Continuing Education and Special Collections Professionals: The Need for Rethinking

RICHARD J. COX

THE PROBLEM OF EVALUATION AS A START TO DETERMINING THE ALTERNATIVES
Despite the fact that continuing education has become a staple in the education and training of special collections librarians, archivists and manuscripts curators, and related professionals, there has been little critical assessment of the effectiveness of such education. This presents a serious problem, given the seeming dependence by special collections professionals on such educational efforts. As one essay on the quality of continuing education suggests, "an effective way to improve the quality of continuing education (CE) for librarians, information professionals and others in the field is to conduct sound evaluation of CE programmes, activities and products and then to use the results to improve the CE offering."

Where is the evidence of such evaluation of continuing education in the field of rare books and special collections? A 1975 bibliography of 449 articles, monographs, and reports on continuing education for librarianship included not a single reference to the special collections area. Things have not improved significantly in the twenty years since. A 1976 published study on continuing education in English libraries did indicate that one area requiring additional training was in "handling non-book and 'unconventional' material such as audiovisual material, discs, tapes, slides, film, rare manuscripts and other unpublished records," but there was little substantial discussion of the implications of this need. Paul Conway, more recently examining the topic of continuing education in archives, states that the "existing literature on continuing education in the archival context is extraordinarily weak, given the proliferation of course offerings." It is next to impossible to discover systematic evaluation of continuing education in rare books, archives and historical manuscripts, or special collections; most evaluation is anecdotal or by word of mouth, suggesting that such professionals rely on sustained enrollment for continuing opportunities or adequate

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attendance for one-time offerings. Is this satisfactory? What do we really understand about the nature of continuing education in these disciplines?

It is also interesting that there has been no development of continuing education "models" for special collections personnel. There are models for other aspects of librarianship. These models range from registry systems for tracking individual involvement in continuing education programs to statewide efforts to provide comprehensive continuing education, usually focused on a clearinghouse or local groups that coordinate such training. Occasional surveys of continuing education needs, while not providing more formal models, help to provide some understanding for identifying the parameters of such a model. For example, academic librarians have expressed a strong desire for having such training opportunities offered in their regions or at their institutions, a finding that suggests the need for constructing continuing education courses in a manner that can be mobile. There is little such data about the continuing education of special collections professionals.

There may be good reasons for this lack of development for special collections librarians and their colleagues. A definition of continuing education is "all education which librarians acquire from library schools after they have received the Master's degree in librarianship." But special collections librarians and archivists have a wide range of degrees, not always including those in librarianship; we are likely to find degrees in history, American studies, English, and anthropology, as well as in library or archival science. Continuing education is also seen as essential to rectifying deficiencies in initial graduate education, developing competencies, controlling entry into professional disciplines, maintaining professional boundaries, and maintaining a certain professional image. Conway, drawing on literature from education, notes that the goals of continuing education may include "broad participation," "personal growth," "acquisition of knowledge, skills, or aptitudes," "performance improvement," and/or "organizational development." It may be that special collections staff do not recognize these as concerns relevant to their work, although that seems unlikely if archivists are typical of this group. And it may be that there is an insufficient corps of educators in the area broadly defined as special collections. While there has been consistent worry about graduate faculty keeping pace with current practice, it is a greater problem for archivists, rare books librarians, and related professionals that there is a sufficient number of faculty even teaching in these specialties.

Finally, it must be recognized that formal professional education is essential to both the effectiveness of the entry-level professional and the experienced practitioner. One educator has described the situation as follows: "Professional education is responsible for preparing aspiring professionals for a lifetime of practice, commonly without further formal academic training. Professional education must therefore develop students' understanding of, and mechanisms for, self-directed, life-long learning." Perhaps the best explanation as to why so little work has been accomplished on continuing education programs for special collections librarians is that
assessing the nature and effectiveness of such education is an extremely difficult task. The same educator noted that learning takes place through formal education, continuing education, reading, contacts with colleagues, and experience. At the same time, with respect to continuing education, it can be discerned that individuals follow continuing education activities as largely self-formed and self-directed curricula and that the responses to and effectiveness of continuing education are based on complicated notions of "performance" and a perspective gained from practical experience.14

