

Survey of Archives and Records Management Graduate Students at Ten Universities in the United States and Canada

David A. Wallace

Abstract

A survey of over 150 students currently enrolled in ten graduate archival and records management (ARM) programs across the United States and Canada provides some understanding into these future ARM professionals. Information about their degree backgrounds; prior ARM work experiences; how they discovered the ARM profession; how they found out about their specific ARM program and why they chose to enroll in it; their employment goals in terms of job title, sector, and salary expectations; their willingness to relocate; and their interest in pursuing doctoral ARM studies, gives archival educators a baseline for understanding the backgrounds and aspirations of their students that can be used in developing programs that address these needs.

This paper reports the results of an anonymous survey of 152 graduate students in ten different archives and records management (ARM) programs across the United States and Canada. The survey was developed and distributed in anticipation of the working meeting of graduate archival educators held in August 1999 at the University of Pittsburgh.

The purpose of the survey was to develop some understanding of the collective body of ARM graduate students across the United States and Canada by examining their degree backgrounds; prior ARM work experiences; how they discovered the ARM profession; how they found out about their specific ARM program and why they chose to enroll in it; their employment goals in terms of job title, sector, and salary expectations; their willingness to relocate; and, their interest in pursuing doctoral studies in ARM.

The survey evolved initially out of a series of informal discussions starting in the fall of 1997 about ARM education between the ARM faculty at the

Table 1 Participating Institutions and Their Response Rates

Participating Institution	Number of Surveys Returned	Proportion of Total Responses*
Auburn University—History Department	14	9.2%
Indiana University—School of Library and Information Science	8	5.3%
Simmons College—Graduate School of Library and Information Science	33	21.7%
University of California, Los Angeles—Graduate School of Education & Information Studies	15	9.9%
University of Manitoba—Department of History	4	2.6%
University of Michigan—School of Information	27	17.8%
University of Pittsburgh—School of Information Sciences	10	6.6%
University of Texas, Austin—Graduate School of Library and Information Science	19	12.5%
University of Toronto—Faculty of Information Studies	15	9.9%
University of Wisconsin, Madison—School of Library and Information Studies	7	4.6%
TOTALS:	152	100.1%

*percentages have been rounded to nearest tenth of a percent and consequently add up to more than 100 percent

Universities of Michigan, Pittsburgh, and Toronto.¹ These educators noticed recent increases in enrollment in their programs. They also realized that they had no clear data on their students' backgrounds, the influences on their educational choices, or their career aspirations. In order to obtain a better sense of these issues it was decided to conduct a survey of current students. In 1998 an earlier version of the survey reported below was circulated among students in these three schools. The current version of the survey (included as an appendix to this article) was derived from a reworking of the original, clarifying and amplifying various aspects of the survey.

The driving rationale for the survey was the realization that there existed no good summary data on ARM graduate students' backgrounds or career expectations. This survey develops some preliminary data along these lines and initiates a process by which ARM educators can use non-personally identifiable data from the ARM graduate student population for program development and planning.

The re-worked survey was sent out to the archival educators listserv on February 18, 1999. Participating educators were requested to issue the survey in hard copy to their students, collect the responses, and return them to the author by regular mail. A total of ten ARM programs—eight from the United States and two from Canada—returned surveys from 152 ARM graduate students. Table 1 identifies the participating schools, the number of responses they returned, and what proportion their responses contribute to the total response population of 152.

¹ Later discussions included ARM faculty from the Universities of Maryland and Manitoba.

It should be noted that a substantial number of responses were returned by three of the ten participating institutions: Simmons College (33 responses), the University of Michigan (27 responses), and the University of Texas, Austin (19 responses). Taken together, these three schools account for just over half of all the responses received (52 percent of the total). As a result, any interpretations or conclusions drawn from the body of data collected should be evaluated in light of the disproportionate representation of these three schools.

