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Archives and the College Work Study Program

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Many college and university archivists already are familiar with the College Work Study Program (CWSP), a federally funded, campus-based financial aid program providing assistance to students with a demonstrable financial need, defined as the total cost of education for a year minus the resources the student has available to meet these costs. Under CWSP the federal government pays up to eighty percent of a student's salary, and the employing institution or agency provides the remainder. In this way many campus offices, including college and university archives, have received the assistance of well-educated people at a fraction of the usual cost of such services.

A great many people, however, mistakenly believe that CWSP is limited to on-campus employment. On the contrary, any non-profit institution performing work considered to be in the public interest, or any governmental agency (federal, state, or local) is permitted to hire student workers under CWSP from a local college of university. While budget cutbacks enacted by the Reagan administration will decrease total federal funding for CWSP, it still remains a viable resource for archives, one worthy of further investigation.

First, the administrator of an archives that may be eligible for CWSP should contact the director of financial aid at a nearby college or university. One of the advantages of CWSP from the student's point of view is that by working on campus he or she saves a great deal of commuting time. Therefore students will be more likely to accept off-campus employment if it
is relatively close to their college or university.

However, once an institution's eligibility for CWSP has been established, do not rule out contacting the directors of financial aid at other area colleges. The federal government provides funding for CWSP on the basis of specific requests by the various colleges and universities. As a result, some colleges may have more money available for CWSP than do their neighboring schools, and an archives may be able to entice a student from a more distant institution by offering a higher salary.

There is some flexibility in the CWSP regulations. Because of this, it is necessary for the college and the employing institution to negotiate a contract for off-campus CWSP employment. Usually, the director of financial aid or college work study coordinator is the person to deal with in negotiating this contract. Among the areas that should be discussed frankly are hourly wage, educational level of the student, and type of work to be performed.

Many college and universities pay only the minimum wage to their own student workers. To interest a student in working off-campus, an archivist probably will have to offer more than the minimum wage in order to compensate for travel costs and the loss of convenience. However, since an institution will only be paying approximately twenty percent of the student's total salary, the increased cost to the institution should be minimal.

Closely related to hourly wage is the desired educational level of the student worker. It is another common fallacy that only undergraduate students are eligible for CWSP. On the contrary, graduate students, and even those in professional schools like law and medicine, can be paid by CWSP, if they have sufficient financial need. To hire graduate
students, however, an archives will probably have to offer a higher salary than for an undergraduate student.

A third factor is the type of work which the CWSP student will perform. It would be possible, for example, to control an agency's clerical expenses by hiring CWSP undergraduate students to do some of the filing and typing, provided that these students do not eliminate or displace regular workers. If an archives is fortunate enough, however, to be located near a university offering a graduate level program in archival management, it may be possible to hire graduate students with some professional training, people capable of arranging and describing archival collections. This has been done with great success at the United Negro College Fund.

There is one caveat, however: The federal government will not always pay for employment for which the student receives academic credit. "If a practicum or internship is usually completed without remuneration, the practicum or internship would not qualify under CWS. On the other hand, if most student complete this requirement in a position where the students receive remuneration, the student may be employed under CWS." (New York State Financial Aid Administrators Association 1981-1982 Training Manual)

No matter what level student an archives hires, there will be limitations on the number of hours that he or she can work. The employing institution sets the maximum number of hours to be worked per week, taking into account the potential effect of a combination of work and study hours on a student's progress and health, and the extent of a student's financial need. Because of this limitation, an institution may find it desirable to employ to CWSP students, if possible, in order to maintain flexibility in scheduling and adequate office coverage during the school year.
A second limitation involves the individual student, rather than the employing institution. Federal regulations specify that a student may earn only enough money under CWSP to meet his or her financial need. In dealing with this limitation, employing institutions usually follow one of three approaches. Some limit the student's hours throughout the year so that he or she will not earn more than his or her financial need. Others prefer to have the student work the maximum number of hours and, if he or she exceeds the CWSP maximum, keep the student on the institution's payroll for the remainder of the academic year, paying one hundred percent of the student's salary. Finally, some institutions terminate the student when his or her award is exhausted and hire another student. The situation at each employing institution will determine which is the better approach. Naturally, any questions regarding a student's work and earning status should be discussed with the school's college work study coordinator.

The extension of CWSP to archival institutions on a wider scale would be beneficial for all concerned. Student workers would be exposed to settings other than the usual academic environment; would receive valuable work experience; and might even become interested in remaining a part of the archival profession. Colleges and universities would improve their relations with local community organizations and institutions and might also identify new areas where graduates could be employed. And archival institutions would receive low-cost, quality student assistance; would build better relationships with colleges and universities; and would increase the universe of people aware of the importance of the preservation and use of historical records.