Despite the lack of work done on continuing education in the field, it is obvious that its importance cannot be ignored or a determination made about the most effective means by which continuing education can be offered. Despite the popular perception of the placid professional lives of rare book librarians and archivists—the images of tweed-covered academic types wrestling with highly technical and largely meaningless problems—it is clear that they work in an array of disciplines undergoing immense change and facing complex problems. While I would argue that they must build solid foundations of graduate education that carefully provide the building bricks of theory, methodology, and practice, I am also convinced that they need to develop a synergetic relationship between such formal education and the practitioners in the field, and use continuing education as a connecting rod between the two in order to develop timely responses to specific problems and to influence what the academic educators actually do in their classrooms. Robert Rippey, examining models of corporate education programs, says, "As new challenges or technologies arise, the response time of traditional professional education is too long. By the time the research is done, the texts written, the faculty trained, and the curriculum change approved, a problem may reach epidemic proportions."15 In the remainder of this essay, I try to paint a picture of continuing education in special collections, examine one aspect that I am most familiar with (archives) more closely to show the strengths and weaknesses in continuing education, consider why more sustained evaluation is needed, and conclude with some suggestions about what this evaluation should include and what it could provide for special collections librarians.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS WORK: PROFILING THE ALTERNATIVES

It is clear that there are alternative means by which to obtain education and training in special collections management. In this section I have sketched out a profile of opportunities to obtain such additional training that were available in one year, in this case 1992. Since I could find no other such profile, I am not sure whether this was a typical or unusual year, except for the fact that the annual Rare Book School formerly offered at Columbia University and now located at the University of Virginia was not offered.16 The profile (despite its limitations) provides, however, an opportunity to see what kinds of continuing education venues archivists, rare book librarians, and other special collections professionals could avail themselves of in a calendar year. It also
can help us muse upon what all these opportunities constitute in education for our specialties.

One other limitation to this profile must be mentioned. This profile does not take into account the annual conferences of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of ACRL, this group’s many publications and issuance of standards and guidelines, and the regional and local conferences and meetings that have proliferated in the past decade. Do these provide a form of continuing education for rare book librarians and archivists? There should be little question that they are a vital source of information for all such professionals. Yet, it is impossible to determine the degree of impact of these activities on these professionals, and one purpose of this essay is to argue that there needs to be a more systematic effort in this direction. Do all these venues provide adequate continuing education? Are there gaps? Are there aspects that are overemphasized? Does the current state of continuing education work, given the nature of graduate education such professionals usually possess?

The number of opportunities in 1992 for continuing education, even excluding the types mentioned above, were great (see table 1). In 1992 there were 123 different workshops and institutes offered worldwide, with the majority on the topic of preservation management and conservation (71), a significant number on archives and historic manuscripts (39), and a much smaller number on rare books and special collections (13). These workshops and institutes were offered by a variety of different organizations (see table 2). Specific institutions (36) led the way, with (not surprisingly) universities (32) a close second. Regional and other professional associations together constituted a major portion (41) of the hosts. A much smaller number were offered by international groups (11), while there were some that were unspecified as to the host (5).
Other elements of the profile of continuing education provide some interesting food for thought. There is a decided preference for short-term offerings (see table 3). While there were 43 one-day offerings, there were only 12 offerings in the two- to four-week range. While I identified 30 five-day offerings, the majority of these seem to fall into the annual professional mode rather than being focused on a specific topic. An examination of location and topic also reveals some interesting trends. Special collections personnel can obviously avail themselves of the opportunity to travel to just about any part of the continental United States or anywhere else in the world (see table 4). There are obvious clusters of such courses—the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest in the United States and England in Europe—reflecting the locations of major cities or important schools and institutions. A little more breakdown of the topics of these courses (see table 5) reveals a strong preference for technical (paper structure and pest control) or managerial topics (preservation administration and personnel) with considerable interest in particular forms of material such as photographs and architectural records.