A few other caveats need to be pointed out. First and most importantly, this survey represents the cumulative responses of ten programs, which is roughly one third of the thirty-three graduate ARM education programs within the United States and Canada listed in the Society of American Archivists' *Directory of Archival Education Programs 1999–2000*.² As such, this survey makes no claims towards comprehensiveness—many schools did not participate—nor does it seek to draw overarching conclusions about the composition and aspirations of all ARM graduate students. It seeks instead to highlight trends as evidenced by the not-insubstantial 152 responses and to offer some rough characterizations as to what these trends may imply. Second, at several points some schools' numbers for a particular question do not add up to the total number of responses returned from that school, as a result of respondents either ignoring a particular question or providing more than one response for a question when only one response was requested. Consequently, a total of 152 was not always achieved for each of the survey questions.

Nevertheless, in spite of these concerns, this survey of 152 ARM graduate students from both the United States and Canada represents the first time an attempt has been made to gather this kind of data in more than an impressionistic fashion. As such, it provides some primary raw data for understanding who pursues ARM graduate studies and what their career ambitions are.

Before turning to the results of the survey, it is useful to place this research within the broader context of the development of archival education in the United States and Canada. This survey is nominally subsumed within a broader analysis of the status of ARM education which was recently undertaken by ARM educators participating in a project on information professions and educational reform jointly overseen by the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.³ Over the past fifty years, ARM education within North America has experienced slow and often contentious development. This meandering growth has been punctu-

² Available April 2000 at: <www.archivists.org/prof-education/dir_part2.html>.

³ See Richard J. Cox, Elizabeth Yakel, David A. Wallace, Jeanette Bastian, and Jennifer Marshall, "Archival Education in North American Library and Information Science Schools: A Status Report." Forthcoming in *Library Quarterly* (April 2001); and, Richard J. Cox, Elizabeth Yakel, David A. Wallace, Jeanette Bastian, and Jennifer Marshall, "Educating Archivists in Library and Information Science Schools," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* (forthcoming).

ated over the past decade by significant change in ARM education programs. Indicators of this recent growth include a diversification and individualization of programs, a strong increase in the number of full-time tenure track faculty, increases in ARM course offerings, and nascent development of degrees that explicitly acknowledge ARM as a separate field of practice. Through the 1960s, most individuals became archivists within unstructured and unregulated apprenticeship-like settings. The lack of a shared means of professional education engendered debates within the field regarding the most appropriate content, form, and venue for ARM education—which has been and is still primarily situated within public history, history, and library and information science departments. Between 1980 and 2000, there has been an ebbing of public history programs with an archival education component, a leveling-off of ARM programs within history departments, and distinct growth of ARM educational programs within library and information science schools. In addition, although ARM education is primarily delivered by adjunct faculty, presently there are more full-time tenure track and tenured ARM faculty than ever existed previously, (with the total approaching forty—up from a total of seven just twenty years ago). This expansion of full-time faculty provides ARM educators with a stronger voice within library and information science schools than has previously existed and establishes a growing body of ARM scholars who must do research and publish in order to remain in academia. Concurrent with this growth in programs and faculty is an expansion of the number of graduate students who are choosing to pursue ARM studies. The survey results provide educators with much needed baseline data about the ARM student population.

The following discussion and analysis of the raw data produced by the survey is presented as a separate sub-section below.

1. Undergraduate Degree

At the outset, it is important to understand the academic background of current ARM students by looking at their undergraduate degrees. Such data gives educators a sense not only of the backgrounds of ARM students, but also of the range of disciplines that are currently feeding graduate ARM programs.

