

**Society of American Archivists**  
**SAA-Developed Standard Review Procedure**

**Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies (GPAS)**  
**Member Comments**

In June 2016, a call for member comments on the new GPAS recommended revisions was posted on the SAA website and shared via social media outlets and *In The Loop*. The call was open for two weeks, with links to both the current 2011 version and the new, recommended revisions. See the call here: <http://www2.archivists.org/news/2016/comments-sought-on-%E2%80%9Cguidelines-for-a-graduate-program-in-archival-studies>.

*Comments on 2016 Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies*  
*Respectfully submitted June 2016, Mark A Greene*

My interest and involvement with Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Archival Studies dates back to the last years of the extinct Committee on Education and Professional Development. I have watched the guidelines mature in almost every aspect, evincing SAA's increasing commitment to involvement in graduate education. This most recent iteration of the guidelines has many, many things to recommend it, from continuing dedication to hands-on learning and staunch support of the use of adjunct faculty from the ranks of practicing archivists to the persistent equal attention to both archives and personal collections and the enduring importance of disciplines such as history to forming a well-rounded archival education. Bravo for those components and many others.

So please take what follows as constructive criticism, aimed at making a good document better. My concerns fall into 4 categories: terminology; mission and goals; and faculty.

Terminology: While I have related concerns about curriculum content, I wish to suggest that notwithstanding the explanation in footnote 2, the phrase "records and papers" is a misleading anachronism. "Papers" has an almost universal meaning which belies the definition in the guidelines, that is, an analog item made of rag or wood fibers and capable of being touched and the information upon it read w/out the aid of an electronic device. By most people's understanding, "papers" cannot be digital by definition. As a former mss curator I have a keen interest in making clearer the term for analog or digital material created by individuals or families and thus distinct from "records" created by organizations or businesses. Let me propose the terms "records and documents," "records and personal collections," or "organizational records and personal collections".

Mission and Goals: Surprisingly, very few of the SAA strategic goals are reflected in the mission, goals, or curriculum of the guidelines. The strategic plan goals are

- Advancing the public standing of archivists.
- Ensuring the diversity of its membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record.
- Fostering a culture of creativity and experimentation across the association.
- Providing an open, inclusive, and collaborative environment.
- Providing excellent member service.
- Social responsibility and the public good.
- Transparency, accountability, integrity, and professionalism in conducting its activities.

Translated from the goals of an organization to the goals of a profession (as I presume they are meant to be), all but bullet 5 seem to me to be not only worthy but critical goals for graduate education. Not all can be as easily converted to standard pedagogical methods, but I believe most can. For example, providing a collaborative environment might call on faculty to emphasize to a certain extent group projects; fostering a culture of creativity will demand of faculty their own willingness to experiment with new teaching methods aimed at supporting the ability of their students to fail w/out actually receiving a failing grade. I don't remember seeing any components in mission or curriculum that address "Social responsibility and the public good" or "professionalism" (or its related goal of professional socialization, which would normally take place outside the classroom by such steps as mentoring during conferences). And the curriculum section on advocacy and outreach is disappointingly brief and thin, and barely hints at the strategic goal of "Advancing the public standing of archivists."

Most worrisome, to me, is the absence of goals or curriculum content designed for "Ensuring the diversity of [professional] membership and leaders, the profession, and the archival record." The term "diversity" appears in the guidelines only 4 times, "multicultural" only once! Where are the goals of understanding the very different ways in which non-Western cultures apprehend and value records, access, "permanence", ownership, etc, seriously studying the reasons "under-documented" peoples are not being successfully recruited into the profession, and discussing the reasons that decades-long efforts to diversify the cultural record have been only partially successful? Where are introductions to critical race theory, to ethnicity as provenance, the increasing prevalence of community archives, etc. As with born-digital material (see below) diversity should not be relegated to one curricular component but rather imbued throughout the guidelines—hence my choice to promote it as part of the section on mission and goals.

More briefly, but no less importantly, I urge that the study of born-digital material (currently 1) i) Digital Records and Access Systems) be integrated throughout the curriculum rather than relegated to its own curricular component. I would argue that the time is long past to suggest to students or to the public that archivists still haven't come to grips with the fact that digital material is pervasive in our society and no more deserving of a separate learning goal than audio/visual materials. One mission of the guidelines should be to ensure that whatever specialty a student pursues, whether writers' mss or digital business archives, that they are fully comfortable appraising, preserving, providing access, and the like to digital as well as analog material—because it's a sure bet they will be called on to manage both analog and digital and mixed files, series, and record groups.