If we step back a bit from this array of continuing education course offerings, can we detect any sort of coherent structure? Are there patterns that reveal anything to us about the state of the field? It is difficult for me to discern any major conclusions other than these: there appears to be an interest in a wide variety of topics; the nature of the offerings might reveal some weaknesses in pre-employment education; or the elements of these disciplines are transforming rapidly enough so that there needs to be a diversity of offerings on every conceivable aspect of work in the special collections arena. The interest in technical topics suggests the need to stay current with new research and practices. The interest in management and the rarity
of any courses identified as "advanced" in nature suggests that the current continuing education courses are efforts to strengthen weaknesses in graduate education in archives, library science, and special collections work. However, it is through careful evaluation of these offerings that what continuing education is or should be striving to do becomes more obvious.

EXISTING EFFORTS TO EVALUATE CONTINUING EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN AMERICAN ARCHIVAL PRACTICE

A small number of efforts have been made to evaluate continuing education in special collections librarianship. While these efforts provide no conclusive findings or even approaches, they do suggest the kinds of work needed to be undertaken by a discipline that is obviously intent on relying on continuing education at all levels. To demonstrate the nature and utility of such evaluation, I selected the American archival profession as a case study because there have been some efforts to evaluate continuing education and because it is the discipline that I know best.

The modern American archival profession is generally considered to have been formed in the 1930s when the National Archives was established and, more important, when archivists founded their own professional association—the Society of American Archivists (SAA)—in 1936. Debates about the education of the archivist started at the very beginning. They have continued along several tracks: the relationship of the archivist to history or to library science, the need for more comprehensive graduate education programs, and the connection between theory and practice. The education of the archivist has come mostly through workshops and institutes from the 1930s to the present, supplemented by the development of some graduate courses primarily starting in the 1960s, and more recently (and not without some controversy) with the establishment of full-fledged master’s degrees in Canada and soon in this country as the SAA has approved similar guidelines for such a degree. The main point here is that with the reliance on continuing

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education, it is expected that one would have seen more analyses of the impact and value of these educational and training venues on the archival community. These analyses have not materialized, most of the writings being either position statements for some aspect of archival education or personal reflections on what occurs in archival education programs.\(^21\)

Like special collections librarianship in general, the reliance of the American archival community on continuing education does not mean that there is a coherent sense of what this education constitutes or that it has been evaluated in any meaningful way. Research on such professional issues is rare in the archival profession, as is straightforward reporting on workshops and institutes.\(^22\) One continuing education program in the archival field which has been evaluated is a two-year project (1987–89)—the Religious Archives Technical Assistance Project run by the Archives of Religious Institutions—a New York metropolitan based organization—with funding by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. This project was intended to accomplish three objectives: "break down the professional isolation often characterizing small archival programs"; develop a more "integrated program" for continuing education, "linking basic workshops with concentrated planning efforts, on-site consultation visits and reports by a trained archivist, cooperative interinstitutional programs, and various forms of technical assistance"; and to help small programs deal with some specific persistent problems—"rapid personnel turnover, minimal commitment by parent organizations, limited funding, and lack of internal visibility." The results of this effort were uneven. It proved difficult to encourage cooperation, convince individuals to undertake individual internships, or to get programs to share archival resources and facilities. The project also proved difficult to stimulate more use of the repositories' holdings, to generate preservation efforts, and to encourage greater participation in professional associations. The greatest success occurred in enabling these small archival programs "to articulate and define basic administrative elements"\(^23\) (such as mission statements and collection policies) and to gain ground in arranging and describing their archival holdings. Such evaluation is seen as crucial because it reflects needs in the archival community that can be addressed only through careful targeted educational efforts and deliberate monitoring of the results.

The most comprehensive analysis of continuing education in the archival field was the recent study by Paul Conway of a group of 320 archival repositories across the country that sent staff to participate in one of the SAA's Basic Conservation Workshops offered from 1981 to 1987.\(^24\) As Conway states, his "central thesis postulates that meaningful patterns exist between the level of ongoing preservation activities in archival repositories and the perceptions by those who manage them that information and advice about preservation are available and useful."\(^25\) Conway used an eight-page questionnaire to gather information about preservation program activity, the nature of the administrative structure and placement of the organization, and sources of information used by the institutions.
Conway's several strengths make this a superb study that at least all archivists and preservation managers should read. First, he has an excellent grasp of the relationship between preservation and broader archival functions. His review of the literature and his chapter on definitions and the research problem provide one of the clearest descriptions of this relationship one can find. Second, Conway has developed a number of original indexes to measure such things as "intensity of care," "prevention planning," "prevention implementing," "renewal planning," "renewal implementing," and the uses of a variety of potential information sources. The development of these measures enables Conway to deal effectively with his thesis. Third, Conway brings a strong knowledge of archival institutions and experience in conducting research about them to this study, primarily as the architect of the 1985 SAA "Census of Archival Institutions," and as the leading advocate for archival user studies. The utility of his measures certainly derives from this previous work.