Figure 1 presents the range of academic areas within which the 152 respondents fall. Perhaps not altogether surprising is the high incidence of history bachelors—which comprise nearly one third of all responses. History was the only separate “discipline” offered as a response option for this survey question. The other possible responses are more broadly construed as major academic areas that are encompassed by many disciplines (for example, the disciplines of biology and chemistry would be encompassed within the broader Natural Sciences category). Given history’s longstanding strong relationship with the

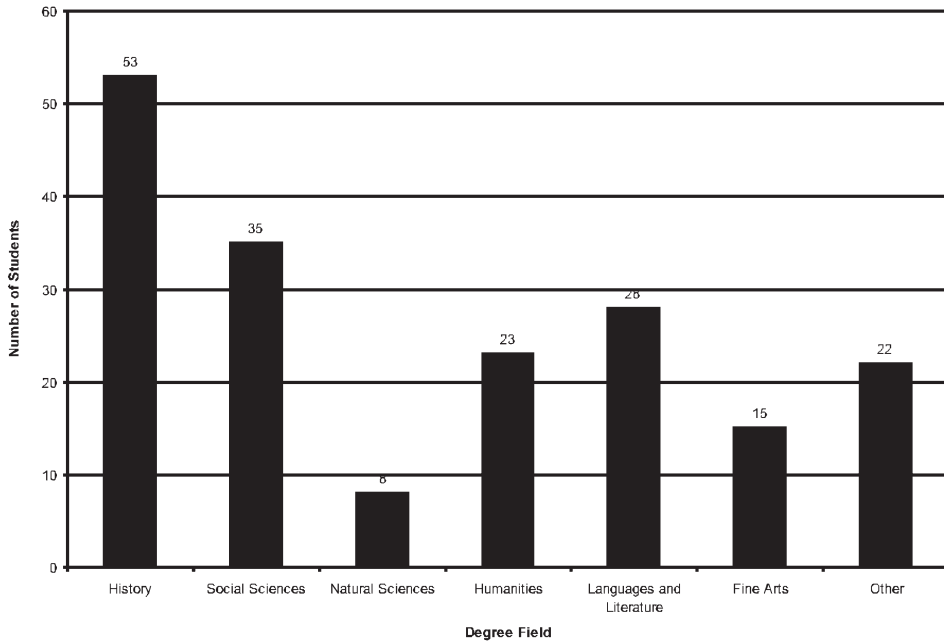


FIGURE 1. Undergraduate Degree Held By Current ARM Graduate Students

ARM profession, it was decided to “privilege” it by making it a separate choice in and of itself.

What is perhaps mildly surprising is the relatively strong representations from the other social sciences, languages and literature, and the humanities. Taken together, these three areas far outstrip the numbers for history, indicating that while history continues to provide a steady and reliable supply of graduate ARM students, the student base for ARM education is extending beyond its traditional historical roots. Both the natural sciences and the fine arts appear to provide rather limited entrée into ARM graduate education.

2. Degree Beyond Undergraduate

Roughly one-third (50) of respondents entered their graduate ARM education programs with either a master’s or a Ph.D. already in-hand, or were concurrently obtaining their ARM master’s and a second master’s degree. While a master’s in history was the most common post-baccalaureate degree sought by the survey population, there is an interesting mix of other advanced degrees, including: Middle Eastern languages and cultures, African area studies, medieval studies, early American culture, cinema and television, textile design, English, art history, anthropology, linguistics, music, literature, theology, communications, and education. This again speaks to the rich academic diversity of

ARM graduate students and highlights the depth of supplemental academic expertises ARM graduate students bring to their programs.

3. Prior ARM Work Experience

Nearly half (68) of all survey respondents entered their program with no prior ARM work experience. While a lack of direct ARM work experience is to be somewhat expected for those just launching professional degrees and careers, it is perhaps surprising to realize that half of all respondents have at least some ARM work experience, ranging from less than a year up through five plus years of experience, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

Of those with some ARM work experience, however, about half have less than a year's experience. So, while some ARM prior work experience is a fairly common attribute of respondents, only about a quarter of all respondents have more than cursory ARM work experience (defined here as more than one year), with a very slim minimum having more than two years experience. So, while educators are likely to encounter quite a few graduate ARM students in their classes with firsthand practical working knowledge, the depth of this experience is likely to be rather limited. Nevertheless, the presence of practical experience among students can serve as a fruitful resource to intelligently analyze and question ARM principles and practices, as well as to provide a base from which students can relate their own work experiences directly to classroom subject matter.

