

Education Programs: Outreach as an Administrative Function

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THE *Washington Post*, COMMENTING ON THE APPOINTMENT of a new director of the National Endowment for the Humanities, reminds us of a forgotten truth, namely, that the health of humanistic studies is an important public value and that seeking to make cultural benefits widely available is neither to squander nor to vulgarize them. But the *Post* adds an unexpected twist:

It is said that it is elitist of the Endowment to support certain fields of pure scholarship. We think the elitism exists on the part of those making the charge—people who assume that the general public is some part of a leaden mass unable to appreciate or make use of the fruits of a flourishing community of serious scholars.¹

Scholarship, then, is one kind of educational enterprise, but not the only one. The possible products of scholarship comprise a continuum, and that continuum reflects the needs of a public comprised of many parts.

The *Post* editorial mirrors the thinking of those of us within the archival community who support archival education programs.² It is quoted to provide reassurance at the outset to other archivists who may feel that they are being pressured to abandon the scholarly community in the interests of popularization, or to view as somehow outmoded their talents as technical archivists. They are neither, by any means.

Gaining intellectual control of records remains the archivist's special work, without which no other activities proceed. We archivists are not, therefore, being asked to abandon technical archival work to open the doors to all comers.

Nor does it any longer seem necessary to persuade archivists to offer education programs. The numbers of these increase regularly, as a recent SAA survey

¹ "The Politics of the Humanities," editorial in the *Washington Post*, 4 August 1963, p. A18.

² We have used several terms in this paper which may confuse. The first, *archival education*, is used interchangeably with outreach, outreach programs, and education programs, terms in use in the United States, and subsumed in Canada under the rubric, diffusion. These programs are those which bring the products of archival research, the techniques of research in archives, or other aspects of humanist learning derived from primary sources to the user public, rather than to other archivists. The second term, *archives education* is here used to refer to the training of other archivists. So new is the concept of outreach that as yet we have no generally accepted term for it, as do our neighbors in the museum field who refer to their counterpart regularly as *museum education*, and who call the training of museum specialists, *museology*.

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indicates. The writer's impression, after many conversations with colleagues, is that many archivists are eager to extend their resources into wider communities, to make those resources available to publics they do not now reach. But behind these expressions of enthusiasm rests a dis-ease, a suspicion that these activities, however useful and laudatory, do not fit readily into the mainstream of activities we call archives administration, rendering them at the outset dubious. Why do these programs more often than not appear to be episodes or events, rather than programs in the ongoing administrative sense? What changes in our thinking will legitimize education programs within the larger administrative apparatus of an archives?

Outreach is first of all an extension of reference work, and as we use the word it generally describes any activity that brings the records or the means of using them closer to the public, multiplying in some way the effectiveness of the records or access to them. But that view—and the concept of outreach is still so new to our field that we can hardly refer to it as a definition—trips us up in two ways. First, to suggest *any activity* implies a randomness, a capriciousness, which immediately sets outreach programs apart from the more orderly stream of activity we call archives administration, rendering them decorative and therefore expendable. Frequently they are confused with public relations, an activity which has an entirely different thrust. Second, *the public* suggests a single, undifferentiated group, a notion which is equally misleading.

Our first job, then, is to recognize that we have many publics, ranging from institutionally connected researchers to general users, and across a spectrum that includes, among others, teachers at all levels of the educational system; elementary, secondary school, college and university students; genealogists, avocational historians, government employees, publicists, media professionals, and the merely curious. Next we must identify those potential publics in relation to our own mandates, depending on whether we represent, for example, a state archives, a county historical society, a state university, or a private institution. Finally, we must think in terms of providing service to the largest number of people within any one of these publics in ways which fit the intellectual and logistical needs of its members. Only then can we begin to conceive of educational activities as programs rather than as scattershot episodes or events.

