

Accessing Continuing Education for Provenance Research

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Abstract: Provenance researchers work to provide transparent and authentic access to information about items in institutional collections and on the market, and there is a consistent, wide demand for provenance research skills in archival practice today. Due to the great variability in needs from one type of collection to another, several providers have initiated continuing education (CE) programs for provenance researchers. A preliminary review of CE programs specializing in provenance research *skills* (and accepting a conceptual definition of provenance) designed for archival and museum professionals will serve to determine the extent of needs met. Accessibility as a guiding orientation underpins the following review of such offerings, which are meant for working professionals seeking formal provenance research instruction. This paper concludes with a brief discussion of provenance research in internships and graduate museum and archival education, which can continue to educate new and experienced provenance researchers.

Researching Provenance, An Introduction

Archivists define provenance as the origin of an item alongside information regarding the item's custody and ownership across time (SAA Glossary 2022). An important layer in archival science, provenance research provides evidence to support the belief that such objects are authentic and can be relied upon, resulting in *trust* in archival placement. Lemieux (2016, 5) echoes the point that provenance is a key input into such evaluations. Provenance research skills are an essential component of conducting due diligence by investigating the authenticity, custody, and ownership of an item across time. To that end, provenance-related formal education, workshops, and/or on-the-job training each serve their own audience. The overarching research question examined in this paper is: Where can archivists develop essential provenance research skills?

Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970 Convention) (Tognoli & Guimarães 2019, 566), cultural heritage professionals have increasingly recognized the importance of the rightful ownership and transfer of cultural property, and thus the broad need for provenance research. A set of 25 job ads collected in early October 2022 for



entry-level “Archivist” positions, which will be further analyzed in an upcoming work, confirms that the word ‘provenance’ is frequently mentioned in the requirements, indicating that provenance knowledge and skills are desired by employers. For current archives professionals, provenance research has proven to be possible during the global pandemic – which curtailed travel for hands-on contact with collections and their associated records – because of the elevated presence and prioritization of digitized catalogs. Such resources have made some sought-after and far-flung information sources accessible at the click of a mouse. Thus, an archival professional can make progress on collection-based provenance research using online resources. Yet provenance research is a complex rather than intuitive skill, requiring not only the ability to access source documents but also “a critical, empirical approach” (Masurovsky 2016) to assembling such facts into knowledge and communicating them accurately to the public. Alongside hands-on experience through internships (discussed below), there is a role for continuing education (CE) in propagating and boosting provenance research skills across the profession. For example, recent CE programs have emphasized Nazi-era and modern subject matter, using in-person and online modalities.

Students and professional archivists alike benefit from CE training in provenance research. This paper discusses how eight programs in two categories of CE offerings (specialized programs and non-degree courses/workshops) teach provenance research, considers how internship experiences can compensate some of their accessibility limitations, and concludes with a reflection on future directions for provenance education. The programs studied in this review each make notable educational contributions and may slightly overlap another in relation to chronological and/or content characteristics.

CE for Provenance Researchers

The prioritization of provenance research indicates a commitment to transparency on the part of an institution. Students and new archivists alike may seek CE to enhance their skills and resource-awareness for conducting provenance research as a component of collections stewardship. Archivists are trained to study and communicate the originating contexts of creation for the archival collections under their care. Researching such originating contexts should involve *going back* to the sources that had a role in the creation and use of the records before their dispersal or full arrival at the present institution. The latter transition point occurs during archival accessioning, which Yun (2021) illustrates as a dynamic and crucial activity with four primary functions in the workplace: pre-custodial intervention, intake, baseline control, and documentation for access. Within such procedures is a place to situate provenance research as part of successful accessioning practice. Knowing what makes a good, even defensible, provenance statement or narrative is a key learning outcome of several of the below educational programs, especially those that incorporate an active learning exercise.

