

Analysis of the Marketplace for Educated Archivists: State Archives as a Case Study

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The archival profession has recently demonstrated a growing interest in the content, institutional location, and format of university-based archival education programs. Many discussions have focused on the discovery or creation of an ideal educational or training program, or the description of an existing one. The interchange has been sparked with controversy and disagreement because archival education can be so many things: it can be a source of professional enrichment and advancement for persons already in the profession, or it can be a set of courses and programs designed for persons entering the profession. It can be formal courses offered in a full- or part-time university degree program, or as nondegree continuing education units. Such courses may take the traditional form of semester-long classroom lectures or be televised through a public education network.¹ Archival education within universities can be part of an undergraduate or graduate curriculum; it can be located in a library school, history department, or independent special program. Archival education can be week-long workshops and institutes, whether offered by the Society of American Archivists, a university, or the National Archives.

It can be offered in-house by an archival institution for its staff; by universities and colleges for their students; by educational consultants to mixed groups with specialized needs in particular subject areas; or by local, regional, or national professional organizations for their members.

In each of these settings, the purpose of the education is to prepare students to understand and perform archival work. Although much attention has been paid to the form of the education and training, relatively little has been paid to the needs of the workplaces hiring trained archivists. Perhaps this is because many of the persons participating in the discussions are themselves archivists who have hired, made promotion decisions, and supervised working archivists; they base their remarks on their own experiences. Such an individualistic view of the educational demands of the workplace can be highly idiosyncratic, reflecting only a small piece of the larger picture. The discussion of the form, location, content, and duration of archival education might be much illuminated by systematic study of the institutions employing newly trained or retrained archivists.

This article is a brief report of a research

¹The College of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina began experimenting with this format in the fall semester of 1987 with a television course in records management.

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project designed to investigate pre- and postemployment professional education needs of a specific segment of the archival world: state archives.

Methodology

Twenty-four state archivists in the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast were surveyed using a detailed questionnaire, followed by lengthy telephone interviews.² Transcripts of the telephone conversations were forwarded to the respondents for correction and expansion. Initial interviews with archivists in the Southeast were conducted in the spring of 1986; interviews with archivists in the Midwest and mid-Atlantic states were completed during the summer of 1987. In most cases, the respondent was the person then designated as the state archivist or who had overall supervisory responsibility for the daily functioning of the archival part of a larger agency.³

The focus of the original 1986 questionnaire was quite simple, asking four basic questions: (1) What had been the educational training in archives of professional staff hired during the past five years at the institutions? (2) How satisfied was the institution with the preemployment training in archives provided by different kinds of training options for entry-level archivists? (3) What additional professional training can or do the archives offer their employees once they are hired? (4) In what areas would an administrator like to see more training or different kinds of course work provided for (a) potential employees coming out of university-based archival education programs, or (b) for lower-level employees needing additional training as part of professional development? It quickly be-

came apparent during the initial interviews that even the relatively small universe of state archives presented diverse problems requiring important additional information not obtained from these questions.

Realistic answers to the education and training questions depended on a number of other related factors: the location of the state archives within the state bureaucracy; the size of the professional staff and the variety in specialization of duties; the structure and administration of the civil service or other system that defined archival duties, education, and salary levels; the quantity of records held by the institution and the level of reference demand; whether the archives was responsible for records management and/or local government records; and the level of funding available for salaries and professional development. The original questionnaire was therefore expanded to elicit this information from the 1987 participants (see Appendix) and archivists interviewed in 1986 were requested to provide comparable additional data.

Findings

At first, the diversity of work experience (and therefore of training needs) for archivists within even the limited and highly structured world of state government archives seemed to defy generalizations. In these twenty-four states, there are three basic organizational models of state archives: the archives as an independent state agency, the archives as a subdivision within a larger state agency; and the archives as a legislatively mandated part of a state historical society (see Table 1). The independent archives flourish most strongly in the South-

²Mid-Atlantic archives studied were New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Midwestern archives were Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri. Southeastern archives were North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Virginia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

³In two cases, where a recent appointment or personnel change had been made, the person interviewed was the individual who previously had been in charge and was familiar with past hiring and training practices, rather than a newly hired administrator less familiar with past institutional practices.

