

NATIONAL FORUM ON ARCHIVAL CONTINUING EDUCATION (NFACE)

**Educational Needs and Priorities among Professional Archivists and
Manuscript Curators**

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I. Define objectives

The “common ground” speakers have been asked to “characterize and connect” the groups that we represent. We have been asked to identify our group’s needs, barriers and where we can interact with other groups. Finally, we have been asked to identify the role of NFACE and to find the “common ground” within our group and connect our group to other records keepers.

OBJECTIVES:

- Characterize
- Identify Needs
- Connect
- Identify individual barriers
- Connect again
- Identify barriers to interaction
- Identify where they can constructively interact with other groups
- Identify the role of NFACE
- What is the “common ground”?

II. Characterize

NFACE is concerned with the continuing educational and informational needs of all individuals who care for historical records. As part of the data gathering efforts to identify those needs, NFACE distributed a survey of individual needs via newsletters, the Internet, and at various regional meetings. In addition, the NFACE Program Committee members held 24 focus groups nationwide.

The largest number of respondents to the individual needs survey (31.3%) identify themselves as archivists. (For the purpose of this summary, the term

CHARACTERIZE:

The largest number of respondents to the NFACE individual needs survey identified themselves as archivists.

▪ Archivist	641	31.3%
▪ Librarian	423	20.6%
▪ Mus Prof	180	8.8%
▪ RecMgr	126	6.1%
▪ OtherGovt	171	8.3%
▪ Volunteer	357	17.4%
▪ Other	152	7.4%

“archivist” should be understood as including those who are “manuscript curators”.) For professional archivists, there has been much discussion and occasionally heated debate over what makes someone an archivist. An entire program could be devoted to an examination of this question. The NFACE survey only asked that respondents identify their principal work.

Professional archivists have a wide range of education. There is no formal archival degree, although, there are guidelines for a “Master’s in Archival Studies” (MAS) degree. A review by the Society of American Archivists Committee on Education and Professional Development found that only a few graduate programs fully follow the MAS guidelines. There are increasing numbers of graduate programs with archival components, including a few Ph.D. programs. More archivists have a graduate degree in history or library or information science that may or may not include courses in archives management. There are many archivists who have been trained “on-the-job” or through institutes such as the Modern Archives Institute, Georgia Archives Institute, and Western Archives Institute which provide basic instruction.

Given the wide range of education among professional archivists, there is a need for a wide range of continuing education. For some, like the “on-the-job” trained archivist or archivists whose graduate programs did not include an archives component, there is a need for formal, basic, core training. As our profession is one that is changing, continuing education will have constant importance in the future especially in areas of electronic records, Encoded Archival Description (EAD), and facilities planning.

According to the 1998 report of the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC), “Where History Begins”, professionally trained archivists and manuscript curators, work in a variety of repositories, including college and university archives and special collections departments, historical societies, state and local government archives, federal repositories, research libraries and other cultural institutions, and for corporate archives serving businesses and religious organizations. “Where History Begins” characterized the repositories employing professional record keepers as the “professional core”, the repositories whose major or only focus is the collection, care and research use of historical records. The “professional core” also includes smaller repositories staffed by professional archivists who work alone or with limited technical and clerical staff as well as archival departments within larger organizations.¹ Most of the archivists responding to the individual needs survey work for colleges and universities.

¹ Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, “Where History Begins: A Report on Historical Records Repositories in the United States”, compiled by Victoria Irons Walch, Project Coordinator, May 1998, p. 31.

Having characterized who professional archivists are, how they receive their education, and where they are employed, the next question is where do they obtain professional support?

CHARACTERIZE:
Most of the archivists responding to the individual needs survey work for colleges and universities.

▪ HistSoc	94	14.7%
▪ C&U	205	32.0%
▪ Govt	139	21.7%
▪ PubLib	17	2.7%
▪ Mus	51	8.0%
▪ Relig	81	12.6%
▪ Other	54	8.4%

For assistance, colleagues and professional associations are the most frequent sources of assistance for professional archivists. Of the professional associations,

CHARACTERIZE:
Colleagues and professional associations are the most frequent source of assistance for archivists.

▪ Fed govt agency	129	7.2%
▪ State govt agency	194	10.8%
▪ Local govt agency	28	1.6%
▪ SHRAB	58	3.2%
▪ Prof assns	420	23.3%
▪ Colleagues	574	31.9%
▪ Vendors	189	10.5%
▪ Consultants	89	4.9%
▪ Other	18	6.6%

the Society of American Archivists and regional archival associations are the most frequently cited as providing assistance. There is value in our professional associations since 85.6% of the archivists responding to the NFACE survey indicate that they seek assistance from SAA or regional archival associations.

