

A First Look at the A*CENSUS Results

A*CENSUS Preliminary Report #1

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Prepared by Vicki Walch, A*CENSUS Principal Research Consultant

A special “thanks” to the 5,620 individuals who participated in Archival Census and Educational Needs Survey in the U.S. (A*CENSUS). The response rate more than triples the number of people who responded to the last comprehensive survey of individuals working with archives and manuscripts in the United States, which was conducted in 1982.

The A*CENSUS project, supported by grant funds from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and coordinated by the Society of American Archivists (SAA), is also one of the largest collaborative projects ever undertaken by U.S. archival organizations. The 27-member A*CENSUS [Working Group](#) included representatives from six national and seven regional archival associations, representatives of diverse communities, and archival educators in both graduate and continuing education programs.

Working Group members were actively involved in developing survey questions and promoting participation. The Working Group’s collective commitment and energy resulted in an extraordinary response rate. NAGARA supplied its mailing list which included 680 names of individual members, employees of institutional members, vendors, speakers, workshop attendees and others with whom the organization has had contact in the last several years. COSHRC also provided a list of 79 state coordinators and deputy coordinators. After removing duplicate names, the final A*CENSUS mailing list contained 11,939 names.

Working Group members are now working within their own organizations to analyze the data and provide information about what we can all learn from the survey results. Full public-use data sets will be available soon to anyone who would like to use them. It is the project’s goal that all archival associations (not just those represented on the Working Group), archival educators, graduate students, institutions, and others make wide and active use of the data.

The final raw data set was sent to project staff on July 22, which allowed Principal Research Consultant Vicki Walch to present very preliminary findings during the 2004 Society of American Archivists annual meeting Boston. Here are some highlights.

What is your gender?

The archival profession has experienced a significant shift in gender in the last half century. The A*CENSUS survey indicates that the ratio of women to men is now approximately 2:1. This is almost a mirror image of the gender distribution reported in Ernst Posner’s 1956 survey of SAA members, in which 67% were men and 33% were women.

| Responses | All Respondents | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| | Count | Percent |
| Male | 1,642 | 34.1% |
| Female | 3,104 | 64.5% |
| Rather not say/No answer | 65 | 1.4% |

What is your age?

It's easy to spot the Baby Boom generation moving through the profession! Forty percent of all A*CENSUS respondents are between the ages of 45 and 59. (**Note:** Age was one of the last questions in the survey and not all respondents completed the entire form, so these results add up to less than the number of total respondents.)

| Age | All Respondents | % |
|-------------|-----------------|-------|
| Under 25 | 69 | 1.4% |
| 25-29 | 252 | 5.3% |
| 30-34 | 457 | 9.6% |
| 35-39 | 475 | 10.0% |
| 40-44 | 514 | 10.8% |
| 45-49 | 632 | 13.3% |
| 50-54 | 860 | 18.0% |
| 55-59 | 666 | 14.0% |
| 60-64 | 363 | 7.6% |
| 65 and over | 480 | 10.1% |

Position type

This was the very first question in the A*CENSUS survey. It is notable that only slightly more than half of all respondents define themselves as archivists or manuscript curators. This supports findings in surveys conducted by other organizations in the last few years that many individuals working with historical records actually work in another profession or occupation.

| Please indicate if you currently are: | All Respondents | |
|---|-----------------|---------|
| | Count | Percent |
| Working as an archivist or manuscript curator | 2,890 | 52.6% |
| Managing a program that employs archivists | 443 | 8.1% |
| Retired from employment as an archivist | 120 | 2.2% |
| Teaching in a graduate archival education program | 38 | 0.7% |

| | | |
|---|-----|-------|
| Studying to be an archivist | 147 | 2.7% |
| Working in another profession or occupation, but with archives-related responsibilities | 748 | 13.6% |
| Working as a technical or support staff member with archives-related responsibilities | 309 | 5.6% |
| Administering a program serving archival interests but not working directly with archival records (e.g., granting agency, education provider, professional association) | 114 | 2.1% |
| Other | 635 | 11.6% |

The A*CENSUS final report will be available in the summer of 2005. In the meantime, the project staff and Working Group plan to issue a number of short summaries, highlighting key statistics like the ones provided above, in order to provide useful data to the profession as soon as possible.

If you would like to learn more about A*CENSUS and its results, see the A*CENSUS Web page at <http://www.archivists.org/a-census/index.asp>. If you have questions, please contact Jodie Strickland, A*CENSUS Project Assistant, at SAA Headquarters, 312-922-0140 or jstrickland@archivists.org.