Table 1

Characteristics of State Archives by Organizational Type					
	No. of Professional Staff (FTE)	Holdings [†] (cu. ft.) govt. recds. / mss.		Records Management ^{††} state / local	
Part of Larger State Agency					
<u>Secretary of State</u>					
Georgia	38	92,000	2,000	yes	yes
Illinois	29	72,000	none	yes	yes
Michigan	6.5	18,500	850	no	yes
Missouri	4	11,500	30	no	no
New Jersey	8	12,500	500	no	no
<u>State Library</u>					
Florida	12	27,000	1,000	no	no
Virginia	21	47,700	2,000	yes	yes
<u>Dept. of Education, Office of Cultural Education</u>					
New York	31	40,000	none	yes	yes
<u>Dept. of Cultural Resources</u>					
North Carolina	30	30,000	5,000	yes	yes
West Virginia	3.5	6,670	1,150	no	no
<u>Historical & Museum Commission</u>					
Pennsylvania	10	23,000 (both)		no	yes
State Historical Society					
Kansas	9	15,000	none	yes	yes
Minnesota	4	40,000	36,000	no	no
Nebraska	5	17,000	8,000	no	no
North Dakota	3	8,500	2,000	no	yes
Ohio	26	30,000 (both)		no	yes
South Dakota	8.5	19,000 (both)		no	no
Wisconsin	17	44,000	40,000	no	no
Independent State Agencies					
Alabama	18	24,000	5,000	yes	yes
Indiana	5	15,000	"a few"	yes	yes
Maryland	16	101,000	3,000	yes	no
Mississippi	8	91,500	5,260	yes	no
South Carolina	30	13,000	none	yes	yes

Key to Table 1

^{*}*New Jersey: The bulk of these "private" materials are records of the New Jersey line of the Pennsylvania Railroad; they were added to the collection in 1986 because in its infancy the line was granted a monopolistic charter by the state legislature, giving it very close connections with state government.*

^{*}*West Virginia and Pennsylvania: The volume of holdings was obtained from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, **Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories** (1988).*

^{**}*Michigan: The state archives has sole responsibility for identifying local records of permanent value, but with only one staff member available for the task, it must rely largely on records management activities of local governments.*

^{**}*Missouri: Records management is carried out by a different division within the office of the Secretary of State.*

^{**}*New Jersey: Archives and Records Management are different bureaus within the same agency.*

^{**}*Florida: The State Library is part of the office of the Secretary of State. Records management is the responsibility of a different bureau within the same division of the Secretary of State office.*

^{**}*Kansas: County government records management only.*

^{**}*North Dakota: The archives has county government records management oversight responsibility.*

^{**}*Ohio: The archives does not have a legislative mandate to perform RM for local government, but in order to do the mandated archival work with local government records, it does RM for county, municipal, township, and school district agencies.*

^{**}*Wisconsin: The archives works closely with the Wisconsin Department of Administration to train records officers, and on a case-by-case basis provides assistance in schedule writing.*

east—in South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama, as well as in Maryland and Indiana. Archives that are part of larger state agencies vary both in their geographic and agency location. In New Jersey, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Georgia, and Delaware, archives are part of the Office of the Secretary of State; in Florida and Virginia, of the state library; in North Carolina and West Virginia, of the Department of Cultural Resources; in Pennsylvania, of the Historical and Museum Commission; and in New York State, of the Office of Cultural Education within the Department of Education. The Wisconsin-pioneered state historical society is the most prevalent model in the Midwest; in Minnesota, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Kansas, and Ohio, responsibility for public records administration has been assigned to a state historical society.

Administrative placement seems to determine many aspects of an archival agency that affect the kind of training sought in potential employees. For example, all archives in this survey located within historical societies have private or corporate manuscript collections related to the history of their state, as well as government records, but they are less likely to have rec-

ords management responsibilities. Archivists in these states also frequently administer historical or genealogical reference libraries. Thus, respondents at these institutions reported that training in librarianship and familiarity with manuscript collection practices and problems, as well as with record-keeping practices within state agencies were valued. An understanding of the history of the state and its national context, and some experience in historical research and writing were also noted as desirable.

