Educating the Reference Archivist

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Abstract: Although much has been written recently on archival education and the role education plays in certification and professionalization, little of this literature addresses archival reference and the skills archivists need to carry out their reference responsibilities. This inattention to the training of reference archivists reflects the field's general indifference to the reference process relative to other archival concerns. This article, through a selected survey of the literature, suggests that only in the last decade have archivists begun to examine critically the reference process and to recognize the shortcomings of archival finding aids and reference personnel. Several archivists have suggested ways of improving archival finding aids, but few have addressed the issue of personnel expertise. This author recommends increased formal education and suggests potential topics of study.

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MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN recently about archival education and the role education plays in certification and professionalization.[1] This recent literature, like previous writings on archival training, however, pays little attention to reference service. In 1983 Frank Burke noted that in the forty-five years since 1938, only twenty-two articles on archival education were published in the *American Archivist*.[2] Burke might have added that the predominant emphasis of these articles was on the training of archivists in technical rather than theoretical aspects of their work. The teaching of arrangement and description and the debate over the relative merits of history versus library science degrees have been the main concerns of articles written on archival education. Little, if any, attention has been given to the teaching of archival reference and the development of those skills most needed by archivists to assist users in a reference situation.

Good reference service in an archives depends primarily upon accurate, comprehensive finding aids and knowledgeable, helpful reference staff. Recently, archivists have recognized that finding aids and reference practitioners do not always address the needs of patrons. Researchers' skills and knowledge, archivists' assumptions about researchers, and the ability of both parties to communicate effectively all affect the success of the reference exchange. The complexities and importance of the reference process suggest the need for greater study and evaluation of its main components. A course on archival reference in a graduate program in archival education offers an opportunity for such study. Through a careful review of the archival literature on reference and description, relevant readings from other disciplines, and hands-on training, students would learn the essential theoretical dimensions of archival reference and acquire the skills needed to become better reference specialists.

Archival Reference Literature: Content and Deficiencies

For many years, archivists lamented the lack of attention reference work received in professional literature. In 1963 Frank Evans criticized his fellow archivists for failing to analyze their methods of assisting researchers, arguing that the literature, including the work of Theodore Schellenberg, "glosses over" the issues of reference services by making generalized comments concerning the archivist's responsibilities and functions.[3] In 1974 William Saffady found the situation unchanged when he surveyed 280 publications cited in the reference section of a comprehensive archival

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[1]Among the articles on archival education published in the last decade are Francis X. Blouin, Jr., "The Relevance of the Case Method to Archival Education and Training," *American Archivist* 41 (January 1978): 37–44; Virginia J. H. Cain, et al., "Archives by Degree: Personal Perspectives on Academic Preparation for the Archival Profession," *Provenance* 2 (Fall 1984): 39–60; Richard J. Cox, "Strategies for Archival Action in the 1980s and Beyond: Implementing the SAA Goals and Priorities Task Force Report," *Provenance* 3 (Fall 1985): 22–37; Frank B. Evans, "Postappointment Archival Training: A Proposed Solution for a Basic Problem," *American Archivist* 40 (January 1977): 57–74; Jacqueline Goggin, "That We Truly Deserve the Title of 'Profession': The Training and Education of Archivists, 1930–1960," *American Archivist* 47 (Summer 1984): 243–54; Ruth W. Helmuth, "Education for American Archivists: A View from the Trenches," *American Archivist* 44 (Fall 1981): 295–303; Michael Holland, "Archival Preservation: Continuing Education for the Working Archivist," *Provenance* 3 (Spring 1985): 40–57; Lawrence J. McCrank, "Prospects for Integrating Historical and Information Studies in Archival Education," *American Archivist* 42 (October 1979): 443–55; Nancy E. Peace and Nancy Fisher Chudacoff, "Archivists and Librarians: A Common Mission, A Common Education," *American Archivist* 42 (October 1979): 456–62; and Frederick J. Stielow, "Continuing Education and Information Management: Or, the Monk's Dilemma," *Provenance* 3 (Spring 1985): 13–22. See also *Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986) for a discussion of proposed educational standards and the role of education in promoting professional goals.

[2]Frank G. Burke, "Archival Cooperation," *American Archivist* 46 (Summer 1983): 302.