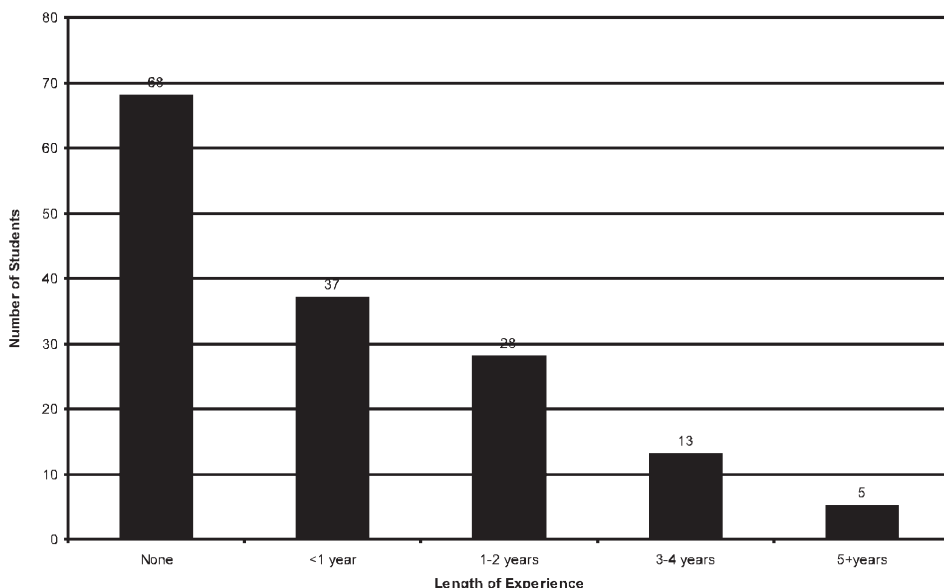


FIGURE 2. Prior ARM Work Experience

4. How Respondents Found Out About the ARM Profession

Part of understanding our ARM graduate student population is obtaining a sense of the routes by which they arrived at the ARM profession. One aspect of this issue is determining just exactly how they learned of the existence of the ARM profession. Figure 3 provides a distribution of the various avenues by which the survey respondents found out about the ARM profession.

Nearly 40% (60) of all respondents claim to have discovered the ARM profession while in school. This answer far outstrips all other responses. Other effective means through which ARM graduate students learn about the profession include personal contact (19% or 29 individuals), prior work experience (18% or 27 individuals) and, to a lesser extent, professional literature (9% or 14 individuals). Less effective means for discovering the ARM profession include the World Wide Web (6% or 9 students), the mass media (2% or 3 students), and career counseling (1% or 2 people).

5. How Respondents Found Out About the Program They Enrolled In

Nearly half (46% or 67 students) of survey respondents indicated that they found out about the ARM graduate education program they are currently