Curriculum: Many of my comments thus far have implications for the curriculum section, but please bear with me for a few brief notes of a more specific nature. For example, at the risk of marking myself completely obsessed by this topic, where is there any reference to backlogs and the need to make progress in revealing these hidden collections to researchers? This has implications for appraisal, processing, and reference/access teaching content I would imagine and is a nearly universal problem confronting new archivists. During all the years I've been teaching appraisal workshops for MAC and SAA attendees have expressed frustration at the poor instruction (particularly practical experience) they received regarding appraisal in graduate school. Just how to remedy this gap I do not know, except to suggest more emphasis on assessing creators and on donor relations (role playing exercises anyone?).

Policy-making, arguably a bedrock of archival management and practice, is given unsettling short-shrift in the guidelines (the word 'policy' appears nowhere in the document; 'policies' appears only 4 times). Archivists at all stages in their careers must understand the need and efficacy of policies, must be able to suggest and contribute to developing policies, and have the wherewithal to critique policies that are no longer effective. I would suggest that policy creation and assessment should be a distinct subset of Management and Administration along, perhaps, with strategic planning, grant-writing and fundraising, and (completely missing I believe) 'managing up'. And to reiterate a point raised earlier, where are aspects of diversity, multiculturalism, alternative ideals of intellectual property and tangible property ownership, and so many other components of non-Western and non-white perspectives and practice of archives? At first I supposed these matters would be the content of Social and Cultural Systems but was disappointed.

Faculty: Not only is there no reference to recruiting a diverse faculty, there seems to be little recognition of the need (and difficulty) of recruiting an increasingly diverse student body. Even if the means of changing the situation of Lilly-white faculties and student bodies are not yet apparent, let me suggest that the goal should remain clearly on the table.

Thank you for soliciting feedback. Good luck bringing it all together again!

Hello:

I have several comments on the revised guidelines. In general the guidelines hold up and there is not a need for major revisions. However, the format does not lend itself to thinking about different potential archival careers and some working backwards from recent job ads will lead to some gaps.

There are two areas I would like to highlight:

1. Teaching with primary sources. The past 2 years have seen teaching with primary sources unconfereces before SAA, a number of new books on this topic, tons of articles, etc. Yet the guidelines do not even include this in the description of what a reference archivist does. The new guidelines should ideally include this skill as a domain or its own, expand the types of evaluation under reference beyond user-based evaluation to at least user-based, program, and learning evaluation, and include learning theory as complementary knowledge. Working back from instructional archivist job description, one needs not only archival knowledge but also an understanding of teaching and learning, knowledge of measuring learning outcomes, and evaluation of the educational unit.

2. Research / research methods. I am not sure why historical research is still held above everything else or why it is separated from the larger discussion of research design. Is there no design in historical research. The whole section on research design needs to be beefed up and expanded. Anyone doing digital curation of research data needs to understand research design for the disciplinary data being curated, if curation includes helping formulate data management plans the archivist-curator needs to understand research design, etc. Look at job descriptions for digital curators and others to see how research is woven in to different jobs.

Research design and methods are key even if the archivist will not engage in research. It would also be good to reframe this section in terms of research questions and matching design to those research question (eg collecting the best evidence in the most systematic way) to address the research questions whether it be operational or to further some idea in the profession.

Good luck with the revisions.

Beth  
Elizabeth Yakel  
Professor and Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs  
University of Michigan

First, under “Appraisal and Acquisition” it mentions “procedures used to identify” materials, so I would title this section “Selection, Appraisal and Acquisition.”

Under “Preservation” it talks of “protection” of materials, so I would title this section “Preservation and Protection” or “Preservation and Security.”

I think that making these changes would make those headings more fully representative of their paragraphs.

Thank you.

Mott

*President of the Academy of Certified Archivists, 2015-16*

Thank you for putting the guidelines out for comment. I would like to simply add that the guidelines does not address the need for an archival education in media formats that aren't digitally based. Analog media is continuously overlooked and almost every archive has some form of audio, video, or film based analog media that is part of special collections. Simply adding in analog media formats to your introduction would be appreciated... "that is, society's records and documents broadly defined, paper-based[, analog media] or digital."