[3]Frank B. Evans, "The State Archivist and the Academic Scholar: 'Stable Companionship,' " *American Archivist* 26 (July 1963): 319–20.

bibliography. He concluded that archivists had "generally neglected conventional aspects of reference service in favor of topics . . . only tangentially related to reference service as librarians know it," and suggested that the neglect might be because archivists viewed records administration, not research assistance, as their primary responsibility.[4]

More recently, George Chalou and Lucille Whalen expressed continued concern about this lack of scholarly articles on reference. Chalou suggested that archivists were so busy serving their users that they "seldom have the opportunity to reflect on the nature of reference service."[5] Whalen shared Chalou's belief that archivists recognize the importance of reference activities, citing the Society of American Archivists (SAA) reference manual as an indication of the field's interest,[6] but lamented the absence of a body of literature on the researcher-archivist relationship and, in particular, on archivists' attitudes toward researchers.[7]

As Evans, Saffady, Chalou, and Whalen correctly noted, the literature on reference service is scant compared with that written on other archival topics, such as appraisal, arrangement, description, acquisition, and preservation. Moreover, much of it primarily relates to questions of security, photoduplication, copyright, and other "tangentially-related" reference concerns. Nevertheless, a student should be familiar

with this literature and the practical guidelines it contains. Its primary benefit has been the establishment of standardized practices designed to resolve the conflicts between researchers' access needs and archivists' preservation concerns. The SAA's manual on reference and its statements on access and reproduction reflect the standardization that the literature has promoted.[8] But to be effective reference archivists, students must consider not just procedural questions, but also the more unique and theoretical aspects of archival reference work, especially the interaction between archivists and researchers and the ways in which archivists convey information to researchers via finding aids. Fortunately, in the last five years, archivists have shown increased interest in these topics, and a growing literature base is available for the archival student. A review of this literature indicates the primary topics to be covered in a course on archival reference.

Interaction Between Archivists and Researchers

Several authors, noting the differences between conducting research in an archives and in a public or academic library, have argued that the reference archivist is more crucial to the success of the research process than is the librarian. Because archival records are "non-browsable and non-circulating," direct interaction between the archivist and the researcher is essential, especially

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[4]William Saffady, "Reference Service to Researchers in Archives," *RQ* 14 (Winter 1974): 139. In surveying Frank B. Evans's *The Administration of Modern Archives: A Select Bibliographic Guide* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1970), Saffady found sixty-seven of the articles dealt with literary property rights; fifty-nine with problems of access and confidentiality; thirty-six with issues of estrays, thefts, and replevin; and thirty with the examination of suspected documents.

[5]George Chalou, "Reference," in *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, ed. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1984), 257.

[6]Sue E. Holbert, *Archives & Manuscripts: Reference & Access* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977).

[7]Lucille Whalen, "The Reference Process in Archives: An Introduction," in *Reference Services in Archives*, ed. Lucille Whalen (New York: Haworth Press, 1986), 3–4.

[8]Society of American Archivists Committee on Reference, Access, and Photoduplication, "Standards for Access to Research Materials in Archival and Manuscripts Repositories," *American Archivist* 37 (January 1974): 153–54; and Society of American Archivists, "Statement on the Reproduction of Manuscripts and Archives for Reference Use," *American Archivist* 39 (July 1976): 411.

when catalogs provide inadequate access to the repository's holdings.[9] In the absence of sound finding aids, reference archivists often find they are the only link between the subject content of a collection and the provenance-based arrangement of the records.[10] Historian Philip Jordan concurs that "if there is a meeting of minds [between researcher and archivist], finding aids, important as they are, assume secondary value."[11] The archivist becomes the "superarchivist," a reference specialist who knows something about the entire collection of materials and who can refer the researcher directly to the most pertinent records or to another staff member with more in-depth knowledge of the patron's subject.[12]

Recently, archival writers have begun to evaluate more carefully archivists' relationships with researchers and the components of a successful interview process. Articles by Mary Jo Pugh, Edward Oetting, William Joyce, Phebe Jacobsen, and Elsie Freeman indicate the growing concern for archival reference theory and practice.[13] These archivists address issues overlooked in earlier writings and provide the archival student with a theoretical framework for evaluating reference service.