This dissertation provides excellent descriptions of the nature of preservation programs in American archival repositories, the nature of preservation practice from a national perspective (how individual institutional practice adds up to something meaningful), and, of course, how and when archivists acquire and use information for preservation. The main point of his study is Conway's correlation (using his indexes and standard correlation coefficients) between preservation practice and the use of information sources (including continuing education programs). While he provides many levels of findings in this relationship, Conway's main conclusion is that archivists put a great emphasis on "personal networking, . . ." and that "those archivists who connect directly to the larger world of professional advice appear to be more able to marshall the intellectual and physical resources necessary for constructive action." The implications for formal continuing education are indeed profound, suggesting either that formal educational ventures should be reconsidered or that they should be used mainly as mechanisms to establish the networks.

There have been only a few efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of major institutes in archival administration. Starting with the Modern Archives Institute a half century ago, there developed a series of multiweek institutes by the early 1970s that essentially provided an alternative to more formal graduate courses, of which there were few in
this period. In fact, as Linda Matthews has described, the Georgia Archives Institute originated in the late 1960s when the Georgia Department of Archives and History was having a difficult time finding qualified archivists because of the dearth of graduate programs and short-term institutes. At their peak, there were major institutes at the National Archives (the Modern Archives Institute), Colorado, Georgia, Ohio, and California. Their basic mission was to provide an intensive orientation to the basics of archival work, usually in a two-week framework, sometimes with a single major faculty member but more usually with a number of guest lecturers drawn from archival programs in the immediate geographic area.

Despite the importance of these institutes, their assessments have been rudimentary. Matthews’s evaluation of the Georgia version is a descriptive history, in its own fashion, also filling a void of analysis of these institutes. She essentially notes only the nature of students who attended this institute over the years, concluding that a major portion consisted of individuals already employed as archivists, usually newly entering professionals, and half were employed by small archival programs such as local historical societies or church archives. Most, sixty percent, were Georgia-based professionals, although the remainder came from a wide geographic area. Matthews’s analysis is most helpful for its insight into how such institutes have been transformed, mainly as other educational venues have developed and matured. She notes that the institute’s role as a vehicle for socialization into the profession, as basic training for beginning staff, and as a framework and network of support for small institutions and organizations whose archives staff will continue to be part-time or voluntary remains a major contribution. Its future will depend, as in the past, on the available resources for support of its programs and a continuing assessment of its place in the changing professional environment.

Matthews’s analysis can be compared to a recent study of the students attending the Modern Archives Institute, a continuing education venue that has been in existence since 1945 although its form has changed a bit through the decades. As Matthews suggests, this institute has served as the “model” for continuing education in this field, including for the Georgia Institute. In a detailed profile of the institute’s participants, several interesting facts stand out: participants attend because of a lack of other opportunities to acquire basic training in archival work; most are practicing archivists not by conscious career choice but by other circumstances; most are not members of professional archival associations; and most are in search of practical information rather than theoretical discussions. The Institute designers see that it is continuing to fulfill its mission to provide “post-appointment training for inexperienced archivists, particularly from small institutions with small collections and small staffs with no organized internal training program.”

Unfortunately, there also have been few general descriptions of continuing education in this field. Even those that do not offer substantial analysis and evaluation reveal important clues about how such evaluation should be done. James Fogerty’s
description of a series of basic archival workshops offered by the Minnesota Historical Society notes that the “participants completed a four-page questionnaire, giving information about their backgrounds, experiences, and the facilities and manuscript holdings in their institutions”; this enabled a profile of institutions and participants to be developed. Fogerty also notes that the ten workshops offered in this series “provided an excellent opportunity for experimentation,” with instructors attending each others’ sessions and some of the sessions being revised considerably. Finally, he notes that the success of the workshops can be “measured” through documented increased usage of acid-free storage materials, an increase in information requests from local repositories, and an increased sophistication in the nature of these requests. “A tangible measure of the success of the project is that a basic level of knowledge has been absorbed, and it can be built upon with further training and experience.” Fogerty’s effort to publish an essay on a continuing education offering is rare, but his discussion of how it could be evaluated rather than a literal evaluation is typical.