Methodology

To comprehend where archivists currently build their provenance research skills, the researchers gathered information on various CE settings and their offerings in the latter half of 2022. The present effort paralleled data analysis activities completed during year two of a three-year project examining effective practices and extensible methods for provenance research (Buchanan, Bartley, and McGinnis 2022). Overall, a range of international providers have had major successes in the expanded visibility of provenance research since 2000, underscoring its implicit importance and widespread need. Offerings currently available may also have some limiting factors. Such characteristics do reflect the capacity and setting of particular programs, e.g. the use of training materials on specific categories of collections, or about collections that originate from stated geographic regions. The following is not an exhaustive list of provenance CE programs (the collective term used here); they represent current and recently available English-language opportunities teaching provenance research skills, with all having emerged in the last 20 years. They are categorized and briefly described, with particular attention to their accessibility (defined here through the measures of cost, location, duration, and eligibility):

- Specialized programs:
 - Provenance Research Training Program (PRTP)
 - German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program (PREP)
- Non-degree courses or workshops:
 - Holocaust Art Restitution Project, Inc (HARP)
 - Hidden Networks: The Trade of Asian Art
 - Association for Research into Crimes Against Art (ARCA)
 - University of Denver (DU) Center for Art Collection Ethics (ACE)
 - Centre for Global Heritage and Development
 - Christie's Education

Provenance Research Training Program (PRTP) (2012-2014)

PRTP was an advanced training program with the mission to serve the international community of current and future professionals of various backgrounds who are or will soon be engaged in dealing with Nazi-era looted cultural property and related post-Holocaust issues. The tuition in 2013 was \$1500, not including travel or hotel costs. Five iterations of the PRTP have been offered: Magdeburg, Germany (June 10-15, 2012), Zagreb, Croatia (March 10-15, 2013), Vilnius, Lithuania (December 1-6, 2013), Athens, Greece (June 2-5, 2014), and Rome, Italy (December 8-12, 2014). Application requirements included personal information, a letter of intent, a CV, and two letters of recommendation (Provenance Research Training Program 2016). The PRTP was a program of the European Shoah Legacy Institute which closed in Prague, Czech Republic at the end of August 2017, though its director remains active with HARP below.

German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program (PREP) (2017-2019)

With funding from the German Federal Government's European Recovery Program and the Smithsonian Women's Committee, the German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program (PREP) for Museum Professionals aimed to advance the field of World War II-era provenance research throughout museums, archives, libraries, and research institutions in Germany and the U.S. During the time of the program, 21 participants per year engaged in two exchanges, one in each country, to expand international provenance research networks, train and mentor research professionals in museums, and contribute expertise to the development of technologies that facilitate sharing of resources and research results. The Smithsonian Institution Provenance Research Initiative (SPRI), Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, and five partner institutions appointed one participant each for the PREP program. The Steering Committee selected 14 additional participants each cohort year, based on professional criteria to achieve a synergistic mix of museum and archive professionals (Smithsonian Institute 2019).

Holocaust Art Restitution Project, Inc (HARP) (2015-Present)

Responding to an absence of structured provenance research training, the U.S. nonprofit Holocaust Art Restitution Project (HARP) organized a "Training program in art provenance research" of three two-day sessions in New York City in 2015. Led by two instructors – Ori Z. Soltes, the president of the Holocaust Art Restitution Project (HARP) and professor of art history and philosophy, and Marc Masurovsky, a historian and provenance researcher specializing in the material losses of the Holocaust and World War II, who directed the PRTP – the first session occurred on April 16-17, the second on April 23-24, and the final session on April 30-May 1. The training program sought "to assist the legal community and art market professionals who have an interest in artistic, cultural, and ritual objects that have been displaced through acts of war and genocide between 1933 and 1945, with an emphasis on those items misappropriated during the Third Reich, the Holocaust, and the Second World War" (Masurovsky 2015). The program required an application with a short statement of interest and a fee of \$3,500 to attend all

teaching units (or \$1,200 per unit). Though co-hosted by the Center for International Law at New York Law School, continuing legal education (CLE) credit was not offered for the training. The 2015 program led successfully to HARP first offering its original week-long course “Provenance and the challenges of recovering looted assets” on June 20-26, 2018 (Association for Research into Crimes against Art 2018). The course was co-located in Italy with the annual Amelia Conference hosted by the Association for Research into Crimes against Art (ARCA), which continues today and is further detailed below.

Hidden Networks: The Trade of Asian Art (2020-2022)

“Hidden Networks: The Trade of Asian Art” was a series of webinars seeking to foreground the understanding of provenance and reveal the complex structure of the market for Asian art between the 19th and 20th century. The series was co-organized by the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Asian Art, and the Zentralarchiv and Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz) (Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art 2021). The series included five online webinar events between October 2020 and October 2022 that were free, with limited registration. Each agenda featured multiple speakers from different disciplines, including archaeologists, museum curators, academic art historians, and provenance specialists, and ranged from three to four hours in length. No CE credits are mentioned in the descriptions.