Raising questions about archival arrangement, description, and access, Pugh argued that archival reference theory is predicated on several unrealistic assumptions: not only do archivists assume too much about their users' capabilities, but they also overrate the knowledge of the reference archivist, placing too much emphasis on the interview process. Pugh challenged colleagues to examine "the myth of the immortal, omniscient, indispensable reference archivist," asserting that "current practice relies too heavily on the subject knowledge and memory of the individual archivist, and is too dependent on the personalities of the researcher and archivist."[14] She called upon archivists to evaluate and strengthen the guides to collections and recommended the creation of cumulative indexes to these guides. Although no finding aid would replace the reference staff, Pugh suggested that better and more comprehensive indexes would lead to better and more consistent reference service that was not so dependent upon the personalities and competencies of individual staff members.

Many of the points raised by Pugh have been addressed by others. For example, Oetting also was skeptical about the omniscience of reference archivists, especially since reference staff often are new to an institution. He maintained that it takes an archivist years to "know" a repository's collections, and that most archivists never achieve the knowledge that archival reference theory presumes they possess. Consequently, Oetting echoed Pugh's advice that archivists must improve their reference tools in order to enhance the reference staff's ability to provide consistent and knowledgeable assistance.

The interaction between archivist and researcher generally has been limited to the initial reference interview, described by one archivist as the "linchpin to good reference

[9]Edward C. Oetting, "Wearing Someone Else's Shoes: Reference in an Established Archive," in *Reference Services in Archives*, 23–25.

[10]Hugh A. Taylor, *Archival Services and the Concept of the User: A RAMP Study* (Paris: Unesco, 1984), 33.

[11]Philip D. Jordan, "The Scholar and the Archivist," *American Archivist* 31 (January 1968): 63.

[12]Frank G. Burke, "The Impact of the Specialist on Archives," *College and Research Libraries* 33 (July 1972): 313–14.

[13]Mary Jo Pugh, "The Illusion of Omniscience: Subject Access and the Reference Archivist," *American Archivist* 45 (Winter 1982): 33–44; Oetting, "Wearing Someone Else's Shoes," 23–26; William L. Joyce, "Archivists and Research Use," *American Archivist* 47 (Spring 1984): 124–33; Phebe R. Jacobsen, " 'The World Turned Upside Down': Reference Priorities and the State Archives," *American Archivist* 44 (Fall 1981): 341–45; and Elsie T. Freeman, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Archives Administration from the User's Point of View," *American Archivist* 47 (Spring 1984): 111–23.

[14]Pugh, "Illusion of Omniscience," 38.

service.''[15] Joyce, however, observed that, instead of the cooperative, informative reference interview depicted in the earlier writings of other archivists, the interview process often reflects an ''adversary relationship'' between archivist and researcher.[16] Although Joyce particularly stressed archivists' strained relationships with professional historians, Jacobsen and Freeman have noted archivists' difficulties with genealogists, avocationists, and nontraditional scholars. Jacobsen, concerned mainly with the denigrating manner in which archivists have treated amateur historians and genealogists, argued that archivists must recognize that genealogists constitute the largest body of archival users and are among the staunchest supporters of archival funding. Likewise, Freeman argued that because archivists like reference work, they assume they are oriented to researchers. She observed that this is a misconception and that archivists have an adversary relationship with genealogists and other avocationists who comprise one of their largest constituencies. As Freeman noted, such misconceptions alienate archivists from researchers.

The Need for User Surveys

As Pugh, Joyce, Jacobsen, and Freeman have suggested, archivists serve increasing numbers of nontraditional scholars as well as scholars involved in nontraditional areas of inquiry, such as social history and women's history. Believing that archivists do not have a clear sense of who researchers are and how they approach records, these writers have recommended conducting more user studies. According to Joyce, archivists must examine whether they ''understand sufficiently the research questions and access issues that animate'' different types of researchers.[17] They also must analyze researchers' training and skill in conducting primary research.

The need for archival user studies remains a continued concern of archivists, as documented by a 1986 issue of the *Midwestern Archivist* devoted to the topic.[18] In addition, the final report of SAA's Task Force on Goals and Priorities called for both formal and informal studies to ''evaluate past and present uses for archival records.''[19] Likewise, Paul Conway concluded that archivists recognize the importance of user studies, but nonetheless are unsure about how best to design and implement them. He proposed an analytical framework allowing archivists to evaluate, at five different stages in the reference process, the ''quality'' or effectiveness of service, the ''integrity'' or protection of archival materials, and the ''value'' or benefits of archival research. As Conway suggested, his framework has the potential of permitting archivists to ''compare and assess the results of individual studies because it is ''not rooted in specific institutional procedures.''[20] Also, since it does not rely on expensive computer analyses and may be incorporated into existing rec-

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[15]Glen A. Gildemeister, ''Reference and Research in Regional History Centers,'' in *Reference Services in Archives*, 190.