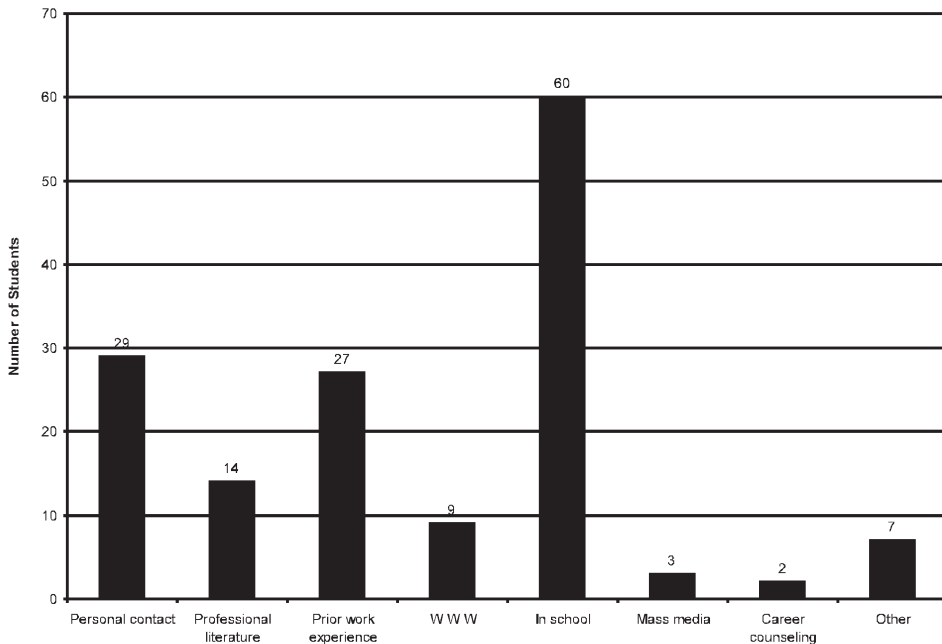


FIGURE 3. How Respondents Found Out About the ARM Profession

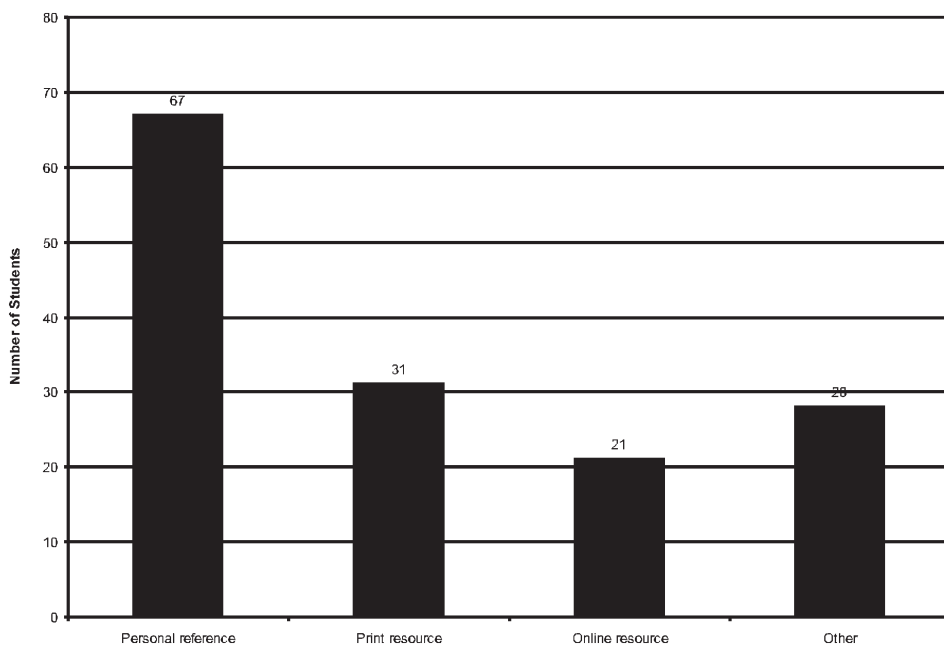


FIGURE 4. How Respondents Found Out About the Program They Enrolled In

enrolled in via a personal reference. The value of personal references exceeds the total for both print (21% or 31 students) and on-line resources (14% or 21 students) combined. What is noteworthy here is that the importance of materials that ARM graduate educators have some control over—print and on-line resources about their programs—does not match the importance of a factor they have little direct control over—personal references about their programs.

In regard to the types of print resources that ARM graduate students have used to find out about the program they eventually enrolled in, program literature—such as school and department guides, calendars, catalogs—were the most prominently employed. Professional directories such as the Society of American Archivists *Directory of Archival Education Programs* and the American Library Association’s *Directory of Accredited LIS Master’s Programs*, appear to have limited impact in informing prospective students about ARM educational programs. As for on-line resources, school websites were the most common means by which prospective students learned about the program they eventually enrolled in. Given the expected computer literacy of future applicants and the increasing role of the World Wide Web as a first source of information, ARM program websites are likely to take on an increasingly important recruiting role in future years. Beyond school websites, both the ALA and SAA organizational websites were occasionally noted by respondents as on-line sources of information about their programs.