Also, Karen Gracy, of Kent State, is currently researching the need for curriculum guidelines for av based archival programs and presented a panel on it at last year's AMIA conference. She may be of aid in further revisions or you may be of service to her.

<https://www.kent.edu/slis/profile/karen-f-gracy-phd>

Thank you,

Carla

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Carla Arton  
Film Digitization Specialist

17 June, 2016

Dear Education Committee members:

The following is some feedback on the proposed revisions to the SAA Graduate Education Guidelines that are based upon discussions with faculty colleagues here at UCLA and also my own thoughts. They are, for the most part, more about clarification and inclusivity than about specific content. However, as the 2011 position paper<sup>1</sup> put together by archival academics from countries around the world under the auspices of the Archival Education and Research Initiative<sup>2</sup> (of which I am the director) also states, I do believe that issues relating to diversifying the profession, being culturally competent, and working participatorily and equitably with diverse communities to address their archival and memorykeeping needs should be more integral to all graduate archival education programs.

Specific comments/suggestions:

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<sup>1</sup> Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI) Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (PACG) (A. Gilliland, corresponding author), "Educating for the Archival Multiverse," *American Archivist* (Spring/Summer 2011): 68-102.

<sup>2</sup> aeri.website.

In the first sentence in the introduction, replace "paper-based or digital" with "regardless of form or medium" - this would be more inclusive of the many ways in which records are created historically and today in different environments and communities. Under the section on mission and goals, the phrase "regardless of format" is used, which would also not be entirely consistent with this opening statement.

In the last sentence of the first paragraph of the introduction, "Thus, archives and archivists are essential in a democratic and educated society" again might be more inclusive and less elite in tone if it were phrased simply, "Thus, archives and archivists are essential to society."

In the first sentence of the second paragraph, the term "training" is a much narrower conception of the role and scope of professional education than is applied in most graduate programs and that fits better with the statements in the Mission and Goals section beginning "Graduate education, in contrast to training, is both academic and professional; therefore, it includes both original research and experiential learning." Perhaps it might be sufficient in the introduction to say that Graduate programs in Archival Studies prepare students to excel in their professional duties" Perhaps the language can be streamlined across the two sections or one of the statements could be removed altogether as redundant? The second paragraph also references the importance of addressing the diversity of society as a whole, but the more specific discussion later of curricular components does not reflect or reiterate this, even though it is a key strategic goal of SAA.

"Archival Studies programs must also prepare emerging professionals to work with the records of the future as well as those of the past, for graduates will practice in a vast array of institutions and professional positions." The two clauses in this sentence seem to be two different statements, rather than the second being a dependent clause.

Under Mission and Goals, " Regardless of the organizational setting, master's-level archival studies programs must be coherent, cohesive, and identifiable" is an appropriate statement, but it seems to conflict with the later statement in the Conclusion that the program must be "autonomous," something that would not be viable within the structures of many of the schools and departments currently offering graduate archival education in the US and that might well raise red flags in schools where the archival curriculum is only one component of school's portfolio.

The statement "Ultimately, archival education creates an intellectual framework that enables students to understand the ideas on which their profession is founded, to engage in the development of archival principles, and to apply this knowledge in a wide variety of settings" does not make any reference to critical and analytical skills as well as reflexivity that many academics believe are essential to being able to evaluate, challenge and build upon these ideas and principles.

Under Curriculum, UCLA and some other graduate education programs operate on the quarter system. Can the guidelines please include quarter credit hours equivalents for semester credit hours? Otherwise potential applicants to programs who use these guidelines become very confused.

The statement, "The curriculum should integrate research throughout, and an important element of any program should be an original research project resulting in a scholarly paper or thesis" is overly constraining. Many schools have moved away from a Master's thesis because their school or university established other culminating requirements or because they believe that an individual or collaborative research project or other applied research activity is more directly applicable to work as an archival practitioner. It might be more flexible to state that students should be trained in research design and methods and complete an original research paper, thesis or project on a professional topic as part of their program requirements. This seems to be closer in spirit to the statements made under 3. Research that come later in the guidelines.