As archivists, we tend to think of our users as a monolith, a single body of clients who require uniform, detailed, scholarly reference service. But if we begin to recognize the differences among our users, to identify them as a series of publics, rather than as *the public*, we begin to see that they do not all need this uniform maximum service. We can begin to assess service in terms of content and logistics, and to fit it to need.

Outreach can range at the least from simple exhibits, tours, and curatorial talks to more sophisticated activity, including multilevel conferences, traveling exhibits, group instruction, teacher workshops, courses based on the archives using records as text and archivists as facilitators, or cycles of activities focused on a theme or a period. But in developing any of these educational services we must first decide for whom we are producing them, at what level of sophistication they need to be produced, and in what formats they can best be supplied to the maximum number of people. Such development removes from outreach its charity-basket connotations and turns it into an administrative device, one in which we make decisions about whom we serve and in what ways we serve them.

It is important to connect this proposition with two others, one historical and the other contemporary, which provide context and encouragement to the concept of the archives as an educational institution. The first added proposition is that only within the twentieth century in this country has adult education become the almost exclusive province of colleges and universities. Learning in nineteenth-century America, even as late as the early twentieth century, was conducted through public and informal institutions: chatauquas, workingmen's libraries, theaters and opera houses, museums, immigrant aid associations, and historical societies.

Today these institutions have changed their functions. Some have social welfare roles, others operate as service institutions, some serve a select public. They are run by professionals and, in the case of historical society-archives, by professionals trained in a European tradition with university and research orientation. Since the early twentieth century then, our training, reinforced by research directed standards bearing no necessary relation to the American experience, has isolated us from a function which once was ours, namely, that of serving as an educational institution, our staff being educators or organizers of educational activity.

The second proposition is corollary to the first, namely, that history is alive and well in this country everywhere but in the classroom. Look at the bulletin board of the public library, the adult services calendar of the community college, or the program of the garden club. Observe the interest in historic gardens, houses, architecture, interiors, costumes, and china. Count the number of tours of historical villages; the digs for amateur archaeologists; the films for admirers of the Hittites, the Medicis, or Indian mounds in Illinois. Consider, if the proposition is in question, genealogy, no longer the property of social climbers but the tool of teachers and the delight of students and avocationists. There is a fascination with the past in all its warty and populous beauty, a fascination undeniable in this nation of transients; and it is their right.

How do we begin to identify our users, and to fit service to need? A study of the users of the National Archives is useful as a model for this assessment.³ That study found that more than five out of ten of our Washington users were genealogists; in some of our regional branches, that number is as high as eight out of ten. About one user in ten is a casual researcher, possibly an amateur historian, a film or television producer, an editor, lawyer, writer, or simply a passerby. Two out of ten users are connected with research institutions, and are likely to publish or otherwise disseminate their work through scholarly channels. The remaining two are students, working either for the doctoral, the master's, or, increasingly, the bachelor's degree.

If it is true that roughly eight out of ten users of our National Archives variously serve their own avocational needs or broad popular interests, how do we simultaneously serve them and the scholarly researchers who also have a claim on us? By providing systems which make the records more available to them in forms and through channels that serve their needs. There is no doubt that one-researcher to one-archivist service is necessary at a sophisticated, sustained level of research. But not every transaction requires it, and our dismay at the ideal of

³ A Study of Users of the Records of the National Archives. Prepared by staff of the National Archives and Records Service, October 1976, for administrative purposes. It is the writer's understanding that these figures have since changed but they serve the purpose of identifying publics.

introducing more people to archives as sources of information may well arise from the assumption that this kind of service is the only kind.

More often, much information now transmitted in this expensive fashion can be transmitted in bulk. Such service can include audio and/or visual programs that orient fifty researchers at a time to an institution's facilities and to fundamental research information. It can include intensive classes that instruct genealogists and general researchers, because each group requires a different range of information, in how and when to approach records. Or it can include workshops for college classes or faculty, showing them either how to use documents in the classroom or how to do research. The variations are infinite, but the questions to be asked by the administrator are two. First, what are the specific publics we are mandated to serve? Second, given our administrative constraints, what services will convey our resources to the largest number of people in any one of those publics in forms most usable to them?