Association for Research into Crimes against Art (ARCA) (2009-Present)

The Association for Research into Crimes against Art (ARCA) is a research civil society organization (CSO) that works to promote the study and research of art crime and cultural heritage protection. The Association seeks to identify emerging and under-examined trends associated with art-related crimes, and to develop strategies that advocate for the responsible stewardship of our collective artistic and archaeological heritage (Association for Research into Crimes against Art 2021a). Since its founding in 2009, ARCA has offered a provenance research course as part of its postgraduate certificate program. The 2021 offering, “Provenance research in a (post?)-pandemic world,” was a two-session, total 4.5-hour course held online via Zoom on November 22 and 29, 2021 (Association for Research into Crimes against Art 2021b). The course was available for the price of €110,00 and did sell out.

University of Denver (DU) Center for Art Collection Ethics (ACE) (2018-Present)

The DU Center for Art Collection Ethics (ACE) offers postgraduate, non-degree certificate programs both virtually and on campus. ACE programs welcome applications from graduate students and emerging professionals from a variety of backgrounds, who have a meaningful impact on cultural institutions and the communities they serve (University of Denver Center for Art Collection Ethics 2022). A virtual training program, “Fundamentals of Nazi-Era Art Provenance Research,” was offered on August 2-6, 2021. That program was geared toward graduate students (limited to 20) with an option for a postgraduate certificate of completion, but non-certificate students did have the option to attend at a daily rate of \$30. A hybrid version (available both in-person and online) of “Nazi-Era Art Provenance Research” will be offered in June 2023. The Samuel E. Kress Foundation-funded program will be available to 20 on-campus certificate students at a cost of \$1500 plus travel, and to non-certificate students for a modest fee.

Centre for Global Heritage and Development (2019–)

The Centre for Global Heritage and Development organizes a yearly summer school since at least 2019. In 2022, the nearly week-long school (August 29-September 1) focused on contested cultural objects and the role of provenance research. Two experts in art crime and cultural heritage law ‘curated’ (designed and taught) the summer school, held in a synchronous hybrid format. The mix of invited in-person and

online presentations was held at the Leiden University campus in Leiden, Netherlands. Two rates were offered: a rate for onsite participation that included meals (€600), and a rate for online participation with access to the lectures (€250). At the end of the course, participants received a certificate of participation along with an issued statement regarding the CE credits earned (Centre for Global Heritage and Development 2022).

Christie’s Education (1978-Present)

Christie’s Education was founded in London in 1978, and expanded into New York and Hong Kong in the 1990s. Its programs such as Art, Law and Business; Modern and Contemporary Art and the Market; and Art History and Art World Practice have reached hundreds of students (Andrea Kutsenkow, personal correspondence, September 19, 2022). Due to higher enrollments in its online courses, Christie’s Education discontinued its in-person master’s degree program in 2020. The institution continues to acknowledge the importance of provenance education in the art dealing industry (Christie’s 2019). Christie’s offers three non-accredited, non-certificate bearing, short courses focusing on provenance research.

- The **Appraisals and Art Advisory** course, scheduled February 22 to March 22, 2023, 18:00-19:30 EST for USD \$700, touches on provenance research in relation to determining legal and non-legal construct value in various art markets selling and re-selling capital (Christie’s Education 2022a).
- **Fakes, Frauds and Forgeries: Issues in Authenticity** is a short duration course focusing on provenance as it relates to conservation science, due diligence, and the details, techniques, and principles of an artwork (Christie’s Education 2022b). The current iteration of this virtual course is scheduled for March 21 to April 18, 2023, 18:00-19:30 EST at a cost of USD \$700.
- The **Provenance and Restitution: The Stories Behind the Art** virtual short course centers on the expansion of provenance research beyond Nazi-plundered works and into Middle Eastern artifacts and antiquities in the art market, focusing on geopolitical disputes and the illegal procurement of Southeast Asian ancient objects. (Christie’s Education 2022c). This course is offered April 4 – 13, 2023 for £400.

