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The Historical Profession and Archival Education

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The Historical Profession and Archival Education

By Joseph M. Turrini

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The views expressed in the article are not necessarily those of the Board of the Academy of Certified Archivists. It is being presented in *ACA News* as a point of interest to its readers.

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Archivists, historians, and librarians have for decades disagreed about the appropriate placement of archival education in the university. Whether archivists should be trained in history departments or in library science schools has been a source of significant conflict and acrimonious debate. This unsettled quarrel resulted in two different educational tracks that persist to this day. Changes in the archival profession and in the academy, however, now appear to be accomplishing what the professional debates failed to achieve. Recent developments suggest that the archival profession, at one time dominated by history department graduates, will be staffed by library science graduates in the near future. Given the current trends, a more relevant question might now be: Can history-based archival programs survive in the changing archival environment?

History departments should continue to be a part of archival education. The archival profession emerged from academic history in the early decades of the 20th century. The connections between the historical and the archival profession

remain, and the history graduate school still provides a solid background for many aspects of archival work. However, changes in archival education, primarily the expansion of specialized archival courses and the increased technological expectations of archivists, require that history departments adapt the content and the size of their archival programs. To continue to produce competitive graduates, the history profession needs to demonstrate a renewed commitment to archival training, as well as to think creatively about how to satisfy the new educational demands of the profession.

The Ascendancy of Library Schools in Archival Education

The educational training of archivists has changed substantially in the last 30 years. A 1971 study found that over 50 percent of archivists had a history (or related social science) graduate degree, while just 12 percent of archivists possessed a

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Masters in Library Science (MLS).¹ A 2004 survey of the archival profession, known by the acronym A*CENSUS (from Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States), found that the percentage of archivists with an MLS (or related information science degree) had more than tripled to 39 percent, while the percentage of archivists who held a history (or related social science) masters degree had decreased to 46 percent. Two professors involved with the A*Census survey have suggested that the data indicate that the library science degree is now "the degree of choice over those from history departments."² The reasons this trend has occurred suggest that it will continue unless history-based programs adjust.

The Increased Commitment of Library Science to Archival Education

There are a number of reasons why the archival profession is shifting from being primarily history-educated into one that is principally library science-educated. First, library science schools have responded to the increased educational expectations of the archival profession with a much stronger commitment than history departments. Over the last few decades, the educational expectations for entry-level archivists have expanded. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) has recommended and employers expect a larger portion of graduate coursework with archives-specific content. This has led to the growth of programs with expanded archival course offerings. However, this growth has

occurred in library schools, while history departments have stagnated. For example, a 1999 study found that 11 library schools offered six or more archival courses.³ On the other hand, *A Guide to Graduate Programs in Public History*, 2002, published by the National Council on Public History (NCPH), included 34 history departments with archival concentrations. Most of these history-based archival programs provided just one to three archival courses, usually within larger public history curriculums with specialties in fields like museum studies, historic preservation, and public policy. History departments have simply not expanded their archival course offerings to meet the rising employment expectations. The only history-based programs in the NCPH guide that have access to larger archival curriculums are the five programs that have access to courses cross-listed with the library science programs at their schools, and the two programs that have cooperative arrangements with nearby library science programs at different schools.⁴

At the same time, library science programs have bolstered their number of full-time faculty devoted to archival education. As the 1970s closed, there were only seven full-time archival faculty (three in library science programs and four in history departments) in the United States. A decade later, the number of full-time archival faculty had risen to 22 (12 in library science and 9 in history). By 2000, the number of full-time tenure-track archival faculty had risen to 36. This rather significant increase in full-time archival faculty occurred much more energetically in library schools than in history departments:

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Library schools employed 26 of the full-time archival faculty while history departments employed just 10.⁵ In the last 15 years, library schools have expanded their commitment to archival education by hiring additional faculty while history departments have remained idle. Granted that the failure of the historical profession to increase the number of archival professors comes at a time of an overall contraction of tenure-track faculty positions. Regardless of the context, the increase in archival curriculum and full-time archives faculty in library schools demonstrates a much stronger commitment to archival education than in history departments. Library science programs have embraced archives (and the related records management field) as another form of information management which meshes with their transformation from library schools to broader information science schools.

The Technology Turn

The increased use of technology in archival settings is a second reason for the ascendance of library schools in archival education. The processes created to exploit new technologies and standardize archival procedures have emerged from library schools and integrated fully throughout library school curriculums. The creation of MARC-AMC for cataloguing archival collections into OPACs and bibliographic utilities in the 1980s is one example. A more recent example is the development of Encoded Archival Description (EAD), a standardized finding aid format used to publish finding aids on the Web. Initiated in 1998, EAD reinforced the need for standard library tech-

niques, such as controlled vocabularies and standardized formal structures, into the archival profession. Thus, it should be no surprise that library school students are much more likely to learn skills applicable to the use of EAD throughout their programs. For example, library science students have access to cataloging courses that teach them to apply the Library of Congress Subject Headings, and many library school students are exposed to markup languages like XML, which EAD requires. History department archival students are rarely, if ever, exposed to similar concepts and technologies within their regular history courses, but they need them. One recent study noted that there has been a noticeable increase in the "knowledge of or skill using EAD or markup languages" as "either required or desired qualifications" in archival employment ads.⁶ None of the 27 history-based archival concentrations in the NCPH guide not attached to library science programs appear to include EAD implementation or markup language coursework. This should be somewhat alarming to history-based archival instructors seeking to keep their programs relevant.