Again, from a broad perspective, it seems that the best that can be said about the archival community’s continuing education efforts is that they have served as a form of remedial training for those without sufficient preappointment education and, perhaps, as a form of socialization to archivy. The problems with viewing continuing education in this field in this manner can be seen if we consider one of the greatest challenges to the profession: the rising dependence on electronic information technology. While there has been a long-term commitment by the SAA to offer continuing education in electronic records management, there has been hardly any corresponding development of programs (by which I mean supported, systematic efforts to manage such records). The reasons seem clear. Basic archival education (which engenders an understanding of basic archival concepts and principles) has been insufficient to support the continuing education efforts. Moreover, the growing consensus of electronic records archivists about how to manage such records seems not to have grown beyond this small (very small) group of professionals because of the archival community’s inattention to its own literature or its unwillingness to develop new missions and approaches. The recent effort by the SAA’s Committee on Automated Records and Techniques to develop a curriculum for electronic records archivists both admits the previous failures and adopts as a principle that an electronic records archivist can be good only if he or she is first a good archivist; this principle reflects the fact that for continuing education to succeed it must take into account what knowledge is commonly held by the particular program’s participants.

POTENTIAL FOR MORE INTENSIVE EVALUATION

There is little question that there needs to be more extensive and intensive evaluation of continuing education in special collections librarianship and related fields. All varieties of methodologies are possible, and, it should be added, virtually any kind of evaluation would be better than what we now possess. There have been a number of
efforts to study the effectiveness of fieldwork in library science, for example, while there is practically nothing of similar efforts to analyze fieldwork in special collections work. Studies on other aspects of continuing education have used questionnaires to survey library and information workers about their interests in and priorities for continuing education, identifying subject areas and types of delivery approaches. Some of these general surveys have been quite revealing about the "uncoordinated and unsystematic approach to continuing education and training for professional library and information staff," showing a potpourri of courses and workshops with little more to guide their offering than individual interests and self-perceived needs. Some of these surveys have carefully gleaned information on various factors (such as geographic and subject areas, gender, age, and employer support and interest) affecting the attendance at continuing education workshops. One public library used a wide array of evaluation techniques "including standard evaluation forms, open-ended questionnaires, monitored implementation of concepts and methods presented, skill tests, and narratives describing perceived strengths and weaknesses in the program." Another study selected individual participants in a major management institute and conducted a longitudinal study of the long-term impact on their careers. There have also been specially designed follow-up assessments of particular continuing education courses in order to determine their impact and effectiveness.

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Conway has postulated at least one reason that we may have conducted such little evaluation. In his work, he has made a strong argument that the nature of the evaluation needs to suit the purpose of the continuing education venture. Does anyone completely understand what it is that they are trying to accomplish in continuing education in special collections librarianship? Conway notes that there is a "standard notion of professional education" extending from the entry-level degree to in-service training to specialized continuing education. But, he suggests, archivists (and others) have not followed such a linear approach: "People who consider themselves a part of the
archival profession and who are sufficiently committed to join the profession's only national association simply start working in an archival repository and increase the full variety of their educational experiences as they work their way up the ranks of the organization or gain additional years of experience. This should sound familiar to anyone who has been part of the special collections field for more than a few years.

If an evaluation of continuing education in special collections work is to be done, where should the evaluation begin? Chobot states that continuing education can be considered from four perspectives: from basic planning and definition to design, then delivery, and, finally, evaluation procedures. It seems that, first, there is a need to consider what all this continuing education activity means. While there appears to be richness in all the diversity, at present it cannot be assumed that sufficient strengths or important gaps have been identified. There is no convincing sense of what overall purposes are being met in offering continuing education programs. Are these programs to help advanced professionals? Are they intended to provide stopgap measures for those working with special collections who for one reason or another have not acquired a sufficient preappointment education? There is obviously a major difference between those two questions, yet it is difficult to see if these questions are even being asked, let alone being answered.