By contrast, relatively few of the archives located within a larger state agency had substantial quantities of nongovernment records, but five of the nine had direct responsibility for either state or local government records management. All of the independent state archival agencies had responsibility for state agency records management; three of the five had local records management mandates as well. Three of the five independent archives had some manuscript holdings, but these did not constitute even 25 percent of total holdings. Respondents at these institutions reported that entry-level archivists should have a solid grounding in the principles of records management, but were less likely to cite a need

for experience or training in processing manuscript collections.

This suggests that the soundest course is to train students thoroughly in records management and the administration of manuscript collections and government records, in order to give them the broadest possible professional employment opportunities. Library training would seem to be the best background for persons hoping to obtain archival positions in state archives located within state libraries and for historical society-affiliated state archives with an integral library collection. A solid grounding in historical research methods and content is essential for state archives located within a larger government historical agency, as well as for those in a historical society. A joint archival degree program of an M.A. in history and an M.L.S. would seem to be the ideal. Such diverse training, encompassing library and historical research and writing skills, records management, and the principles and techniques of managing archival records and private papers is certainly an educational ideal for university-based programs, but it requires a minimum two-year training program; in the case of joint M.A./M.L.S. degrees, it may require three years.

Do the job descriptions and salary levels for entry-level positions in state archives adequately reflect the desired training? Annual salaries for entry-level professional positions in the archives surveyed ranged from \$11,000 to \$27,700 (see Table 2). Moreover, when the salaries were fairly low, civil service requirements were correspondingly low; at the bottom of the salary scale, minimum qualifications were only a high school degree, with preference for two to four years of college training. Even when candidates with an M.A. or M.L.S. could be hired at a correspondingly higher grade, salaries were as low as \$14,000. The median salary for entry into the archival profession in positions in which a bachelor's degree was defined as the minimum

qualification was \$16,349; for entry-level job descriptions in which a master's degree was the legally required minimum, the median was \$19,300. In practice, however, most archival administrators stressed that they hire candidates with far more than the minimum qualifications. In North Carolina, for instance, although a candidate with a B.A. and one year of archivally related experience is eligible for consideration for an Archivist I position paying \$18,000, the last person hired at that level had an M.A. and five years of experience.

For such salaries, students are understandably reluctant to incur debts of \$10,000 or more to complete the more costly, long-term educational programs that provide the training the profession and employers regard as important, particularly when new archival employees may be hired without such training. The situation is further complicated by the relatively few entry-level job openings in state archives. Three states had hired between eight and ten persons in the five years between 1982 and 1987; seven had hired four to seven; the remaining eleven for which such data was provided hired three or fewer in the five-year period. While such discouraging figures may lead archival educators to question whether they ought to gear training to the needs of state archives at all, it should be noted that as a group, these agencies hired a total of eighty-four new archivists during the five years studied, primarily at the entry level.

Despite the differences among archives, state archivists shared common ideas in areas crucial to the educational needs of their staffs. Most faced a common dilemma: they wanted to expand the size of their staffs—indeed, several are already doing so—but fiscal realities slowed such expansion. All agreed that new staff should have preappointment archival training and that university degree programs would play an important role in the professionalization of archival work. Respondents stressed that such training should focus on three areas:

(1) integrative skills and the ability to see the whole picture; (2) personnel and management skills, including the ability to work with departments and agencies, patrons, and colleagues; and (3) an orientation to the special needs of government records at the state, regional, county, or/and local level. Many respondents suggested that their experience had shown that archival education for state archivists worked best when linked to a government archives, so that the future employee had meaningful exposure to government records and their care. One archivist noted that an acceptable alternative to government agency experience could be comparable immersion in the records of a large and bureaucratic business. When asked about the areas in which more or different training is needed, individual respondents cited "more technical expertise" in such areas as micrographics, computer programming, and the chemical and technical areas related to paper conservation; experience or training in "the skillful art of negotiation"; and emphasized the dire need for applicants knowledgeable in records management.

Much information remains to be analyzed from the interviews conducted for this survey. Archivists spoke eloquently on the

importance of continued postemployment professional training for their staffs, and described both the variety of strategies agencies follow to promote this professional development, and the limitations of geographic isolation or budgetary constraints. Methods by which different state archives apprenticed newly hired professionals within their particular institution varied widely. Such issues as who defines archival positions within a civil service system, the degree to which professional archivists can influence those descriptions, and the impact that placement within a parent agency may have on the ability of archivists to lobby for higher salaries for archival professionals require further study.

