end concerns in mind. Last Fall, the group successfully developed and deployed a new collection (South Asia Open Archives (SAOA) | Manuscripts) using a Dublin Core-based metadata schema that accommodates descriptive standards for manuscript materials. The infrastructure for this pilot project will support the addition of digitized manuscript materials to SAOA's collection, following CSSSC's completion of the SAMP-sponsored "Pedagogy and Scribal Culture in Pre-Colonial Bengal" project. Additionally, the group has been investigating the effects of recent changes in JSTOR's handling of catalog records for the community collections. In June 2022, JSTOR announced that community collection records were available through EBSCO's Discovery Service (EDS) and in October added OCLC WorldCat Discovery and ExLibris Primo/Summon to that list. Following those announcements, the working group started investigating where SAOA's records appear and how to support members' and users' access to SAOA's collection. This work remains ongoing. The working group has also been engaged in reevaluating SAOA's digitization vendors in coordination with the CCWG. Exploring and evaluating possible vendors adds to SAOA's earlier experiments with distributed workflows. In early November, SAOA added 380 issues of the Tamil magazine *Markcist/மார்க்சிஸ்ட்* to the collection, speeding up the process of ingest and publication by inviting colleagues at RMRL to ingest the materials directly. The success of this initial pilot project will help to expand SAOA's capacity to add new content in the future.

For FY24: Looking ahead to FY24, the Infrastructure Working Group hopes (a) to facilitate the inclusion of SAOA's records in local (institutional) catalogs, (b) to improve SAOA's existing metadata to support better discovery and access of collection items, and (c) to expand SAOA's capacity by continuing to explore distributed workflows.

Outreach Working Group

The Outreach Working Group works to ensure that users are aware of our presence and what we are working on, so that from the point that materials are published in SAOA, they are used and appreciated.

Working Group Members

Laura Ring, University of Chicago (Chair)

Amina Malik, Outreach Assistant, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Ellen Ambrosone, Princeton University
Triveni Kuchi, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Todd Michelson-Ambelang, University of Wisconsin–Madison
Mara Thacker, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Update

This year, the Outreach Working Group formally drafted and ratified its charge to enhance, increase, and diversity use of the South Asia Open Archives through community engagement. With the aim of diversifying access to SAOA, the Outreach Working Group created a mailing list comprised of faculty at non-member institutions who conduct research or teach classes on topics related to South Asia. This list, along with SAOA's growing presence and following on social media (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook), will support the group's upcoming communications, outreach, and events catering to potential new audiences. In addition to written outreach (emails and social media posts), the group will also be hosting a virtual meeting to share information about SAOA with these potential new users. Much of the group's work in the coming months will be supported by the inaugural Outreach Assistant. A graduate student in the University of Illinois's School of Information Sciences, this Spring's Outreach Assistant joins SAOA in exchange for academic credit and professional experience as part of the iSchool at UIUC's practicum program. In addition to supporting public outreach events, the Outreach Assistant will be supporting the working group's efforts to develop sustainable outreach activities and will be responsible for designing, developing, and producing a meaningful deliverable at the end of the semester.

For FY24: Given the initial success of its internship program, the Outreach Working Group plans to continue this program moving forward. Additionally, in FY24, the group will continue to support SAOA's commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion by supporting a community agreement; expanding outreach activities to include more faculty, students, and researchers from universities in South Asia; supporting more opportunities for collaborations between working groups; and facilitating the development of pedagogical and interpretive materials that support the use of SAOA's collection items.