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THE ACT SURVEY ON PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

Archie Motley

In the spring of 1978 a questionnaire was distributed to 125 archivists by ACT, an informal caucus within the Society of American Archivists. The survey was designed to elicit responses on a number of important issues facing the profession today, including certification of archivists, accreditation of archival education programs, minority employment, the status of women in the profession, and grants. A total of 44 persons responded to the survey. A summary of the responses follows.

CERTIFICATION OF ARCHIVISTS:

Q. Should archivists be certified? Why?

29 respondents favor certification; 7 oppose it at this time; 4 others oppose it outright.

Respondents favoring certification felt that it was an essential step towards full recognition as a profession. Lacking certification and established standards of competence, archives can only claim professional status.

29 respondents feel that formal education should be a factor in the certification process; 1 that perhaps it should; 1 did not feel it should be a factor.

17 archivists favor a rigorous examination for archival certification; 1 a rigorous exam eventually; and 2 favor a less-rigorous test. 22 respondents feel the SAA should administer the examination.

Q. If archival certification becomes a reality, should there be a "grandperson clause" to confer automatically certification on all current working archivists with a specified period of work experience?

20 archivists feel there should be some sort of "grandperson" clause in the certification process that would automatically confer certification on an

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archivist with a specified amount of on-the-job experience; 8 others favor such a clause if other specific conditions are met; 12 respondents oppose a "grandperson" clause.

Q. Who should determine the criteria for archival employment?

27 respondents feel employers should set the criteria for archival employment in their shops, with a number of people noting that employers will always do so no matter what the certification criteria are. 22 feel the SAA should determine the criteria for archival employment. 4 feel the educational training institution should have a say in the matter. (Several respondents stated that both the employer and the SAA should have a voice in the matter, with the SAA establishing criteria and employers adapting them to suit their own operations if necessary.)

15 archivists feel that professional positions should be open to non-certified archivists; 3 others feel they should be open only for the time being. 16 respondents feel that professional positions should be closed to the non-certified.

Q. If archival certification standards are established, should they apply equally to all archivists whether they work for the university archives, private historical societies, church or business archives, state or municipal governments, the National Archives and Records Service, etc.?

32 respondents feel that the same certification standards should be applicable to all archivists; 6 do not; 2 others would make allowances in special instances.

Q. Should archivists form professional or trade unions?

27 respondents feel that archivists should not form their own trade or professional union; 9 feel they should; 4 others that perhaps they should.

ACCREDITATION OF ARCHIVAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS:

Q. Should archival education programs be accredited? Why?

Q. Who should accredit archival education programs?

42 people favor accreditation; 2 are opposed at this time; 38 feel that the SAA should be the chief accrediting body.
Q. How would you prefer to see archival education programs established?

Q. What would you care to see offered in archival education programs?

24 people favor Archival Science as a separate academic curriculum, although a number question its practicality in a university structure; 4 oppose archival science as a separate curriculum.

34 would like to see Archival Science as part of a graduate program in History; 1 would not want to do this necessarily.

22 respondents would care to have Archival Science as part of a graduate program in Library Science; 3 would perhaps like this; 6 objected to such a program.

Q. If archival education programs are accredited, should professional positions be open to people who have not completed an accredited program?

18 archivists feel that professional positions should be open to those who have not completed an archival training program; 15 feel that these positions should not be open to such people; 8 archivists feel that some professional positions should be open to people who have not completed an archival training program.

18 respondents feel that competent sub-professionals should be permitted to advance to professional positions even if they have not completed an archival training program; 9 feel they should be allowed to so advance if they pass a certifying examination; 7 archivists feel that sub-professionals should not be allowed to advance to professional positions if they have not completed an archival education program.

25 archivists see no elitism in barring people with less than graduate degrees from archival professional positions; 14 respondents see an elitist danger in this respect; 2 others see a possible danger.

36 respondents favor certification and accreditation because they would improve the caliber of people employed in the profession and the quality of service offered the public; 3 do not favor C & A for this reason.

25 archivists favor C & A because they would be a useful bargaining factor.
as regards improvements in wages and working conditions; 4 do not favor C& A for this reason.

10 favor C& A as a means to establish a professional class of archivists who have met certain education and examination requirements; 15 do not favor C&A for this reason. (In the three cases above, some respondents answered "yes" or "no" to more than one possibility.)

MINORITY EMPLOYMENT:

Q. In light of the very few Black, Latino, Oriental, and so-called "third-world" archivists in the U.S. and Canada, what should the SAA and other archival organizations do to improve this situation?

The term "special efforts" employed in the questionnaire doesn't quite meet Descartes' standards for clarity and distinction, but 25 people responded that archival education programs should make "special efforts" to recruit minority people for their programs; 2 gave this goal a qualified endorsement; 3 opposed making "special efforts" in this area.

