

Social Activism, Professional Lives, and Institutional Missions

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Abstract: Since the 1970s archivists and historians have become increasingly interested in social justice. However there has been little research into what our professions and our professional lives gain -and what we lose-when we become activists. Does activism impact historians differently than archivists? While we were interested in the subject because of the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) project, we wanted to examine all topics of activism, not just civil rights and social justice. We were also interested in the effect our presence in activist organizations had. In October and November 2010, we surveyed 195 people who were historians or archivists and identified themselves as activists. The survey included questions on employment, activities, effects of activism on work, effects of work on activism. In the view of respondents, activism provides clear benefits to repositories, including good publicity, advancing the institutional mission, and enhancing relationships with donors. Activist groups also benefit from the professional work of archivist and historian members, according to respondents. The topics of their activism vary from gun control to anarchism. Negative repercussions from employers were reported, particularly by historians, ranging from being made fun of to being fired. Many feel inhibited by their employer from participating in activism. Some reported that their activism limited their professional duties. The results of this survey suggest that employees need to educate their employers about the benefits of activism. Employers may need to develop guidelines to support activism among their staff and to minimize the potentially limiting influence on professional activities.

About the author:

Sonia Yaco is the Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. She is the co-founder and state co-chair of the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) Project, a statewide task force that seeks to locate, identify and encourage the preservation of material related to the school desegregation process in Virginia. Her article examining the legal and ethical issues of such records, "Balancing Privacy and Access in School Desegregation Collections: A Case Study," appeared in the November 2010 issue of *American Archivist*. Her coauthored chapter "A Documentation Case Study: the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) Project" will appear in the forthcoming SAA publication, *Diversity Reader*. She is the co-author of *Hampton Roads: Remembering Our Schools*. (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2009). Her article "It's Complicated: Barriers to EAD Implementation," appeared in the Fall/Winter 2008 issue of *The American Archivist*. Previously, Ms. Yaco was a reference archivist at the Wisconsin Historical Society. For the last twenty-five years she has also been the president of Anlex Computer Consulting LLC, which specializes in digital and textual information management for libraries and archives. She holds a Masters of Arts degree from the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

Bea Hardy is the interim Dean of University Libraries at the College of William and Mary. Previously she was the acting director of research, instruction and outreach services for Swem Library, the Marian and Alan McLeod Director of the Special Collections Research Center and a lecturer in the history department. Dr. Hardy is the co-founder and a regional co-chair of the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) project. Prior to William & Mary, Hardy worked for the Maryland Historical Society as the France-Merrick Director of the H. Furlong Baldwin Library. She has also worked as the outreach and program manager for National History Day and as an assistant professor of history for Coastal Carolina University, among other teaching positions. She has written numerous scholarly publications and has been awarded several fellowships and grants. Hardy received her undergraduate degree from Goucher College, and she earned her first master's degree in history from the University of Virginia. In 2004, she earned a second master's degree - this one in library science -- from the University of Maryland College Park, and in 1993, she received her PhD in history from the same school.