CHARACTERIZE:

Of the professional associations, the Society of American Archivists and regional archival associations are the most frequently cited as providing assistance to archivists.

▪ SAA	289	41.4%
▪ Regional Archival Assn	192	27.5%
▪ St/City Archival Assn	127	18.2%
▪ AASLH	9	1.3%
▪ NAGARA	19	2.7%
▪ AAM	5	0.7%
▪ ARMA	27	3.9%
▪ ALA	5	0.7%
▪ IIMC	1	0.1%
▪ ACWR	9	1.3%
▪ State Museum Assn	1	0.1%
▪ State Library Assn	1	0.1%
▪ Pres Consortia	13	1.9%

Professional archivists are most likely to attend workshops that are local either in city, in house, in state or from professional organizations in their region or state, or use on-the-job education services.

Archivists are most likely to attend workshops that are local:

- in city
- in house
- in state
- from professional organizations in the region or state
- on the job training services

(“Local” can have a broad definition. In the case of someone in Northern California, “local” may be 400 or 500 miles away in Los Angeles or San Diego.)

III. Identify needs and issues

Having identified “professional record keepers”, what are their needs for continuing education? The NFACE survey of individuals listed 32 topics for

IDENTIFY NEEDS

Of the 32 topics included in the NFACE survey of individual continuing education needs, the “top ten” topics as highest priority for archivists are as follows.

1. And the highest priority is.....Uses of Technology
2. Preservation and conservation
3. Appraisal
4. Finding aids
5. Arrangement & Description
6. Electronic records management
7. Copyright
8. Privacy/access laws and regulations
9. Disaster preparedness
10. Storage and environmental standards

(Apologies to David Letterman and his “Top Ten List”.)

training opportunities or information resources. For archivists, the highest priority was placed on training or information concerning the uses of technology. Other “top ten” topics are 2) preservation and conservation, 3) appraisal, 4) finding aids, 5) arrangement and description, 6) electronic records management, 7) copyright, 8) privacy and access laws and regulations, 9) disaster preparedness and 10) storage and environmental standards.

What the survey suggests is that there is need for more specialized and advanced education and training.

IV. Connect

Connecting the needs of archivists and manuscript curators to that of the other groups surveyed, six of the ten topics given the highest priority by the professional record keepers were in the top ten for other record keepers.

CONNECT:

- Of the top 10 topics seen as priorities for training and/or information by archivists, six of the topic areas are in the top ten for other record keepers.

If there is any surprise in the survey, it is probably the degree of agreement in the needs of the different types of records keepers.

V. Identify individual barriers

The interest in local, state or regional education services relates to the top reasons why archivists don't try to acquire additional training or education. Put simply, respondents to the NFACE survey indicated that additional training is too expensive for institutions or individuals with limited budgets, particularly where it is too far to travel for the training or education.

IDENTIFY INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS:

What are the chief reasons archivists don't try to acquire additional training or education?

1. Too expensive
2. Limited budget
3. Too far to travel
4. Other priorities
5. Insufficient staff coverage
6. Not aware of opportunities
7. Employer won't pay

Other barriers identified by the survey are that the archivists or their institutions have other priorities, insufficient staff coverage or are not aware of the opportunities. The survey found that employers could be barriers to additional training if the employer won't pay or if additional training is not important to the employer.

VI. Connect again

CONNECT AGAIN:

Archivists share the same major concerns as other records keepers as to why they don't seek to acquire additional training or education.

So, not only do professional archivists and other records keepers share many of the same needs, they face many of the same barriers to obtaining continuing education. This is probably not as much a surprise as the fact that the needs of professional archivists and other records keepers are so similar.

VII. Identify barriers to interaction

IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO INTERACTION

- Various paths to training - different training requirements
- Conflicting traditions
- Different focus among various groups
- Limited communication
- Geographic barriers
- Archivists sometimes tend to work in isolation from other record keepers.

With many of the same education and training needs and many of the same obstacles to obtain education and training, it would seem that there would be a natural desire for professional archivists and other records keepers to work together to meeting their needs and overcoming the obstacles. The vision of archivists and other record keepers collaborating and cooperating on continuing education efforts is an attractive vision. However, there have been barriers to collaboration between records keepers.

First, within the group of professional record keepers, there is the wide range of educational backgrounds. There are different traditions among professional archivists and manuscript curators. It is only with the increased use of technology and the move towards standardization, MARC format, EAD, and so forth that there has been greater coordination among professional archivists.

Beyond the professional archivists, there are conflicting traditions between professional archivists and other records keepers. For example, recently there were lengthy postings on the Archives Listserv about the differences between how museum professionals and archivists catalog records.