16 respondents feel that a certain number of archival education program scholarships should be set aside for members of minority groups; 3 others favor this action conditionally; 13 oppose such a move, chiefly on the grounds that to do so would constitute reverse discrimination.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE PROFESSION:

Q. Do you feel that women are currently getting a fair shake in the archival workplace and in professional archival organizations? (Elaborate.)

18 archivists feel that women are getting a fair shake in the profession at this time; 21 do not, many noting unfairness in the top levels of employment and in salaries. (Many respondents gave qualified answers to this question.) 11 women feel women are not getting a fair shake, 5 feel they are. 10 men feel women are getting a fair deal, 9 do not. 4 anonymous respondents all feel women are getting a fair deal at this time.

Q. Should the SAA follow the lead of the growing number of major professional organizations who have refused to hold their national meetings in those states which have not ratified
the Equal Rights Amendment, and move the SAA's 1979 annual meeting from Chicago to a city in a state which has ratified this proposed constitutional amendment?

21 archivists would like to see the SAA move its 1979 convention out of Chicago to protest Illinois' failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to the U. S. Constitution; 17 replied that the convention should remain in Chicago, several declaring that such a political protest should not be introduced into the matter of annual meeting site selection; 5 regard the question as moot. 10 women feel the convention should be moved, 5 women do not, and 1 woman regarded the question as moot. 11 men were opposed to moving the convention, 8 favor moving it, and 4 men regard it as a moot question.

GRANTS:

Q. What suggestions do you have for the kinds of grants to be awarded?

18 respondents were generally satisfied with the grants that have been issued so far; 6 archivists expressed some reservations and suggestions.

Q. Since they are taxpayer supported, should both the NEH and the NHPRC also issue regular reports on the total number of proposals not funded as well as on those funded, specifying the kinds (processing, field work, publication, conservation, etc.) of proposals involved; the kinds of institutions (historical societies, universities, etc.) submitting them; the geographic areas of the country from which all proposals have been received; and the total amounts of money requested and the amounts actually funded in the various categories of archival work and in the various regions of the country?

26 people feel that the NEH & the NHPRC should issue reports not only on the number and kinds of proposals funded but on those proposals not funded as well, so as to provide a better picture of the grant-proposal situation to those institutions that plan to submit grants. 2 others feel that perhaps information on grants not funded should also be disseminated. 4 archivists feel that the NEH and the NHPRC should not report on proposals not funded.

Q. Should the NHPRC be decentralized so that money would be
allocated directly to various regions of the country so that the final money-awarding decisions (actually the whole ball-game) would be made on the local rather than the national level?

19 archivists oppose the decentralization of the NHPRC; 4 feel the NHPRC should be decentralized; 4 others feel that the agency could be decentralized in some instances.

13 respondents feel that the NEH should have more grass-roots people on its final review board; 2 feel that perhaps the agency should do this; 5 feel the NEH final review board is fine as is.

12 respondents saw possible dangers in having a relatively small number of people on the NEH final review board that makes grant decisions affecting the entire country; 1 felt that perhaps there could be problems in this regard; 9 respondents saw nothing wrong with the present setup.

Q. It has been suggested that if it is at all possible, grant proposals should be for more than one year’s duration to provide archivists with employment for a longer period of time. Do you favor this approach as a means to assist the floating group of archivists who now have to find another job after only one year’s work?

To provide grant-paid archivists longer terms of employment, 17 archivists favor the awarding of grants on a two-year rather than one-year basis whenever practical. 9 oppose this, some of them stating it would lead to submission of inflated grant proposals; 5 said the matter depends on the goals of the projects in question.

15 respondents feel that some archival institutions will curtail their own budgets to rely on grant money for the performance of their archival operations; 5 others feel this may be the case. 12 archivists feel this will not transpire.

12 archivists said that those institutions known to have reduced their own archival staff should be eligible to receive grant money; 8 others feel that they probably should be allowed to receive such funds. 7 respondents feel such institutions should not receive grant money; 3 others noted it would be highly impractical to prove whether an institution had reduced its archival budget and/or to enforce a grant-denial sanction on them.
Editor's note: A summary of the findings shows that the respondents strongly supported certification of archivists, accreditation of archival education programs, and "special efforts" to increase minority employment in the profession. The issues "Status of Women" and "Grants" did not achieve a similar consensus. The respondents were almost evenly divided on the matters of discrimination against women in the archival profession and whether the 1979 convention should be moved from Chicago. Finally, the respondents were evenly divided concerning grants, except feeling strongly that the NHPRC should not be decentralized and that both NHPRC and NEH should report on grant requests turned down as well as on those funded.