

Professional Archival Training

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As a profession, historical records administration has grown significantly in the past two decades. The growing size of the profession has precipitated a demand for better archival education and training programs. The session addressed the recently approved SAA guidelines for archival education programs and the prospects for the certification of archivists, the accreditation of archival programs, and the function of short term archival institutes.

TRUDY H. PETERSON:

The men and women who organized our profession some forty years ago gave us many things: a literature, an ethos, a sense of community, and an ever widening recognition of professional fundamentals. Yet these founders never clearly defined the role of the archivist nor what skills were needed to be an archivist. Those who worried about definitions were at pains to distinguish the archivist from the librarian, the curator, the records manager, and the academic historian. And although the need for archival education was recognized immediately, archival principles and techniques were taught in a wide variety of settings, from Ernst Posner's famous American University courses to institutes, short courses, workshops, and various types of in-house training.

With a profession that has grown in size and vigor over the past forty years without a standard for archival education, why then should we adopt one? The answer is that the profession has two fundamental responsibilities that it cannot adequately meet so long as the current anarchic situation continues. The first is the responsibility to protect the general public from incompetent or unscrupulous practitioners. The profession has an obligation to regulate itself—to assure that a person formally designated as an archivist meets certain specified standards agreed upon by the profession, and that archival training programs provide certain fundamental information and experience and maintain conditions under which the achievement of basic professional knowledge can be reasonably expected. The second responsibility is to assist members of the profession in securing employment commensurate with professional status. Assurance of employment equity for the profession seems, at first glance, a selfish and mercenary reason to tinker with the current status of archival training. But its importance stems from a singular fact about archives: they are almost universally part of a larger bureaucracy. Most archivists have had neither specialized diplomas nor adequate equivalents of such, and so have faced the bureaucracy empty-handed. While by no means a complete solution, a standardization of archival training could help us meet these responsibilities.

A program of institutional and personal archival certification is the logical first step. Two types of archival education could be certified. Type A would include courses and practicums given for academic credit as part of a program of academic

training at the graduate level and leading to the award of a graduate degree with a major or minor concentration in archives. Type B would include short courses, institutes, or formal on-the-job training courses offered by archival institutions and requiring evidence of practical work experience before the awarding of a certificate or credential of completion. The character of the curriculum, the credentials of the faculty, and the general reputation of the institution sponsoring the training all would be factors in determining the eligibility of the training program for certification. In addition to certifying programs of archival instruction, all persons successfully completing certified training would automatically be certified. All persons presently holding archival positions could be certified as archivists upon application for such status.

The standardized archival training program enforced by the certification procedure is designed primarily to meet the training needs of full-time archivists employed in large or middle-sized institutions. But what of the training needs of the paraprofessional, of the volunteer or part-time archival worker in the local historical society? One way that training might be provided to these groups would be through a series of basic workshops and consultant visits. Such a program could have many benefits: information to paraprofessionals or employees of small or impoverished archives in remote areas, encouragement to obtain further training, preservation of archival material, and the discovery of related sources.

The aim of reform in archival education through certification and consultation services is not to make the profession exclusivist or homogenized. The aim is, rather, to assure the public that historical evidence will be preserved through the skills of fully trained professionals, and to ensure for the profession the full benefits of that professionalism in the work place.

PATRICK M. QUINN:

Archivists have long discussed the problem of standardizing qualifications for entry into the field. Some contend that extensive primary research experience and seminar-level training in history is a necessary prerequisite, that an M.A. in history is a minimal entry criterion, and a Ph.D. in history is a must for "advanced" administrative positions. Others argue that archives is primarily a service field, hence training in library science with special emphasis on archival courses should be required, including an M.S. in library science.

A third view, articulated in the main by archivists who came up through the ranks with minimal or no training in history *or* librarianship, maintains that archives is essentially a craft with its own specific requirements; and that while training in librarianship or history might be useful in certain instances, it certainly is not and should not be mandatory. Further, it is suggested that *no* formal training at the entry level, including even an undergraduate degree, is necessary. If archives is a craft, then the best way to learn how to be an archivist is to do archival work.