This preliminary report is offered in the hope that it will stimulate archival educators to study more systematically the common needs of and important differences within other segments of the archival workplace. Archives are the market for the students trained in archival education programs. While it is important to think comprehensively in designing an ideal, well-rounded archival education, archival educators cannot afford to ignore the real-world needs and limitations of the marketplace.

Table 2
Characteristics of Positions Filled, 1982-1987

	Staff Size	New Hires	Position Description & Salary Range*	Position Qualifications*
Middle Atlantic Maryland	16	2	Arch I: \$14,876-19,461 Arch II: 15,958-29,902 Arch III: 18,465-	B.A. his B.A. (his or pol sci) + exp or M.A. B.A. + 2 yrs exp or M.A. + 1 yr exp
New Jersey	8	0	Arch Tech: 16,723-23,406 Arch II: 22,411-31,383	B.A. his M.A. his or M.L.S. + exp
New York	31	10	Arch/RA I: 21,000-26,500 Arch/RA II: 26,500-32,800	M.A. + 1 yr exp M.A., extensive exp + special skills
Pennsylvania	10	2	Arch I: 18,504-24,528 Arch II: 20,812-27,990	B.A. his + exp M.A. or M.L.S. + exp
Virginia	21	6	Arch A: 17,521-22,929	M.A. (his or related field) or M.L.S. preferred
West Virginia	3.5	2	Trainee: 12,780 Hist: 15,500 Arch: 16,500	B.A. his B.A. his + exp or M.A. M.A. his or M.L.S. + exp
Southeast Alabama	18	7	Arch I: 15,215-23,451	B.A. his + 2 courses in arch adm
Florida	12	6	Arch Asst: 13,677-22,300	B.A. his or lib sci
Georgia	38	7	Arch I: 17,800	B.A. his or pol sci
Mississippi	8	6	Arch I: 15,215-22,791	B.A. or B.S. his or lib sci
N. Carolina	30	5	Arch I: 18,348-28,920 Arch II: 19,994-31,692 Arch III: 22,680-36,400	B.A. his or related soc sci + 1 yr exp B.A. his or soc sci + 2 yrs arch exp B.A. his or soc sci + 2 yrs supervisory exp
S. Carolina	30	5	Arch I: 16,600-23,350 Arch II: 18,533-26,269	B.A. + 1 yr exp or M.A. in arch adm M.A. + training & exp

State	29	2	Arch/RA I: Arch/RA II:	20,892-26,040 27,740-28,692	B.A. his or related field M.A. + training or exp in archives
Illinois	5	1	RA 5: RA 4:	15,500 17,500	B.A. his B.A. + 2 yrs exp or M.A.
Indiana	9	4	Arch I:	20,742	M.A. his or M.L.S.
Kansas	6.5	2.5	CT 4:	21,600-29,900	M.A. his or related field + 1 yr exp
Michigan	4	4	Arch I:	20,000-24,000	B.A. his or related field
Minnesota	4	2	Arch: Asst Arch:	11,000-14,000 14,000-18,000	High school, prefer 2-4 yrs. college M.A. his or M.L.S.
Missouri	5	2	Mss. Curator:	18,000-19,500	B.A. his or related field
Nebraska	3	2	Arch I: Arch II:	15,200-18,000 NA	B.A. his + 2 yrs exp or M.A. M.A. or M.L.S.
North Dakota	26	8	Arch I: Arch II:	16,349 17,389	B.A. + 2 yrs exp or M.A. or M.L.S. + 1 yr exp M.A. or M.L.S. + 2 yrs exp
Ohio	8.5	2.5	(low entry) (mid-level) (high entry)	14,800 18,000 22,000	B.A. soc sci or lib sci M.A. soc sci or M.L.S. M.A. or M.L.S. + exp and special skills
South Dakota	17	9	entry-level:	app. 20,000	B.A. his or lib sci (prefer M.A. or M.L.S.)
Wisconsin	*Abbreviations: <i>Arch/RA = Archivist and Records Analyst</i> <i>Arch Tech = Archival Technician</i> <i>Asst Arch = Assistant Archivist</i> <i>Hist = Historian</i> <i>Mss Curator = Manuscripts Curator</i> <i>RA = Records Analyst</i> <i>CT = College Trainee</i>				
*Abbreviations: <i>NA = Not available.</i>					Position Qualifications: <i>his = history</i> <i>pol sci = political science</i> <i>arch adm = archives administration</i> <i>lib sci = library science</i> <i>soc sci = social science</i> <i>exp = experience</i>
Position Descriptions: <i>Arch = Archivist</i> <i>Arch Asst = Archives Assistant</i>					

