

Beyond “Fake it till you make it”: Imposter Phenomenon in Archivists

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Abstract:

First identified in 1978, Imposter Phenomenon (IP) is a person's internalized feeling of fraudulence in their profession despite their success. IP has since been studied in various professions, including librarianship and affiliated fields. While several librarian-focused studies found high instances of IP in the profession, none studied archivists. In December 2022, SAA's College & University Archives Section steering committee members conducted the first-ever IP survey of archivists. Nearly 400 SAA members answered questions about work, caregiving, and self-care and completed an IP survey. While early results found high levels of IP among respondents, a deeper analysis found differences from past librarian-focused studies. April Anderson-Zorn will provide an overview of IP and survey results in related fields. Taylor Flinn will give a detailed statistical analysis of the 2022 survey results. Tiffany Cole will discuss the IP survey and online polling. Jane LaBarbara will propose ways organizations can combat IP. The panelists aim to increase IP awareness among archivists, help those struggling, and suggest ways SAA and other organizations can combat this increasingly prevalent psychological occurrence.

About the authors

April K. Anderson-Zorn is an associate professor and University Archivist at Illinois State University. Anderson-Zorn holds an MA in History from the University of Central Florida, an MLIS from Florida State University, maintains a Digital Archives Specialist certificate through the Society of American Archivists, and is a certified archivist. Anderson-Zorn is active in SAA and the Midwest Archives Conference, advocating mental health awareness and representation for archives professionals. Additionally, her research focuses on unique outreach initiatives for hard-to-access repositories.

Tiffany Cole is the Special Collections Archivist at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. In her role at JMU, Tiffany manages all aspects of collection processing including new and legacy arrangement and description. Tiffany also assists with collection development, reference, outreach, and instruction. She earned her MA in public history from JMU. Tiffany earned SAA's Arrangement & Description certification in March 2020 and is a member of the Academy of Certified Archivists. She is finishing out a three-year term on SAA's College and University Archives Section steering committee and was recently elected Chair of MARAC's Nominations and Elections Committee.

Taylor Flinn is a master's student at Illinois State University (ISU) studying Industrial-Organizational and Quantitative Psychology. Taylor has collaborated with the university archives to analyze and interpret survey data. She transforms data into compelling

narratives by clearly communicating results and data visualization. She will attend Auburn University this fall to pursue her Ph.D. in psychology and hopes to continue her research with her ISU archives team.

Jane LaBarbara is currently Head of Archives & Manuscripts for the West Virginia & Regional History Center, the special collections unit at West Virginia University Libraries. This work involves managing the processing of regional history collections as well as the University Archives, and participating in acquisitions. She previously served WVU as Assistant Curator, where she focused on processing with additional disaster planning, reference, and instruction work. She earned her MLS with a concentration in Archives and Records Management from UNC. She is an active member of SAA and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC). She currently serves as a steering member of SAA's College & University Archives section and as Awards Committee co-chair. Her previous professional service includes serving on the MARAC's conference program committee (Spring 2016) and local arrangements committee (Spring 2019). She also previously served on an SAA Awards subcommittee and the SAA Collection Management Tools Section Steering Committee. Her previous research has included a group paper on the current landscape of College and University archives.