It is also obvious that there has not been a systematic effort to develop comprehensive continuing education opportunities in the area of special collections work. Let me state that again: does anyone have any sense that there is a comprehensive continuing education program? At the moment, workshops and institutes come and go based on what? perceived needs or personal interests? There is also little connection with graduate programs, perhaps because they are only now beginning to develop fuller educational offerings; if continuing education could build off graduate programs—at least for the education of full-fledged professionals or for certain specialists—this would go a long way towards providing a framework for making sense out of continuing education. Many library schools offer opportunities for post-master's studies, but there seems to be a lack of recognition of such studies by many institutions. This is complicated by the fact that most library and information science schools have not made a commitment to the basic notion of continuing education. On the other hand, this commitment has not been made because the various components of special collections librarianship have not demanded or supported it.

Let me conclude with a few basic suggestions. First, let us bring together a group of people who have been offering continuing education programs to discuss the overall need of special collections professionals. Let them share whatever form of internal evaluation they conduct, and, more important, let them rate their sense of the effectiveness of continuing education offerings in special collections work. Second, we could encourage a study that does an evaluation by participants in some of our major continuing education venues. How has their attendance assisted their work and their careers? What do they need? Third, bring together graduate educators and leaders in
the fields to discuss their needs and what the relationship between graduate education and continuing education ought to be. The SAA has tried to do this, holding a major education conference in 1987 in Savannah that brought together educators, practitioners, and the leaders of national and regional professional associations. But even with this, SAA has never sustained such cooperation or, at its minimum, a simple exchange of information. Finally, try to bring together employers and educators to discuss the educational needs in special collections work. While there will be major differences in their perspectives, it is hard to imagine that this would not provide some additional information that could strengthen the effectiveness and relevance of continuing education.

While I have issued yet one more call for study (a typical approach by an academic, I suppose), I remain convinced that such study would lead to positive results. I suspect there is a fairly coherent set of ideas among those working with special materials about their needs for continuing education, ranging from concern for such philosophical and technical matters as the digitization of their holdings for preservation and access to more mundane but important matters such as security, communication networks, and facilities management and evaluation. Issues such as cost, location of educational offerings, frequency of offerings, financial support for professionals' attendance, and other related matters also need to be considered for future planning. Without some effort to assess and build consensus about these needs, however, it remains difficult to determine the types of workshops and institutes that should be held or how new technologies may allow us to offer distance education and Internet courses.

There is another set of basic issues that can be addressed by evaluating continuing education. The knowledge of present activities and current perceptions of needs in continuing education creates a benchmark for subsequent analysis. For example, is it correct to assume that those attracted to the positions in special collections will continue to bring the same educational backgrounds, skills, interests, and attitudes as now exist? We cannot assume this. In the archives profession, the past decade has brought the establishment of more comprehensive and intensive graduate education programs; this means that many people entering the field today are better educated than their counterparts were twenty years ago. Attitudes about and expectations for continuing education have probably changed significantly in a relatively short time, while what constitutes continuing education has remained relatively static. How can we—as caretakers of rare books, archives, and special collections—address our most crucial needs if we know little, except what we can surmise through educated guesswork, about the continuing education needs of the professionals caring for these materials?

There has been an increasing stream of serious publications on the quality of American education, especially higher education. One of the more intriguing recent volumes, detailing the challenge of specialization in higher education (piquing my interest as a specialist in a professional school) was written by David Damrosch, who
continuing education

chronicles the threats of continuing specialization to the quality of education offered by the university, noting that "more and more, the contemporary university has become an ivory tower of Babel." Later, he suggests that the "clock cannot be turned back sixty years, even if that were desirable; what is likely to be more constructive is to ask how, if at all, something resembling the ideal of general education can be restored in the age of specialization." These comments strike me as particularly relevant in considering continuing education in special collections work. This continuing education appears, without any guiding principles or coherent summary, to be a Tower of Babel. What is needed is to get to the heart of what rare book librarians, archivists, and others should know and then determine if there are sufficient opportunities for them to gain such education and training. The field can inform both the academy and the various professional associations about the nature and substance of continuing education in a way that is now left to chance or the initiatives of a few individuals and institutions. It is hard to imagine that what we do would not be strengthened by such efforts.