The sentence "Because archival knowledge and professional culture transcend geographical and national boundaries, each component should incorporate an international and multicultural perspective" might also include community boundaries and/or perspectives.

Under 1a, presumably the assumption is that these guidelines will be used in Canada as well as the US, hence the strong Canadian orientation of this section. Nevertheless, it seems very odd to include the British notion of papers, which is not something familiar to most US archivists, among the examples of topics that should be covered. If this is to be included, then why not also include Spanish and French archival ideas drawn from Civil Law protocols and registrarial practices that do show up in parts of the US, or the influential ideas and terminology that have come from Australia and that are based in the records continuum? We were also perplexed by the phrase "the macro approach versus the micro approach to the concept of archives" - none of our faculty has ever come across this term, it is not in the *SAA Glossary*, and it seems strange to include it in baseline guidelines.

Under 1i., while it is essential to be able to work with digital records and access systems, the curriculum makes no mention of familiarity or skills with other media, including photographs, film, video and oral materials that are commonly found in archives. The same is the case under B.2.

Under 2b. could "the people's rights" be simply "people's rights"? This would seem to be a more inclusive statement.

Under 2c., should there not be a reference also to the ICA Code of Ethics?

Again, if diversity is considered to be an important goal, then cultural awareness and competency should be encouraged. One way to do this is suggesting under Complementary Knowledge, for example, ethnic, gender and sexuality, and area studies. Overall, in the Curriculum section, the

list of related areas of study with which students are supposed to be familiar ("Complementary Knowledge") are rather vaguely defined. (For instance, what kind of "Liberal Arts & Sciences" training are we being expected to provide?) The textual archive bias shows through pretty clearly here. For example, for media archives, familiarity with some key branches of media theory and media studies seems advisable. However, we are not sure that adding more areas that everyone must teach or offering tighter definitions of those areas are what's needed – the problem, instead, is in trying to stipulate which other areas of knowledges are "related" to archival studies. All knowledges can be connected in some way or other – SAA can certainly suggest some bodies of knowledge that schools might want to consider incorporating, but these areas shouldn't be written in as a firm requirement, since what's relevant will vary with the specific school and program. Let each program maintain its own orientation and adapt this part of its curriculum to that program's own goals and specializations.

The Introduction asserts that archivists play a vital role in democratic society by preserving and transmitting social and cultural heritage, so some more concrete mention in the curriculum section of how archivists are being trained to understand and fulfill that role would be helpful – some light reworking of the paragraph on Cultural Memory under "Knowledge of the Profession" might be the place for this.

If I can provide you with any further information regarding these comments, please let me know.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Gilliland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anne Gilliland, Ph.D.  
Professor and Director, Archival Studies Specialization  
Department of Information Studies

As an archives management student, I feel that it is really important for SAA, as part of the program accreditation process, to ABSOLUTELY require all programs to annually, openly report the number of archives students enrolled, the number who graduate each year, and to follow up on graduates to report their employment status in at least the 1-3 years following graduation.

Many schools are currently getting away with providing none of this type of employment info. by saying their program is too small to fall within the (federal?) requirement to report employment outcomes. The SAA has the clout to demand that all accredited schools do this. Does anyone currently know the total number (by state and nationally) of archivists graduating each year vs. the number of available positions? Don't students, many of whom go into significant debt to finance their archival training, deserve to get accurate data on their intended school's success rate in producing employed archivists?

I am tired of seeing SAA articles that (justifiably) rail against the absurdly low salaries for archivists when the supply/demand issues embedded in those low salaries can't even be addressed due to lack of data that SAA should be demanding as part of its oversight role. If anyone should know that data is power, archivists should!

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the guidelines....

Dannette Lank

Hello all -

Just a few comments. The document looks great!

A grammar thing that possibly hundreds have already pointed out: under Admin, C2 - Any form of experiential learning must serve the student's educational goals **primary**." Is this supposed to be primarily?

Also, point 2 is an opportunity to point out that students can gain experience in paid positions as well as unpaid ones. I'm not thrilled about encouraging programs to lock students into courses that require them to pay to work. Especially since even with an internship coordinator on the lookout, a few students inevitably end up with dysfunctional internships that don't serve them well. Maybe there's another model for work experience that we haven't stumbled upon yet.

Best,  
Stephanie Bennett  
Collections Archivist  
Wake Forest University