[16]Compare, for example, the descriptions of the archivist-researcher relationship in Philip C. Brooks, *Research in Archives: The Use of Unpublished Primary Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 35, and Joyce, ''Archivists and Research Use,'' 131.

[17]Joyce, ''Archivists and Research Use,'' 125.

[18]Four articles in *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986) concern user studies: William J. Maher, ''The Use of User Studies,'' 15–26; Roy C. Turnbaugh, ''Archival Mission and User Studies,'' 27–33; Paul Conway, ''Research in Presidential Libraries: A User Survey,'' 35–56; and Jacqueline Goggin, ''The Indirect Approach: A Study of Scholarly Users of Black and Women's Organizational Records in the Library of Congress Manuscript Division,'' 57–67.

[19]*Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986).

[20]Paul Conway, ''Facts and Frameworks: An Approach to Studying the Users of Archives,'' *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986): 394.

ord-keeping practices, Conway's proposal should find a receptive audience. As the model is put to use, however, it should undergo as stringent an evaluation as the reference process it monitors. Archival reference students could be party to this critique, contributing to the discussion lessons they learn from the voluminous library literature on the subject. Conway recognized this potential contribution of archival students, and echoed Freeman's recommendation that archival education include training in survey techniques. An archival reference course would be an excellent forum for evaluating the methodology and implementation of user studies.

Educating the Researcher

Freeman's appeal for more user studies stemmed partly from her belief that archivists assumed too much about their users' capabilities and prior research training. Citing studies by Margaret Stieg and Michael Stevens, Freeman argued that historians—presumably the best trained of all archival users—are in fact unfamiliar with many archival finding aids and abstracting services and do not consult primary sources as frequently as was believed.[21] Nancy Sahli, in a more limited study, also found that researchers' selection of primary source materials was based not on "a systematic search of the available national finding aids," but on predecessors' footnotes, suggestions of colleagues, and intuition.[22]

The lack of training and preparation for conducting archival research has concerned archivists for some time. For example, in 1956 Philip Brooks advocated better training of graduate history students and more writing on research methods.[23] Several years later, Meyer Fishbein noted that historians failed to take advantage of the information in archival collections due to their "unfamiliarity" with archival principles. "The main deterrent to the use of archives," Fishbein wrote, "remains the lack of training in their effective use."[24] He questioned the research skills of senior scholars and, therefore, their ability to train their students. Fishbein's observations were confirmed by Walter Rundell's study in the late 1960s, which surveyed the training in historical methods provided in graduate history programs. Rundell found many students, as well as professors, unfamiliar with archival facilities and inexperienced in the use of primary sources.[25] This situation has not changed in the last twenty years. Recent articles by Frank Zabrosky, Elizabeth Stewart, and Philip Mason reflect archivists' continued impression that researchers lack training in basic research methods. These authors complain that researchers fail to write prior to a visit to determine the availability of records and that they often arrive without having done any preliminary research.[26]

If the situation is no better than it was when Brooks wrote in 1956, then reference archivists must be trained to provide instruction in basic research methods. Yet as

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[21]Freeman, "Eye of the Beholder," 114–15. She cites Margaret F. Stieg, "The Information Needs of Historians," *College and Research Libraries* 42 (November 1981): 551, and Michael E. Stevens, "The Historian and Archival Finding Aids," *Georgia Archive* 5 (Winter 1977): 68.

[22]Nancy Sahli, "National Information Systems and Strategies for Research Use," *Midwestern Archivist* 9, no. 1 (1984): 5–13.

[23]Philip C. Brooks, "The Historian's Stake in Federal Records," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43 (September 1956): 273–74.

[24]Meyer H. Fishbein, "Archival Training for Historians," *American Historical Association Newsletter* 5 (December 1966): 2. For a similar discussion, see Burke, "Impact of the Specialist," 313.

[25]Walter Rundell, Jr., *In Pursuit of American History: Research and Training in the United States* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 1–36.