Consider, for example, the needs of the secondary school teacher compared with those of the scholarly researcher. In general, teachers want to know two things before they will use records in the classroom. First, they must be able quickly to identify a record or a group of records that relates in a general way to a topic their class is studying. Second, they want to be comfortable with strategies for using those records in the classroom. Unless a teacher is also doing individual research, he or she does not need knowledge of that elaborate system for tracking records through a network of collections or record groups required of the scholar, nor does that teacher need a specific, unique document proving the point or justifying the argument. He does not need to track down all the sources, just the appropriate ones. He needs evaluations of internal and external validity in a document less than he needs to know that the document can be used in a classroom; that is, he must know that it is legible, has potential for building vocabulary, and is intrinsically interesting. And unlike the scholar, whose work ends in print to an unseen audience, he needs devices for using the material in the classroom. What that teacher needs, then, is not detailed reference service. What he needs is general familiarity with the existence of records appropriate to his topic, or even some boxes of records within that topic, plus a number of teaching strategies best shared with his peers. One answer to his needs is the teacher workshop, using peer teachers to share ideas, and an archivist, familiar enough with the topic and the institution's resources to point the teacher toward a general body of records, and otherwise serve as group facilitator. In this way we serve a number of people at once, who in turn expose many students and other teachers to records as sources of history, and serve them in ways particularly suited to their needs.

What we are producing here is a multiplier effect, an organizing principle that renders outreach programs far more efficient than we have previously seen them. First, by reaching more clients in less time we are multiplying the use of the records. Second, by providing service in bulk we are multiplying the number of potential clients within any given public. Finally, by interchanging parts of various programs or by combining several programs we provide multiple service to any single public. The scholarly researcher, for example, uses one-to-one reference service. But the researcher also views the exhibit, attends the lecture program, sends students to the introductory course on using records, and brings classes to sessions which engage students in the pedagogical uses of records.

In assessing our outreach programs, we need also to decide who will execute them and who will pay for them. With respect to personnel, we must first recognize that the professional skills and standards required for these programs may be different—not inferior, only different—from those with which, as archivists, we are familiar. We may well find that we need professional writers to prepare the press releases; education specialists to develop format and promote the lecture series, symposia, and institutes we will require; and audiovisual specialists to make our films and write our scripts. In a sense new to us, staffing our education programs requires an expansion of the concept of the archivist as professional to include the education archivist, just as we accept the concept of the documentary editor, administrator, or computer analyst as a comparable professional.

Some institutions should and do hire audiovisual experts, educational developers, secondary school curriculum specialists, designers, publication sales experts, and cultural administrators. But three other options are available and, for most institutions, far more accessible. The first two are immediate; the third is longer range.

The first option is an assessment of those talents already on our staffs. Inside every thin man, some wag said, is a fat man fighting to get out. The record seems to support the view that inside many archivists is a filmmaker, a lecturer, an impresario, or an exhibit designer fighting to get out. According to the survey done recently by the SAA Committee on Outreach, most education programs are organized at the outset around the talents of staff members presently on the job. Job descriptions will not necessarily reveal these skills. It may be necessary for the administrator to build an inventory of talents by personal conversations with staff members, by participating in pilot programs, or by other less traditional means of staff assessment.

The second option is the creation of networks of talent within a region. Just as we have devised research networks, so we can devise talent networks, and just as we accommodate joint teaching-archival appointments, we can accommodate joint archivist-educator appointments. Many models exist among community organizations, the performing arts, and other professions accustomed to sharing staff and resources; and the apparatus of joint appointments, released and reimbursed time, and outright moonlighting are negotiable within a region. What is needed is a sense of the larger profession of archivists, rather than the semi-imposed isolation to which we have adapted, combined with a keen appreciation of the fiscal advantages of shared time, staff, and talents. It may be in order to create a talent bank on which members of the profession can draw, with appropriate reimbursement to lending institutions, breaking the unyielding circle of technical chores which seem to deter us from reaching our larger clientele.