Appendix

Survey Questions

Educational Training Needs of State Archives

1. Institutional Information:

a. What is the administrative location of your state archives (i.e., separate agency within state government, division of state library, part of state historical society, etc.)?

b. Does your institution have collecting responsibility both for official state records and for private and corporate state historical materials?

c. How many cubic feet of archival records are held by your institution? How many cubic feet of manuscript or private materials?

d. What is the size of your professional archival staff? How many of these have primary responsibility for state records? Please include records center personnel if they are considered part of archival functions in your state, and note if professional staff are located in more than one central place within the state.

e. If your agency is a division within a larger institution (for example, a separate part of a state library or historical society):

1) Are employment and promotional criteria for archivists determined by the parent institution, and do they differ for personnel with archival responsibilities?

2) How large is the staff of the total agency?

f. What is the salary range for entry-level professional archivists? (Note: I am most interested here in starting salaries at different entry qualification levels, such as with B.A., M.A., M.L.S., or Ph.D.) What are the determinants of eligibility for promotion?

g. How many entry-level professional archivists have been hired at your institution within the past five years?

2. Hiring of trained personnel:

a. What are the minimum education requirements for employment in an entry-level archival position? Is a particular degree specified by state or agency personnel policies?

b. Do you try to hire people already trained as archivists for professional archival-level positions, and are you usually able to do so?

c. Has the availability of trained archivists changed over the years? If so, how recently, and what sort of changes have you observed?

d. Are those people whom you hire with training generally trained:

1) within university programs within your state,

2) within university programs in your region,

3) within university programs in another region,

4) in another archival institution or manuscript collection in your state or region,
or

5) in national or other regional archives?

e. Do those people who come to you with archival training generally have the basic skills that they need to be effective employees in your institution? Are there significant differences in this regard among those coming out of the five different sources for training suggested above in "d"?

3. Providing training within your institution:

a. To what degree has your present professional staff received their archival training

within your institution? Is this in the process of changing? Have you provided such training by choice, or because adequately trained people were not available, or for some other reason? (For example, state personnel policies may have required you to transfer nonarchival state employees from other departments rather than to hire from outside.)

b. When your institution has hired untrained personnel, what general background, or specific fields of training, have proved most useful or successful as preparation for archival work? Do you look for a similar background for those with professional archival training as well?

(The following questions may apply to new employees with archival training as well as to those with none.)

c. Do archival employees receive a general introduction to archival work and the various processes it involves within your institution through a formal process, such as an internal workshop or through some sort of “rotational” assignment of introduction to the several departments? If so, does this occur near the beginning of their employment, or at some other stage in their development as archivists? If not, do you believe such a program would be valuable for new employees if it were feasible economically?

d. Do you train a new archival employee in his or her particular duties within your institution informally, usually in a kind of mentor system, or have you developed formal guidelines and policies for a more systematic “apprenticeship” period of training?

4. Postappointment training outside your institution:

a. Are there local or regional professional development training opportunities available to your archival professional staff? Does your institution support such training through payment of workshop fees, professional leave time to attend, etc.? Who offers such training: a local university, a regional archival or other professional organization, some other institution?

b. Does your institution have the funds to send new (or even experienced) employees to national professional archival meetings, or training workshops sponsored by the SAA or the National Archives, for additional training in archival work beyond that which you can provide for them?

c. Can archivists without a degree or certificate from a formal educational program work toward such a degree or certificate with the support of your institution—through “leave for education” policies, for instance? Would it be to their advantage within the wage or promotional structure of your institution to get such training?

d. What specific kinds of training do you most need provided by outside groups, and how successful have you been in finding sources for that archival training for your staff?