

The Blended Archivist: Balancing Contemporary Roles in American College and University Archives

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Abstract: In November and December of 2009, we posted a survey for archivists working in American colleges and universities to the Society of American Archivists listserv. It was also distributed electronically to the membership of several regional archival organizations. The survey was designed to determine what role(s) archivists currently perform both within and outside of archives.

Our original hypothesis was that there would be significant differences in the responses based on school size as defined by Carnegie classifications. Analysis of survey data by institution size did indeed reveal interesting data, however we were especially intrigued with responses from a large percentage of our respondents whom we have identified as “blended archivists/librarians.” Our current focus is on data related to this group, which includes archivists with library responsibilities as well as librarians with archives responsibilities. From our preliminary review of the data, we predict that a comparison of this group with those archivists without library responsibilities will be fruitful.

The study will examine the responsibilities of these blended archivists/librarians, noting both the identified challenges and benefits of having these dual roles. This topic is particularly pertinent now as archivists are more likely than in years past to have been educated in library science programs and might therefore seem to be better prepared to be blended archivist/librarians. Still, survey respondents consistently expressed that they are stretched and severely challenged with the multitude of competencies demanded by these two areas.

The information resulting from the survey will be especially useful to administrators who might not be aware of the challenges faced by archivist/librarians within a university library setting.

About the authors:

Mary Manning is the assistant university archivist at Texas A&M University. Responsible for the day-to-day operations of the University Archives, she processes manuscripts and university records, preserves archival materials, provides reference, participates in instructional and outreach programs, and prepares exhibits. She works closely with the records manager to ensure compliance with state laws. Her other duties include management of Archon, and web site and digital collections development. She has previously worked as an archivist and special collections librarian at Adelphi University and The Ohio State University. Ms. Manning holds an MA in English literature from The Ohio State University and MLIS with a focus on archives and special collections from Kent State University. She has written and presented on various topics including digital collections, exhibitions, medical history, and archives.

Judy Silva is the arts librarian & archivist at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. Her responsibilities include the administration of the University Archives and the library's Special Collections, the ROCKvoices oral history project, digital initiatives including CONTENTdm collections, web maintenance for archives, donor relations, instruction, and supervision of one staff position. Silva also serves as the library liaison to the art, dance and theatre departments, and shares responsibility for the library reference desk. She chairs the metadata implementation group for the Keystone Library Network Digital Collections. Silva holds a BA in Art History from the University of California, Santa Cruz and an MLIS from the University of Pittsburgh. Prior to her appointment at Slippery Rock University, Silva worked for AMICO (The Art Museum Image Consortium) as the library editorial assistant and communications coordinator for subscriber relations.