The third option is learning how to do it ourselves. To do this we must incorporate outreach techniques in our archives education programs where outreach training now has only a fingernail hold on the last hour of the last day in each session. At present, most of our archives education courses concentrate on basic technical skills—arrangement, description, and reference at one level and one only—and never associate education programs with the administrative apparatus of an archives. If we can agree that concentration on outreach will allow us to focus more sharply on reference services, and if we can agree that outreach is not the last priority of an archives but one that can help us define other priori-

ties, then we can agree that archives education should include far more information on outreach than it now does. We can move beyond introductory courses in technical problems to thematic courses in education, designed to offer specialized instruction to staff of institutions ready to take hold of the concept.

We need not offer these courses in isolation. Museum educators have a ready literature and staff in this field, and they have long since fought the battle to legitimize outreach programs. Other professional groups are available to us, and the contribution of these would relate us to the larger universe of cultural and educational institutions. We need a midlevel archives education course dealing with problems of preservation, description, and reference from a client-centered point of view, identifying publics, offering options in the formats by which those publics are reached, and planning programs based on alternative methods of information dissemination. Ideally, such a course would be given in conjunction with a museum education program, since many of the techniques are similar. Dealing with the technical, informational, and managerial aspects of archives, this course is now within our reach.

Earlier, we noted the *Washington Post* on the relationship between humanistic and public values. Public values deserve public support, and archives, to the extent that records reflect public values, deserve public support. But archives deserve it only to the extent that they deliver their materials in ways that are comprehensible to the public. The public can be expected to pay for archival services if we give them the information they need in ways they can use. In other words, we can expect payment when we give good value for their money.

It is certainly the case that public endowments and private foundations are accessible to proposals for programs which reach wide publics. In fact, it is reasonable to expect that within the next several years public endowments will require in every proposal for public funds a component that makes the records available to a number of publics other than scholars.

In the meantime, we can charge for outreach programs. The National Archives Office of Educational Programs, whose activities range from public tours and lectures to scholarly conferences, and include short courses, exhibits, audiovisual productions, and numerous other client-directed programs, charges for many of them; and clients do not complain. Indeed, interest in these programs increases regularly.

But a persuasive example comes from the museum field, our most experienced allies in the pursuit of outreach programs. Daniel B. Reibel, curator of Old Economy Village, Ambridge, Pennsylvania, confirms the feasibility of client-supported services. Commenting on Old Economy's programs, Reibel says:

Nothing in the world is free. . . . Although a museum staff with imagination and common sense can run programs at a very low cost, ultimately there is a bill. If the audience is divided into interest groups that pay fees commensurate with the program or services received, it is possible to cover all or most of the costs of the programs.⁴

Reibel suggests several other principles which reinforce the experience of the National Archives. Audience size tends to increase after a charge is levied. The quality of the clientele improves too, he says; and, as a corollary which has significant personnel implications, the staff delivers more. Staff performs better, program format improves. Finally, "an adequate charge is only a means to an

⁴ Daniel B. Reibel, "Visitor Financed Programs," *Museum News* 55 (July/August 1977): 27.

end—more and better programs, tours, and other services. . . . Visitor financed programs offer a chance to give good programs suited to the need of both the museum and the visitor, regardless of the museum's budget."⁵

We have some choices in the next few years about the direction in which our archival programs will go; but these choices, like many we face, become clearer as we confront them. The clientele for expanded outreach programs is there; our job is to engage it. The engagement need not be sentimental. It can be analytical, cost-effective, and as useful to us as to our clients. We can choose the publics we serve, choose the means by which they are served, and organize much of our technical work around these choices. In this fashion, we generate public support by providing service—wide, but carefully considered and carefully developed public service.

⁵ Ibid., p. 30.



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