[26]Frank A. Zabrosky, "Researching the Past: An Archivist's Perspective," in *Reference Services in Archives*, 89–103; Elizabeth C. Stewart, "Archival Reference at a Technical University," in *Reference Services in Archives*, 53–61; and Philip P. Mason, "Challenge of Contemporary Records: Reference Service in a Labor and Urban Archives," in *Reference Services in Archives*," 113–27.

Saffady noted, "archivists have not always undertaken this educative task willingly."[27] Some have thought it was the responsibility of the universities to train their students. As Pugh, Freeman, Jacobsen, Joyce, and others have observed, however, the majority of archival users are not graduate students and professional historians, but are government and corporate officials, genealogists, lawyers, playwrights, biographers, and amateur historians, whose training and work do not prepare them for archival research. Consequently, if archivists take seriously their responsibility to assist researchers, they must be willing to become educators. This entails an evaluation of the training archivists receive and of the types of reference tools and skills necessary for conveying information to archival users.

Access Tools and the Archival Literature on Description

Although the literature on archival finding aids and other descriptive tools traditionally has been considered part of discussions of arrangement and description, students also should be aware of its reference implications. The relationship between reference and descriptive practices, especially concerning the relative merits of subject versus provenance access, recently has captured archivists' attention. Spurred in part by the desire to tap the indexing power of computers, archivists have begun to evaluate critically the subject access afforded to holdings and to seek ways to increase the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of archival finding aids. The ensuing discussion has reflected certain assumptions about researchers' needs and has resulted in contrasting proposals for ad-

dressing those needs. As the individuals working most closely with the researcher, reference archivists need to understand the impact of descriptive retrieval systems on archival research. Since they will assist researchers using the proposed automated systems, reference archivists should be actively involved in their design, to ensure the representation of researchers' demands, especially those previously neglected needs of genealogists and nontraditional scholars. A reference course that includes readings on the topic will prepare reference archivists for a role in planning and implementing automated retrieval systems.

Such readings should include a thorough consideration of the issues involved in provenance versus subject access. Questioning the usefulness of existing manual retrieval systems, Richard Lytle, in an 1980 article, identified two traditional methods of providing subject access: the provenance (P) method and the content-indexing (CI) method. In the P method, the researcher links subject queries with provenance information. In the CI method, the researcher attempts to match subject queries with the subject terms found in an index or card catalog. In analyzing the results of a 1978 test study, Lytle concluded that both methods were inadequate and inconsistent for subject retrieval and proposed that a better descriptive system would combine the complementary strengths of the two methods.[28]

In a more recent piece coauthored with David Bearman, Lytle shifted emphasis away from a complementary system to one based exclusively on the principle of provenance.[29] Since provenance traditionally has been the basis for arrangement and description, Lytle and Bearman argued for its in-

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[27]Saffady, "Reference Service to Researchers in Archives," 142.

[28]Richard H. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: I. Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 64–75, and "Intellectual Access to Archives: II. Report of an Experiment Comparing Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 191–207.

[29]David A. Bearman and Richard Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985/86): 14–27.

creased application in reference and retrieval systems, by the generation of access points based on administrative histories and other provenance information. They contended that information concerning the creation of records provides the most useful subject access and that archival reference traditionally has been based on this assumption. They failed to question, however, why provenance has been important historically, and whether its use reflects desirability or merely archivists' failure to design alternative subject retrieval systems. Archival students could well consider this question and also whether a provenance-based system provides unnecessary information about the records rather than desired information about their subject content.

To assist them in their critique, students could turn to Richard Berner's writings on information retrieval.[30] While recognizing the importance of provenance, Berner argued that placing too much emphasis on administrative histories as access points results in too little attention to the information in the records themselves.[31] He promoted instead the idea of a "unified" integrated catalog incorporating the information available in the finding aids of individual collections. Unlike Lytle, Berner recognized the collection inventory or register as the principal means of accessing archives and manuscripts, and asserted that description should focus on detailed container lists, not lengthy, "unstructured" scope and content notes that do not illuminate the arrangement of the collection. Berner urged archivists to devise cataloging terms from container lists, which were less impressionistic than scope and content notes, and to create a general cumulative index which provided access terms for all folder headings found in the individual container lists. Thus, Berner hoped to abandon the bifurcated retrieval system in which the entries in the card catalog show no direct relation to the collection inventories.

