

Taking Care of What Matters: Training the Next Generation of Archivists through Experiential Learning

INTRODUCTION

- MSU is a public land-grant university with over 175 undergraduate and graduate programs.
- Its mission is to “take care of what matters” through the promotion of teaching, research, and service.
- MSU Libraries Division of Archives & Special Collections supports this mission via preservation/stewardship, instructional support, and outreach.
- We work with hundreds of students each year from various disciplines. A common theme has developed: many want to learn about archival work, but there is no such program on our campus.
- I, with administrative support, designed a graduate assistantship program to fill this gap. We had three graduate assistants (GAs) in our inaugural year.
- Over the course of two semesters, these GAs not only had the opportunity to work in an archive, but also the chance to study archival theory, lead instruction, contribute scholarship, and more, all of which will be outlined in this presentation.

OBJECTIVE

To demonstrate the value of incorporating archival educational objectives into student worker training, especially if archival educational programs are unavailable.

GA DEFINED

- A financial award for graduate students in exchange for part-time work.
- Students receive 100% tuition exemption and a monthly stipend.

FRAMEWORK

The development of this program was heavily informed by the Society of American Archivists' *Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies* (2016). While unable to accomplish all objectives outlined in this work, six key activities were identified and incorporated into the assistantship program.

PROGRAM DESIGN



READING ROOM DESK DUTY

GAs have the opportunity to develop and hone their:

- Reading room etiquette
- Archival literacy skills
- Reference interview skills



COLLECTION PROCESSING

GAs use their own knowledge and subjectivity to:

- Assess collections
- Create processing plans
- Arrange materials
- Perform preservation activities
- Describe collections for access



EXHIBIT CREATION

GAs learn to:

- Conceptualize a theme and overall design
- Select materials for display
- Contextualize materials for a general audience
- Promote the exhibit to its intended audience



ARCHIVAL INSTRUCTION

GAs learn to:

- Create lessons and activities to reinforce classroom objectives
- Connect historical materials to student learning
- Teach archival literacy skills



WEEKLY SEMINAR: ARCHIVAL THEORY & PRACTICE

GAs are able to:

- Learn the theory to support other activities
- Engage with current scholarship
- Discuss archival issues with their peers



SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION

GAs:

- Present at the Society of Mississippi Archivists Annual meeting
- Demonstrate their knowledge of archival scholarship
- Gain meaningful experience in a safe environment

SUCCESSSES

After conducting exit interviews with each GA, I learned students most benefited from:

- Learning the theories and guiding principles of archival practice.
- Discussing trends in archival scholarship. The GAs indicated this has made them better researchers and even supported their academic coursework.
- Gaining real-world experience working in an archive, which has given them confidence to pursue archival work.
- Exploring another career path. These GAs majored in history and English, which have extremely competitive academic job markets.
- Understanding the true value of archival labor.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Gain administrative support.
 - More expensive than undergraduate workers and even project archivists, which can make this model cost prohibitive.
 - However, great investment — students have been motivated to learn and produce excellent work.
- Make the selection process equitable and open to a wide range of students who may have an interest.
 - Require an application to include a CV, cover letter, and references.
 - Build relationships with departmental faculty for sharing your application.
- Listen to your GAs and don't be afraid to let them take the lead.
 - Let them decide what they read/study, process, teach, etc.
 - Think of yourself as a facilitator rather than an instructor or project manager.
- Recognize what is realistic within the resources and time frame you have.
 - Not a replacement for MLIS or equivalent — impossible for such a short period of time!
 - Think of it as a supplement that will give GAs additional practice-based skills and knowledge.

REFERENCE

Society of American Archivists. (2016). *Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies*. <https://www2.archivists.org/prof-education/graduate/gpas-2016-proposed-revisions>