

## UMRA Task Force on Organizational Memory and Continuity: Annual Report 2019–20

27 August 2020

This new task force grew out of a conversation between former presidents Jerry Rinehart and Chip Peterson in July 2019, in which they identified a number of issues they felt UMRA should address in order to reduce discontinuities in UMRA's operations and historical record as personnel turn over. They proposed creation of a task force to explore such questions as these:

- Where, in what format, and dating back how far should digital records be kept?
- How can continuity be assured in key positions, particularly officers and committee chairs (e.g., through apprenticeships and/or more systematic written documentation)?

After they had done some preliminary work, in early October president Bill Donohue appointed a task force to develop a proposal. By the end of the UMRA year, after some additions, the task force's membership consisted of the following:

- Rinehart and Peterson (co-chairs)
- Cathy Lee Gierke (webmaster)
- Kris Mortensen (newsletter editor)
- Carol Urness and Julie Wallace (retired librarians)
- Gloria Williams (chair of the History Committee)

The full task force met three times during the 2019-20 year: in November and December (both meetings in person) and in May (remotely via Zoom in the context of the nova coronavirus pandemic). Out of the first two meetings came several key recommendations:

- The University Archives must remain a primary repository for all UMRA reports and documents.
- In addition, UMRA should devise a system for digital storage of more materials than currently are held on the website.
- Each document should have a designated "owner" with lead responsibility for drafting/updating and submitting it.
- UMRA should provide some minimal guidance for drafting documents to assure that they make sense contextually (for example, including date and authorship).
- Policies approved by the board over the years need to be collected and archived in one easily accessible location on the UMRA website, and preferably in a standardized format.
- A system of backups/understudies could enhance continuity, especially in such complex positions as webmaster, newsletter editor, or database manager.

Working within these parameters, a smaller working group consisting of Gierke, Peterson, and Rinehart began developing a proposal. Some of the most perplexing issues concerned document storage technology: whether in GoogleDocs, on the website, or on personal computers. After several months of discussion, including a meeting with a representative of the Office of Information Technology, the working group recommended keeping the "official" version of each document as a PDF on the UMRA website, although working copies of some might also reside on their owner's laptop. The official PDF would serve as the master version from which the document owner would proceed for new updates.

That decided, the working group was able to move the project forward more rapidly, now through a blizzard of email exchanges and an occasional Zoom meeting. It recommended that several types of existing documents be added to the website: board meeting packets, annual reports, membership directories (member login to be required), biennial retreat materials, member survey results, executive committee minutes (password to be required). In addition, it recommended creating (and storing on line)

several categories of documents that still did not exist: position toolkits, a policy library, and guidelines for structuring documents.

Gierke developed a comprehensive Excel spreadsheet entitled, “Document Update Roles,” to serve as a reference tool summarizing the entire system of document management. It lists all documents or categories of document to be posted, and for each it specifies ownership, update schedule, access (public vs. password-protected), and a host of other features.

Through the spring and early summer, and drawing on feedback from other groups (especially the UMRA Executive Committee), the working group continued to nurse the report through successive revisions. In late May, the full task force at its third meeting endorsed the report and offered several suggestions which the working group incorporated into still another revision.

To make the process of document management and submission as user-friendly as possible for document owners, the report recommended that each owner submit documents only to the webmaster, who then would not only post them on the website but also print them (or have them printed) for the History Committee to place them in the University Archives.

The annual website and document update in August 2020 proceeded with enhanced clarity, and collected additional documents. Based on the report’s recommendation., in early August Gierke emailed instructions for document submission to all document owners. Toolkits and annual reports were major additions to the list of documents collected from a large number of people—officers, committee chairs, special interest group chairs, representatives and liaisons, newsletter editor, newsletter production editor, webmaster (herself), database manager, and discount coordinator.

Fortuitously, this was a year for UMRA’s biennial leadership retreat, which was held on August 25. The packet of materials sent to participants in advance of the retreat included a synopsis of the document management system and also the “Document Update Roles” Excel spreadsheet. At the retreat itself, fifteen minutes of a plenary session were devoted to document management (creation, revision, submission), including toolkit content. The retreat’s fifty participants included most of the affected document owners.

Following the retreat, and with the benefit of insights gained from retreat participants’ questions and comments, the working group drafted a memo summarizing for the board the essential recommendations contained in the larger report. That memo will be reviewed by the full task force in late summer and then submitted in September or October to the executive committee and subsequently the board. We plan to recommend that the task force subsequently go out of existence as a separate entity by merging with the History Committee under a new name.

We are placing the following supporting documents on the UMRA website as part of our task force’s toolkit for 2019–20:

- Initial outline of issues, July 2019
- Draft report of mid-June 2020
- Draft of memo for board meeting in September or October 2020

Jerry Rinehart and Chip Peterson, task force chairs