Upon successful completion of any short course, a letter of attendance may be requested from Christie’s for proof of education (Christie’s Education 2022d).

Analysis of the CE Landscape

The landscape of CE for provenance research is characterized by deep subject knowledge, strengths in collaboration at international levels, and some variety of access modalities (in-person, virtual, and hybrid). The earliest offerings focused on the Nazi-looted era while recent ones have taken on other topics, e.g., art dealers across time by Christie’s. Only course descriptions were analyzed, which may not encapsulate key learning assignments and experiences embedded into the program, and more topic-related datapoints might be captured in future work to determine consistent commonalities apart from a common centering use of the word ‘provenance.’ Table 1 below comparatively summarizes the programs introduced above in terms of their cost, location, duration, and eligibility (application criteria for selection).

	Cost	Location	Duration	Application Criteria
Provenance Research Training Program (PRTP)	\$1500 (in 2013)	Europe (Zagreb, Croatia in 2013)	One week	Letter of intent, Personal information,

				letters of recommendation.
Holocaust Art Restitution Project, Inc (HARP)	\$3,500 (in 2015)	New York City, U.S.	Three weekends	Application, 250-word statement of interest.
German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program (PREP)	Travel, lodging, and meals are covered by PREP's two co-organizers	New York-Berlin (February 4-10; September 24-29, 2017), California-Munich (February 25-March 2; October 8-12, 2018), Dresden-Washington, D.C. (March 17-22; October 21-26, 2019).	Two week-long Exchanges over a year	CV, Statements 1-3, Reference contact information, and six additional questions. Museum professionals and graduate students: annual selection of 21 participants (10 from the U.S. and 11 from Germany), each of three years.
Hidden Networks: The Trade of Asian Art	Free	Virtual	Five programs each 3-4 hours	Zoom account; limited registration.
Association for Research into Crimes against Art (ARCA)	€110,00 (2021)	eCourse	One week: November 22-29, 2021	Application.
DU Center for Art Collection Ethics (ACE)	Daily rate \$30 (2021)	Virtual (2021), Hybrid from Colorado, U.S. (2023)	One week: August 2-6, 2021; in June 2023	Application including essay; Synchronous participation two days. Selection of 20 students.
Centre for Global Heritage and Development	€600 onsite with meals or €250 online (2022)	Leiden University, Netherlands or Virtual	One week: August 29-September 1, 2022	Application including CV. Taught in English; selection of 30 attendants.
Christie's Education: Short Courses	\$700	Virtual	One month (2023)	18 years of age; uses Canvas app; taught in English; no prerequisites.

Table 1. Eight continuing education programs compared by four accessibility measures.

The scope and depth of the above continuing education programs (Table 1) indicate a continued need for accessible provenance research materials. Such resources support a more interconnected field rather than bespoke practices that archivists may find later to be limited in their transferability to another institution and/or ease of transmission to a successor in their position.

The Experience and Expertise Roles of Internships

By the measure of duration above, few CE programs provide participants with extended time to practice the skills and apply the approaches examined together beyond classroom exercises. It remains that one of the best ways to learn to conduct provenance research is through hands-on experience. Of note, ARCA offers both virtual (year-round) and work-study summer internships, the latter of which cover the (provenance research) postgraduate coursework tuition in lieu of 20 hours per week of administrative-work on location in Italy (Association for Research into Crimes against Art 2022). Provenance internships, apprenticeships, and other training programs that take place at museums or auction houses are, however, few and far between.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA) offered volunteer internships in provenance research for more than a decade before the practice of unpaid internships ended in 2020. A new program has since been launched, offering paid internships in departments across the museum. Beginning in 2017, the MFA has also funded a part-time research associate position in provenance. The position is intended as a temporary apprenticeship opportunity for an emerging professional with some graduate education in art history or a related field. Using curatorial files, archival and library materials, and digital resources, the research associate encounters real-life scenarios and questions intended to prepare them for a profession requiring provenance research skills.

Funding remains critical for provenance training opportunities like the MFA's. Since American museums are increasingly doing away with unpaid internships, endowments, gifts, and other financial contributions are absolutely key to the continuation of the field. As restitution claims, litigation, and even seizure by law enforcement (Woodman and Politzer 2022, Sokol 2022) increase, provenance research should be a high priority for funding. Both paid internships and permanent provenance researcher positions with a sustained institutional commitment will also allow the community to establish baselines of practice.