The Southeast Archives Educational Collaborative

Can history-based archival programs survive in the changing archival environment? Certainly many in the archival profession and most readers of this magazine value the broad historical training that history graduate students receive. Graduate history students explore historical methods, learn historiography, use of primary sources, and gain subject area training and knowledge, all of which provide a critical educational foundation for performing many archival functions, such as appraisal, arrangement and description, and

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reference. But if current trends continue, historians will find fewer and fewer of their students employable as archivists unless they also obtain library science degrees. Indeed, dual masters degrees, in library science and history, appear to be on the rise in the archival profession. History-based archival programs must find ways to increase their archival offerings and provide their students with the opportunity to acquire the technical skills.

Auburn University (AU) has one of the older history-based archival programs in the country. The history department began offering archival coursework in 1973. By the turn of the 21st century, the small program had expanded to include a three-course archival sequence with an internship. But the growth of the technological requirements in the profession and the inability to offer the wide variety of archival courses found in the larger library science programs posed problems. Faced with similar difficulties in expanding archival course offerings beyond two or three courses, Elizabeth Dow, professor in Louisiana State University's School of Information and Library Science, envisioned utilizing distance education technology to address this problem. Armed with an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant, Dow led the formation of the Southeast Archives Education Collaborative (SAEC). Currently consisting of five universities (Louisiana State University, School of Information and Library Science; Auburn University, History Department; University of Kentucky, School of Information and Library Science; Indiana University, School of Library and Information Science; and Middle Tennessee State University, Public History

Program), SAEC schools began sharing specialized archival courses through real-time videoconference technology in the fall of 2003. Each participating university provides access to one archival graduate course each year. AU students have access to a much wider assortment of archival courses each year, including important technology-based classes, such as Electronic Description of Archival Materials (from LSU) and Electronic Records Management (from IU). Conversely, graduate students from the four other schools have access to two archival courses, Seminar in the History of Archives and Seminar in Advanced Appraisal, taught at AU. The combined specialized archival course offerings create a broad curriculum of archival courses that rivals even the largest library science programs.

SAEC provides AU students access to important archival courses they otherwise would not have, and has helped this history-based archival program stay current with the changes in archival education. While this is surely not the only way to keep history-based archival programs an important part of archival training, history-based archival programs must take heed of the changes swirling around them or they will eventually become irrelevant to a profession that once embraced them.

Notes

1. F. Gerald Ham and others, "Is the Past Still Prologue? History and Archival Education," *American Archivist* 56 (Fall 1993), 719.
2. Elizabeth Yakel and Jeannette Bastian,

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- "Graduate Archival Education and the A*Census," Powerpoint slides, SAA Conference Presentation, August 19, 2005, slides 5–6. At www.archivists.org/a-census (accessed June 6, 2006). In a recently published article developed from the survey, Yakel and Bastian contend, in fact, that the proportion of archivists with library science degrees is probably much higher than the 39 percent reported earlier, because the survey language may have resulted in underreporting of such archivists. See Elizabeth Yakel and Jeannette Bastian, "Graduate Archival Education," Part 4 of the special section on the A*Census, *American Archivist* 69 (fall/winter 2006), 352.
3. Richard J. Cox and others, "Archival Education in North American Library and Information Science Schools," *Library Quarterly* 71:2 (2001), 183.
 4. National Council on Public History, *A Guide to Graduate Programs in Public History* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, 2002), 107 (for the list of schools with archival concentrations).
 5. The figures on employment of archival instructors all come from, Cox and others, "Archival Education," 164–165.
 6. Michelle Riggs, "The Correlation of Archival Education and Job Requirements Since the Advent of Encoded Archival Description," *Journal of Archival Organization* 3:1 (2005), 72–73.

**Upcoming locations for the
Annual Meeting of the
Academy of Certified Archivists**

August 2007 -- Chicago, Illinois
August 2008 -- San Francisco, California
August 2009 -- Austin, Texas

ACA 2007 Election Results

I am pleased to announce the results of the 2007 ACA Election based on the 220 valid ballots that were cast. The nominating committee would like to thank all of our candidates for committing their time and energy to the election process and all the members who took the time to vote.

Kristy Sorenson, CA
Chair, Nominating Committee

[Ballots count: June 11, 2007 by Kristy Sorensen, CA;
Matthew Darby, CA; and Carol Mead, CA]

Vice President/President Elect
Martin Levitt

Secretary
Shelly Kelly

Regent for Exam Administration
Connell Gallagher

Regent for Certification Maintenance
Shelly Croteau

Nominating Committee
Morgan Davis