There is often limited communication and lack of interaction between the various records keepers. How often do we see, for example, ARMA or ALA-sponsored

programs at SAA or SAA-organized sessions at ARMA or ALA? Interaction between organizations has not been on a regular basis.

Geography is a significant barrier for continuing education, both in terms of cost of obtaining continuing education and in terms of accessibility. In addition, individuals often don't have very much interaction with national organizations. National organizations can't always serve members in more remote locations. Speaking as a Californian, and as someone from the west, there are geographic barriers related to continuing education. Opportunities for continuing education programs are fewer in the west than elsewhere.

VIII. Interact

There are a number of ways that archivists can constructively interact with other groups. Since there are shared needs, there should be "shared solutions".

- Joint programming
- Cross programming
(having one group develop or present at another group's meeting)
- Local and regional programming
- Better distance learning offerings
- Improve communication and outreach
- Take advantage of where there are existing connections.

It appears that since there are shared needs and concerns between archivists and other record keepers, there would be possibilities for "shared solutions". There is much that professional archivists can learn from other groups, and there is much that professional archivists can provide to other groups. One possible way of achieving shared solutions would be through joint programs where professional archivists could train alongside other allied professionals. An example might be a joint program on electronic records for archivists and records managers. Joint programs would help to reduce the costs that are a barrier to individuals seeking continuing education. Joint

programming would also have the benefit of reaching a larger audience at a lower per-person cost.

Cross programming might be another method of interaction. Professional archivists could provide museum professionals with training concerning handling of documents and museum professional could provide professional archivists with training concerning handling of objects.

Local and regional programming and better distance learning offerings are also essential for future continuing education. More effort must be made by all records keepers to improve the accessibility of continuing education.

Barriers between groups may be less important as there is greater movement towards electronic records. Walls are also coming down as more materials are available electronically.

The barriers to continuing education and training for individuals as well as between the various types of records keepers will not go away unless there is improved communication. The message needs to be sent and reinforced that continuing education is important and that it should be a priority for ourselves as records keepers, for our employers and for our institutions if we are going to make a difference in the management, preservation and accessibility of our records holdings.

IX. Identify the role of NFACE

IDENTIFY THE ROLE OF NFACE

NFACE

- Is only a beginning.
- can make a difference by opening the opportunities for communication among the various groups of records keepers.
- is important in overcoming the barriers between professional archivists and other records keepers.
- is an opportunity to:
 - identify needs of records keepers
 - look for shared solutions for meeting the needs of records keepers
 - achieve shared solutions.
- touches records keepers regardless of their previous education, in all types of repositories, regardless of size, focus of the repository, or placement within an organization.
- crosses geographic lines

NFACE is only a beginning. NFACE can make a difference by opening the opportunities for communication among the various groups of records keepers. NFACE is important in overcoming the barriers between professional archivists and other records keepers. It is an opportunity to identify needs of records keepers, look for shared solutions for meeting the needs and achieving the shared solutions. NFACE is also important because it touches records keepers regardless of their previous education, in all types of repositories, regardless of size, focus of the repository, or placement within an organization. NFACE crosses all geographic lines.

IDENTIFY THE ROLE OF NFACE (for professional archivists)

NFACE is important to professional archivists because there has never before been an opportunity for the providers of archival continuing education to have a comprehensive discussion about continuing education nationwide, to identify continuing needs, and to plan for the continuing education in the future.

For professional archivists, many of the NFACE incubator and information sessions are intended to give participants opportunities to discuss common concerns with other records keepers.

X. What is the “common ground”?

The “common ground” is that records keepers have common needs for education and training as well as similar reasons for not seeking training. All share a

commitment to historical records. The “common ground” can be defined by the program description for the upcoming meeting of the National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators (NAGARA) to be held in July in Columbia, South Carolina. Coincidentally, “***Preparing for the 21st Century: Education as the Foundation***” is the theme for the meeting.

WHAT IS THE “COMMON GROUND”?

- The “common ground” is that records keepers have common needs for education and training as well as similar reasons for not seeking training. All share a commitment to historical records.
- The archives and records management fields are rapidly changing. It is vital for archivists and records managers (and other records keepers) to educate themselves to meet the challenges that the 21st century brings.

“The archives and records management fields are rapidly changing. Now, more than ever, records’ professionals need to know more about new technologies and changes to standard methodologies and their impact on the creation, management, and preservation of records. It is vital for archivists and records managers (and other records keepers) to educate themselves to meet the challenges that the 21st century brings. This year’s NAGARA program centers on the theme of continuing education and how we can prepare to meet those challenges.” NFACE is one of the first steps for record keepers to prepare to meet the challenges of the 21st century.