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Competencies for Archivists & Records Managers

By way of introduction, this document was prepared by the ACA's Educational Guidelines Review Task Force (EGRTF), 2011 – 2013, and was presented to the membership at the 2014 AGM, while its report is attached following these competencies.

The archival and records management professional profile is characterized by the following core areas of responsibility and action (competencies):

1. To govern (oversee/guide/manage/ exercise stewardship of) records and archives throughout their existence, from their initial formation (conceptualization and creation) to their preservation across time and space;

2. To communicate (make available for use) records and archives by providing services for users, promoting awareness and knowledge of archives in society, facilitating specialized training, and fostering research and scholarship;

3. To lead (supervise/manage) and administer records and/or archives services or structures (programs), by planning their development and managing their resources.

The following functions characterize each of the competencies identified above.

1. Governing records and archives
    a. Managing current records (creating, organizing, and describing by means of metadata – including records classification – records that are still used during the course of business; as well as planning and managing the systems containing the records and their relationships);

    b. Selecting records and archives (appraising the value of records in order to identify those that should be kept permanently and those that should be destroyed; and carrying out their disposition. All this also applies to entire archives or collections that may be added to existing archival holdings, an activity known as acquisition);

    c. Arranging and describing archives (analysing, organizing and describing archival material based on archival principles);

    d. Preserving archives (ensuring that the essential characteristics of records and archives, in all media and forms, are preserved over time and across different systems, by providing appropriate environmental conditions and strategies for preventing loss, corruption or unauthorized access to records and their metadata);

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e. Planning and evaluating records and archival systems and applications (designing, implementing and evaluating the IT systems and applications used to manage records and archives).

2. Communicating records and archives
   f. Providing services for the users of records and archives (reference services; assistance to internal users of the records);

   g. Promoting archives and archival education (advocacy and outreach with different kinds of public; curating exhibits; planning and providing professional training on ARM methods and practices);

   h. Conducting research and scholarship (publishing, organizing and attending conferences, participating in research project).

3. Leading and administering ARM services or structures
   i. Managing ARM programs (ability to develop and supervise the operations of an ARM office or program, by managing financial and human resources, coordinating activities, monitoring the legislation and the market, and ensuring people safety and the security of the holdings).

Depending on the level of responsibility, competence or specialization involved in any ARM position, the functions identified above may have different emphasis in different job profiles.

Education Guidelines Review Taskforce

When the Taskforce was initially formed in June 2011 by ACA President Loryl MacDonald, its mandate was to conduct a review of the 1989 Education Guidelines, and revise it accordingly to fit with the 21st century realities of being an archivist. It was subsequently agreed by all the members of the Taskforce that our main concern was to ensure that future archivists were receiving the level of education they needed to become part of our profession. A concerning trend had been emerging in the employment market for some time in which employers did not seem to understand the differences between people who had two solid years of archival courses for their masters program, versus those who only had one or two archival courses within their broader area of study. The Taskforce wanted prospective students to become informed about the education available to them, thus resulting in them ensuring they enter educational programs which provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to become a professional archivist.

The 1989 Guidelines were directed to the educational institutions themselves, providing detail about the type of courses which should be offered. These guidelines were divided into core subjects and additional subjects, with detailed descriptions provided on each course. Upon initial review of these guidelines, our Taskforce decided to follow in its

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footsteps (although with hopes of creating a shorter document) and divided up the subjects between core and additional. While devising a draft list of subjects, we sent out a survey to a selected group of archivists to hear what their thoughts were on the needs of an updated set of guidelines. This particular group of archivists were individually selected in order to cover a broad swath of the archivist profession: government, city, university, private, religious, corporate and the archival educators themselves. The survey response rate was disappointingly small, but those who did respond were overall on board with what we were proposing.

One area in which we struggled was how to get across the need for a certain amount of hours/number of courses in these areas of study. We didn't want potential students to think that one course covering all aspects of archival theory was sufficient to educate them on the intricacies of these broad areas of study. However, we didn't think it was really our place to dictate exact number of hours needed to our colleagues in the archival education profession. None of us claim to be curriculum experts and were concerned about push-back. So, our solution was to create a competency checklist for measurables in which we outlined the competencies needed to obtain the knowledge required. We used "nature of a record" as an example of the potential of the competency checklist. We submitted a report for ACA 2013 in which we outlined the core and additional subjects, along with our checklist for competencies. We were very interested to hear what the feedback would be from the archival community.

Not surprisingly perhaps, the majority of comments we received at the 2013 ACA Members Input Session were from archival educators. None of them agreed with the entirety of our identified core and additional subjects, and also provided suggestions for courses they personally felt were of large importance to an all-around archival education, but were not necessarily reflected in the subjects we had suggested. Although we were happy to receive their comments and thoughts, it put us in a quandary. It was clear that the various schools had different viewpoints as to what they thought were necessary components of archival education, and we didn't know how to please them all, or even if we should try. We also did not receive any feedback on our competency checklist, so were at a loss as to whether or not we should proceed with that idea or not.

After mulling it over throughout the summer, we decided to go in a new direction. This decision was sparked by a report passed onto us by President MacDonald entitled: "Core Competencies of Electronic Resources Librarianship". It was noticed how similar their competencies were to our competency checklist. But their document spoke more toward the professional librarian or student, rather than the educational institution. So we decided to change the direction of our plan, and rather than copying the 1989 Guidelines by directing our report to educators, we thought that our target audience should be potential students and possibly also potential employers. We wanted to make our ideas easy for non-archivists to understand. And we also wanted to target the students in another way: instead of expecting them to look up the ACA and discover the website that way, we wanted to devise a means to grab the students' attention in a brief but meaningful way,

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and direct them to the ACA website for more information. We thought a similar technique could be used to draw-in future employers too.

Over our next few meetings, we decided to create a pamphlet/poster/brochure to send to universities to target undergrads. It was thought that Career Services might be one logical place to house these promotional materials. These materials were to outline the areas of knowledge needed to become an archivist, and have a QR code to direct the students back to the ACA website to obtain further information and clarification. Fortunately for us, one of our Taskforce members (Shannon Hodge) had some experience working in graphic design and was willing to tackle the creation of our promotional material.

Our competencies checklist also underwent a change thanks to Fiorella Foscarini sharing with the rest of the Taskforce a draft report put out recently by UNI (Italian Institute for Standardization) in collaboration with the Association of Italian Archivists. It was similar to what we had been thinking, so Fiorella translated it and incorporated some of the ideas into our original thoughts. (She is going to make sure the Association of Italian Archivists is okay with this.). Now we have three core areas of competencies, each identified through an action verb: To Govern, To Communicate and To Lead. Each of these areas is broken down into functions.