Connections to Graduate Museum and Archival Education

Given the intensity of effort required to complete a CE for provenance research program, it is worthwhile to determine the relationship between the skills emphasized in CE and the introductory encounters facilitated in graduate museum and archival studies (examples selected for depth). Since 2013, the Museum of Texas Tech University (TTU) in Lubbock, U.S. offers during its May Intersession an intensive two-week graduate course, "Theory and practice of provenance research." It is taught by HARP co-founder Marc Masurovsky and takes the view that many and varied approaches to provenance research have proliferated between "traditional practitioners and non-art historians" who have different "vested interests" in the information about objects or art discovered to have been looted (Masurovsky 2016).

Masurovsky's call for more "reconcil[iation] ... constructive dialogue ... [and] the establishment of a unified code of provenance research" was notably taken up just months later, when the Menil Collection and Rice University in Houston, Texas, U.S., under the Collections Analysis Collaborative (CAC) initiative, hosted "Collaborative Futures in Museum Collections: Antiquities, Provenance and Cultural Heritage." The national conference brought together scholars from across the U.S. to investigate its ancient Mediterranean collection of nearly 600 objects, the results of which have been published in the book *Object Biographies* (Hopkins, Costello, and Davis 2021). More importantly, the conference encouraged "collaborative paths" (Costello and Hopkins chapter reviewed by Lobay 2020) for

researching the provenance of collections inclusively and proactively so as to meet interested parties' information needs.

Provenance research is a frequent subject of international symposia and colloquia, to which academic and professional researchers contribute inclusively. Such events are hosted by a range of organizations such as the American Alliance of Museums (AAM)-affiliated Museum Security Network, the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), artist groups such as the nonprofit Modigliani Project, library and production companies such as Art Vérité, insurers, law firms, law schools, museums, and academic departments – often for CLE credit (New York University 2018, Ferriero 2011). The German organization Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung, which hosts International Provenance Research Day (the second Wednesday in April), engages public audiences in recognizing provenance research as a socially relevant, culturally responsive academic discipline. Building on a history of course offerings, universities in Germany since 2017 maintain professorships in provenance research (Schonter 2018, Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung 2020, Zühlsdorff 2020). A dedicated provenance research course was first offered in the U.S. by New York University in 2015 (The International Art Market Studies Association 2021).

In a U.S. graduate archival education module on arrangement and description from spring 2022 that centered on analyzing the Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) Principles (2017) (this revision expanded the eight principles in 2013's version to 11), students noted that “provenance appears several times in the 2013 DACS Principles but not once in the 2017 update” (Student AP, personal correspondence, February 27, 2022; based on a note in Winn 2017). The revised principles that were approved by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) Council in May 2019 do contain a top-level section on provenance in its Statement of Principles as well as examples of reconstruction (restoration) of provenance in section 7.1.8 on Processing Information, so it is likely that feedback during the intervening open comment period ensured that the standard would treat provenance appropriately. The lesson imparts an appreciation of collaborative work (in standards development).

Conclusion

As indicated by the sample of provenance research programs attended to in this paper, much of the focus remains justifiably on Nazi-era looted cultural property and post-Holocaust issues. Because of the destruction and plunder of cultural heritage sites, the widespread displacement of cultural property through archaeological looting, and the problem of the illicit trade more generally yet occurring in today's world, broadly accessible education in provenance research remains essential. The need to identify stolen and looted property both in institutions and in the trade has created a demand for effective provenance research skills. Museum archivists have a particular need for provenance CE because they expressly “support provenance research” and “steward special formats such as audiovisual records, oral histories, photographs, architectural records, field notes, and artists' records” in their everyday work (Chatalbash, Hernandez, and Schwenke 2022). The multicultural, multiformat collections exhibited in museums and documented in museum archives require ongoing dialogue as new information becomes available. The CE data presented above indicate a vital need for such skills among archivists and information professionals. Educators and managers must prepare and equip new archivists with provenance research skills specific to diverse collection needs. A shared understanding of its everyday conduct in information workplaces will broaden the pathways for new entry-level archivists to acquire skills less so esoteric or specialized, and more transferable to researching provenance in greater capacity.

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