The efforts of Berner, Lytle, Bearman, and others document the growing concern over the inadequacies of archival finding aids and the archivist's inability to provide efficient reference service because of ineffective descriptive and retrieval systems. The exact design of the ideal descriptive system is not clear. Several underlying assumptions about researchers that require further research might be topics fruitfully explored by students in both discussions and written assignments. For example, individuals approach their research through personal names and inferences based on provenance because archivists have not devised alternative subject retrieval systems. Lytle and others, such as Avra Michelson, have assumed that researchers expect high recall and low precision from a retrieval system.[32] This may no longer be true, however, as the increasing size of collections, the financial constraints of research, and the demands placed on scholars to publish all limit the researcher's ability and desire to wade through large numbers of irrelevant documents. Future researchers, accustomed to sophisticated information retrieval systems, will no doubt demand more efficient subject retrieval of archival collections. They also will require a national archival information system, a goal that has eluded archivists thus far, according to

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[30]Richard C. Berner, "Manuscript Catalogs and Other Finding Aids: What Are Their Relationships?" *American Archivist* 34 (October 1971): 367–72; Berner, "Toward National Archival Priorities: A Suggested Basis for Discussion," *American Archivist* 45 (Spring 1982): 164–74; Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: An Historical Analysis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983); Berner and Uli Haller, "Principles of Archival Inventory Construction," *American Archivist* 47 (Spring 1984): 134–55; and Berner, "The Power of Provenance: A Critique of David Bearman and Richard Lytle," *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986): 4–6.

[31]Berner, "Critique of Bearman and Lytle," 5.

[32]Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives," 68–69; Avra Michelson, "Description and Reference in the Age of Automation," *American Archivist* 50 (Spring 1987): 199.

Michelson, because of inconsistent descriptive practices and lack of standardization among repositories.[33] As Sahli has argued, however, even if the design problems are conquered, a national system would be useless unless researchers know of its existence and how to use it.[34] Given scholars' documented lack of knowledge of basic reference sources, archivists should be wary of making unfounded assumptions about researchers' use of a national automated system.

Efforts to establish national information networks, increase the usefulness of archival finding aids, and enhance the skills of reference personnel pose serious challenges. Archival education must prepare would-be archivists to meet these challenges. As shown, a growing archival literature on reference and description is available to aid the student in identifying the main components of the reference process. Each of these components affects the outcome of the reference encounter and, in turn, is shaped and defined by the skills, training, and personality of the reference archivist. As the literature bears out, archivists must learn who their researchers are, how they approach their research, and how to communicate to them information about standard reference works, repository holdings, and related collections elsewhere. Archival students can learn best how to do these things through a reference course offered as an integral part of a graduate program in archival administration.

Teaching Communication and Research Skills

The archival literature on the theoretical aspects of the reference process could be supplemented with relevant readings from other disciplines, especially from the library and communication sciences. For example, archival literature documents the importance of the reference interview and of archivists' ability to communicate effectively with researchers. Pugh, Joyce, Freeman, and others have assigned their colleagues low grades on listening and communication skills. A major aspect of an archival reference course would examine the role of communication theory and the value of utilizing interview techniques from the communication sciences. The extensive body of library literature on the reference interview could be of great use in presenting communication techniques to archivists.[35] Librarians have long recognized the importance of asking users "open" questions about their research, rather than "closed" questions that terminate the reference dialog with a simple "yes" or "no" response. Keeping communication channels open by allowing researchers to ask questions and talk about their topics without interruption is a skill that would benefit archivists. Students need to understand the danger of seeming so preoccupied with conveying to the researcher information about regulations governing the handling and use of collections that they appear indifferent to users' research and insensitive to their uncomfortableness in asking for assistance. Librarians who have examined this issue of "sensitivity" have called for greater empathy, more attentive behavior, and more effective "content" listening—skills one normally associates with the counseling profession. They also have suggested that because facial expressions and body language convey interest or indifference to a person's topic, reference personnel need to

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[33]Michelson, "Description and Reference," 192–208.

[34]Sahli, "National Information Systems and Strategies," 6.