I wish to argue that both the classroom and the workplace can contribute to a proper archival education. Because archival practice is universally uneven, as it is employed by myriad types of archivists under different mandates in a variety of institutional environments, there is no obvious model of an "ideal" archival education. Recognizing that students participate in archival administration programs with very different, and often idiosyncratic, aspirations, I would suggest, however, that such a curriculum include at least three course-length components: an introductory course comprised in the main of lectures, an in-depth and varied

practicum, and an advanced seminar that would focus upon the more substantial archival "issues" of the day. Some institutions currently offering archival education programs and especially suited to do so, such as the University of Wisconsin and Wayne State University, might well offer a variety of complementary courses on such specific subjects as nontextual archives; the administration of state, county, and local records; preservation; and records management.

Traditionally, programs both in library science and history are often only marginally useful to practicing professional archivists. Position announcements for archival openings in colleges and universities have increasingly included the request for an M.L.S. Very infrequently is this requirement subordinated to relevant archival experience. If we, as archivists, do not act decisively to rectify this situation we will abrogate our professional right to determine the parameters of our profession. Similarly, more and more unemployed history Ph.D.'s are turning to archival administration as an alternate career. While this in and of itself should not at all be seen as a negative development—we should keep in mind that a parallel process took place in the 1930s which provided the initial cadres for our profession—we do have an obligation to insist that these new recruits to our ranks be properly trained and qualified. Otherwise we may well witness the phenomenon of currently qualified archivists lacking the Ph.D. being "bumped" in favor of those holding the prestige of a doctoral degree when promotions and tenure situations come to the fore.

Certification of archivists by the SAA should not depend exclusively upon successful completion of an archival education program as outlined above, but should be coupled with the completion of an actual internship experience that would extend beyond the practicum and most probably would be administered by the prospective archivist's future employer.

If we admit that there are numerous and substantive residual factors impeding the establishment of standardized educational programs and certification requirements, yet are convinced that standardization is both necessary and desirable, then it is imperative that we initiate a project that will ultimately lead to preparation of concrete guidelines in these important areas. These guidelines would serve both as criteria for SAA accreditation of current and future archival education programs and as the basis for a mandatory certification procedure administered by the SAA.

We in the archival profession have not yet reached the point of occupational crisis which currently prevails among our colleagues engaged in the pursuit of history and which seems to be encroaching upon the field of librarianship. Consequently, we have a bit of breathing room. Let us make the most of it. If we do not take steps to police ourselves, others will do it for us. We have a collective obligation to protect ourselves, our holdings, and our clientele from abuse by *unqualified* practitioners of our craft, whether they be unemployed Ph.D.'s, graduates of schools of library science, or products of shoddy and otherwise inferior archival educational programs.

HUGH A. TAYLOR:

At a time when the specialization of jobs is collapsing in our post-industrial society, the archivist is seeking the right of other professionals to a recognized pigeon hole. We may be the last to do so, but it seems that, in self defense, we must. Society deserves professional value for its money, and requires from us a recogniza-

ble badge. Until archivists can achieve professional parity with their colleagues in related professions and establish the teaching of their craft *first*, they are in danger of losing identity and weakening the whole archival tradition.

Parity could be achieved with a three-step program. First, we should recognize that preparation for the role of archivist in society may be much more varied than we are usually prepared to accept. There is likely to be a preponderance of history degrees, but we should never exclude those who show excellence in the craft of archivist who do not have a degree. Higher degrees do not necessarily make for better archivists; but they often do, and this should be recognized.

Next, since the journeyman archivist needs a badge we should hasten to pin one on as soon as possible. The Society of American Archivists should sponsor an archival diploma, set up a board of regents to administer it, engage examiners, and charge fees to candidates, using the Institute of Certified Records Managers as a model. The curriculum for the diploma should be an amplification of the guidelines toward a curriculum for graduate archival training approved by the Council of the Society of American Archivists. There should be options for those candidates wishing to emphasize the custody of private manuscripts rather than public records, but the diploma should be sufficiently comprehensive to establish potential competence in a wide range of situations with a minimum of supervision. This examination would constitute Part I of the diploma. Part II would consist of a period of on-the-job experience coupled with evidence of practicum during any course work the candidate may have taken.

Such a program would be self-supporting and indeed might make a profit for the Society. Above all, it would avoid the highly invidious, costly, and virtually impossible task of accrediting a wide spectrum of institutions. Holders of a postgraduate degree with a major in archival science might be exempted from the examination. There would have to be grandfathering arrangements for existing archivists.