NOTES

1. Elizabeth W. Stone, "The Growth of Continuing Education," Library Trends 34 (Winter 1986): 489–513. This provides a good review of the growth of continuing education in the library and information professions. A glance at journals and newsletters in any discipline or specialty reflects such expansion, with references to numerous institutes, workshops, distance education offerings, and the like.

2. When I use the term "special collections professionals" or "special collections librarians" I am using it as a shorthand to encompass rare books specialists, archivists, manuscripts curators, and other closely related professionals.

3. Mary C. Chobot, "Improving the Quality of Continuing Education," IFLA Journal 15.3 (1989): 210. This is a typical statement of the need for such evaluation. Evaluation of continuing education is a fundamental aspect of offering such educational venues.


16. This Rare Book School has been a steady supplier of courses for a wide range of topics essential for special collections professionals. While an annual report has been issued for the various offerings of this school, my concern in this essay is how the broader matters of continuing education for such professionals have been conceptualized. The evaluation of the Rare Book School should take place in that context.

17. Some proceedings of the annual meetings of ACRL’s Rare Books and Manuscripts Section have been published, along with standards and guidelines, a newsletter since 1984, and a journal (Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship) since 1986. The impact of these publications has not been analyzed.

18. The difference in totals between tables 1 and 2 is because of joint sponsorships and varying quantities of information regarding advertisements for particular continuing education opportunities.


20. The degree of reliance on continuing education as a means of entering the field or as a form of remedial training for those who have been hired as archivists without formal education in the discipline depends on how one defines a professional archivist. There are many who define a professional archivist as one who is employed to work as an archivist; these individuals tend to see any road to employment as satisfactory. There are also those, myself included, who see a professional archivist as one who possesses certain knowledge, skills, and expertise; for these individuals, formal graduate education is the first step with continuing education as a means to provide information on new procedures or to expand an individual’s existing knowledge.


30. The tension between theory, methodology, and practice becomes evident in these types of institutes, as I discovered when I served as principal faculty member for the Society of California Archivists’ Institute (a two-week offering) in 1990. It is difficult to present and build a solid core knowledge that can serve as the necessary foundation for informed practice when you are discussing major terms and principles in very brief, concentrated periods of time. It often appears that individuals are more concerned with how to do something than with why something is done. If workshops and other continuing education programs are offered in this manner, then it is difficult to “educate” (rather than train) individuals so that they deal with the ongoing problems and challenges they face in their institutions.


32. I base these comments on my research being published as The First Generation of Electronic Records Archivists in the United States, 1960–1990: A Study in Professionalization (New York: Haworth Press, 1994). In this study I have included an evaluation of the Advanced Institute for Government Archivists held at the University of Pittsburgh School of Library and Information Science from 1989 through 1994.

33. This report and a series of supporting essays were published as the summer 1993 issue of American Archivist.

34. I also personally discovered this as a co-instructor of a series of workshops in 1987–1991 on the archival documentation strategy concept and process. The workshop was designed to be “advanced,” that is, it presupposed a certain level of basic knowledge about archival appraisal. This level of knowledge varied considerably from workshop to workshop, reflecting (as with electronic records) that at almost every institution there are virtually no full graduate courses on archival appraisal. At my school, I teach one of the few such courses; I have described this course and the general problem with the knowledge about archival appraisal in a forthcoming book, Documenting Localities (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1996).


37. Slater, Assessing the Need for Short Courses, 3.


44. Chobot, “Improving the Quality,” 213.

45. McCrossan, “Beyond the Master’s Program,” 283.


47. With these suggestions, I am purposefully avoiding the issue of whether these should be formal conferences or informal exchanges on an electronic listserv. At this point, I believe that any step would be beneficial. It is clear that there are opportunities that could be used for such purposes. The Association of Library and Information Science Educators (ALISE) has special interest groups for both archives/records management and preservation/conservation, yet these are poorly attended. They could easily be used for such purposes.

48. We Scholars: *Changing the Culture of the University* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 23, 122.

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