[35]For a good overview of the library literature in this area, see O. Gene Norman's review essay, "The Reference Interview: An Annotated Bibliography," in *Reference and Information Services: A New Reader*, ed. Bill Katz and Anne Clifford (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 245–60; and Samuel Rothstein, "The Making of a Reference Librarian," *Library Trends* 31 (Winter 1983): 375–99.

be aware of the image they project.[36]

Required reading of this library literature, coupled with simulated classroom experiences, would help future archivists pay closer attention to their mannerisms, speech patterns, listening skills, and general approachability. Videotaping classroom simulations would allow students the opportunity to observe and critique their interviewing techniques. Class discussions could reinforce the ideas presented in the literature and encourage students to pay closer attention to their repository's and their own personal reference approach. It is likely that an individual will remember and learn more from a critical peer evaluation of their performance than from just a reading of the literature.

Role-playing and simulated reference experiences involve active student participation, encouraging more than passive listening or reading of communication theory. This same action-oriented approach could be used in instruction about research methodologies. Clearly, students need to understand how historians, scientists, writers, genealogists, and other archival users approach their research. It is equally important for archival students themselves to engage in research. One useful assignment would be for students to trace part of their family's history. This project would provide a brief introduction to a variety of archival and manuscript records, including census data, land and probate records, birth and death records, military service records, and the guides and indexes available for these records; and it might instill in would-be archivists a better understanding and greater empathy for the needs, problems, and interests of their largest group of users, genealogists.

As reflected in archival literature, archivists have long considered researchers' training and primary research skills inadequate. Archivists must assume greater responsibility for educating researchers about archival holdings and standard reference sources. Establishing a familiarity with both archival data bases and published guides, bibliographies, and biographical and repository directories would be a major goal in an archival reference course. Class assignments should involve extensive work with the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* (NUCMC), Philip Hamer's *Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission's *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States*, Andrea Hinding's *Women's History Sources*, and numerous other published guides to primary and secondary sources in specific subject areas.[37] In addition, students need to gain experience searching both the special format and book files on RLIN and OCLC, especially since an increasing number of archives are contributing data to these systems. One possible assignment involving on-line searching would be for students to prepare a bibliography of archival collections and secondary literature relating to a subject that interests them. Another project focusing more on printed sources would be for students to identify by title the ideal "reference collection" for a government or large academic archival repository. Such an as-

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[36]Examples of the library literature that compare counseling work and reference service include Theodore P. Peck, "Counseling Skills Applied to Reference Services," *RQ* 14 (Spring 1975): 233–35; W. Bernard Lukenbill, "Teaching Helping Relationship Concepts in the Reference Process," *Journal of Education for Librarianship* 18 (Fall 1977): 110–20; and Patrick Penland, *Advisory Counseling for Librarians* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1969).

[37]*National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1959–to date); Philip M. Hamer, *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); National Historical Publications and Records Commission, *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: The Commission, 1988); and Andrea Hinding, *Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1979).

signment would enable students to become familiar with the guides as well as encourage them to think about the types of sources a researcher or staff member might need in order to make better use of the repository's holdings. As Richard Cox has suggested, a well-stocked reference collection provides a practical way for archivists to improve the quality of their reference service, since it can be used to educate researchers to the types of secondary sources available on their topic.[38] This is possible only if the staff itself knows how to "stock" a reference collection and how to utilize the printed guides it contains.

Conclusion

Archivists recently have shown increased interest in promoting use of archival materials, and the SAA Goals and Priorities Task Force has identified this as one of archivists' three primary responsibilities. To enhance research use of collections, the archival profession needs to improve both its finding aids and descriptive practices as well as the expertise of its

reference personnel. Archivists are steadily at work on this first task, and coursework in reference theory and practice would represent a sensible beginning on the second.

Defining the goals, teaching methods, and content for an archival reference course, however, is an ambitious undertaking, and the discussion presented is not intended as a definitive program. Rather, it is offered in order to focus attention on a perceived problem: archivists' inability to provide consistently knowledgeable and helpful reference assistance. Even in its embryonic stage, certain aspects of a course on archival reference appear essential. The course should be required of all archival students; it should precede a practicum involving work in a reference setting or conducting a user study; and it should consist of a balanced mix of archival and library readings, practical assignments, and classroom simulations. Archival educators, reference staff, and other archivists are challenged to refine this proposal for improving the profession's reference skills and its commitment to research.

[38]Richard J. Cox, "Bibliography and Reference for the Archivist," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 185–87.