Finally, the profession should also aim for a postgraduate degree in archival science at the master's level which would probably, in the long run, replace the diploma; but, as Trudy Peterson reminds us, this may be some way off. One way to approach this would be the establishment within a university of an institute for archival research, the institute funded during its first years by a foundation and consisting of a director and research fellows who would be practicing archivists released from their duties to carry out research in an area of value to the profession.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY:

The discussion began with a number of the participants expressing their views on the relationship between archival training and archival work. John Daly observed that many of the best archivists came to the profession with no archival training whatsoever. Many participants expressed a belief that a clear definition of archival work would help educators to devise compatible programs. Elsie Freivogel challenged the traditional definition of archival work because it excludes a great many employees of archival repositories: field workers, educators, administrators, and other individuals whose work is very much a part of archives. Patrick Quinn responded to Freivogel's objection by noting the necessity of a definition for archival work. He noted the growth of college and university archives and the persistent requirement of master's degrees in library science for positions in these

repositories. Quinn argued that the profession needs a definition not only to assert itself, but also to distinguish itself from library science.

There was some discussion as to who should define archival work. Frank Burke questioned the practicality and value of defining archival work when the largest employers of archivists—federal and state government—have yet to define it. Burke asserted that employers, rather than the SAA, should define this work. Trudy Peterson responded that agencies such as the National Archives need the impetus of professional standards to go to civil service commissions and change job requirements. She argued that the profession has a duty to define itself. Charles Lee stated that it is urgent to define archival work because personnel officers will take the initiative if archivists do not. He noted the efforts to devise such a description and emphasized again that such a description is a means of self-protection as well as an aid to archival educators. He applauded Hugh Taylor's call for a formal apprenticeship in archives, and remarked that he, Lee, would not give the title "archivist" to anyone who has not been employed for at least one year in an archival repository.

John Kerwood raised the question of over-specialization in archives. He wondered if the archival profession is not losing sight of the main areas of service to a community, adding that the profession should educate archivists to work in historical societies and museums as well as archives. Kerwood postulated that archivists must learn to choose from a variety of options; they must learn to make decisions effectively. Trudy Peterson agreed, noting that archival administration is a late-maturing profession. She cautioned against the imposition of overly narrow education guidelines for fear they may exclude large numbers of talented individuals who are unable to return to school for an additional two years of education. Patrick Quinn responded that a two year program is not the goal. The profession is looking more to a program consisting of a three-course sequence and a one-year apprenticeship.

Charles Lee redirected the discussion back to John Kerwood's point about specialization. He noted that promotions go to those who have multiple skills, and he argued that overspecialization in the large archival agencies is at a danger point. He proposed a scholarship program that would allow young archivists to expand their talents and gain experience in records management, historic site preservation, and other specialized areas.

The conference turned its attention to the specifics of archival education. F. Gerald Ham explained the work of the SAA Committee on Education and Professional Development and cautioned the conferees against grand plans. He stated that a full scale academic program cannot be instituted at this time, and added that a minor concentration within a history or library science curriculum emphasizing practical experience is the appropriate program. Ham also stressed that archival education is not designed to exclude anyone from the profession, but rather to regularize the means of entering the profession. Walter Rundell observed that archival education needs to add certain practical subjects to its curricula. Among the topics he suggested are finance, budgets, fund-raising, and public relations. Such instruction would allow archivists to respond better to their constituents and to help themselves by creating new jobs for the profession. Archival education, Rundell argued, should plant some roots in the real world. Richmond Williams reiterated the call for more management training in archival education.

Many of the conference participants were concerned about the future programs that would certify individual archivists and accredit archival education programs. Edward Weldon argued in favor of such an effort because it would clarify position descriptions and requirements. Richard Lytle agreed but expressed concern over the problems relating to the examination of archivists for certification. How could a fair examination be administered? He asked Hugh Taylor to respond. Taylor argued for a broad certification program and indicated that he didn't see the problems as insoluble. Larry Hackman expressed a belief that individuals and programs could be certified. He noted that specialized post employment education via an intern program is just as possible as entry-level internships. He thought that the SAA could apply for a grant to start a fellowship program to fund these internships.

Philip Mason concluded the session by calling for further study of the problem of certification. He suggested that archivists should look to correlate professions to see how they institute their certification programs. He hoped for more in-depth study of present programs involving on-sight visits. Mason expressed his desire to see the profession begin to discuss advanced workshops for employed professionals and basic workshops for paraprofessionals.



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