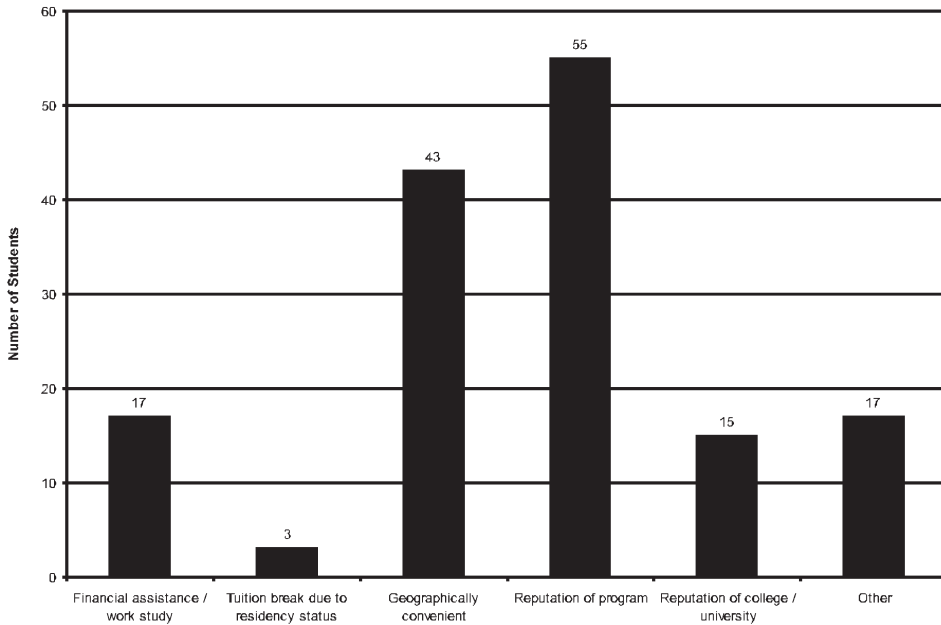


FIGURE 5. Main Reason Respondents Chose the Program They Enrolled In

6. Main Reason Respondents Chose the Program They Enrolled In

Two reasons clearly stand out as the primary reasons ARM graduate students chose to enroll in the program they did: reputation of the program (37% or 55 survey respondents) and geographic convenience (29% or 43 students). These two answers account for two-third of all responses.⁴ Less common reasons include incentives, such as financial assistance or work study opportunities (11% or 17 students) and the reputation of the institution the program is situated within (10% or 15 students). Tuition reductions as a consequence of residency status (for public universities) appear to have almost no impact at all (a mere 2% or 3 students) in facilitating decisions to attend one program over another (see Figure 5.)

7.a Desired Employment Upon Graduation

This question sought to broadly gauge the desired career paths of survey respondents, focusing primarily on whether respondents desired careers as

⁴ One anonymous reviewer of this paper astutely wondered if “program reputation is a kind of ex post facto judgment on the part of respondents, a kind of loyalty to their own program or a reassurance that their program is a good one.”

archivists or records managers. Figure 6 shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents prefer archival careers (62% or 95 students) over careers as records managers (4% or 6 respondents), indicating that, while the two fields are inextricably linked together, records management fares less well as a desirable career path than does archives.

However, 18% (27) of respondents—nearly one-fifth of the total—had not yet determined a career track preference along the above lines. It is unclear whether these graduate ARM students just do not have clear career goals or whether they see many career possibilities but remain uncertain as to which to choose. Fifteen percent (23) of respondents indicated other career paths. Of these, approximately one-third expressed interest in pursuing careers as historians. Other careers specified by respondents include: librarianship of various types (special collection, rare book, manuscript, digital, reference, etc.), and emerging professional careers such as knowledge managers and ARM faculty.

7.b Preferred Job Area/Title

This question sought to obtain a more specific sense of the actual work positions desired by ARM graduate students. Slightly over a quarter of all

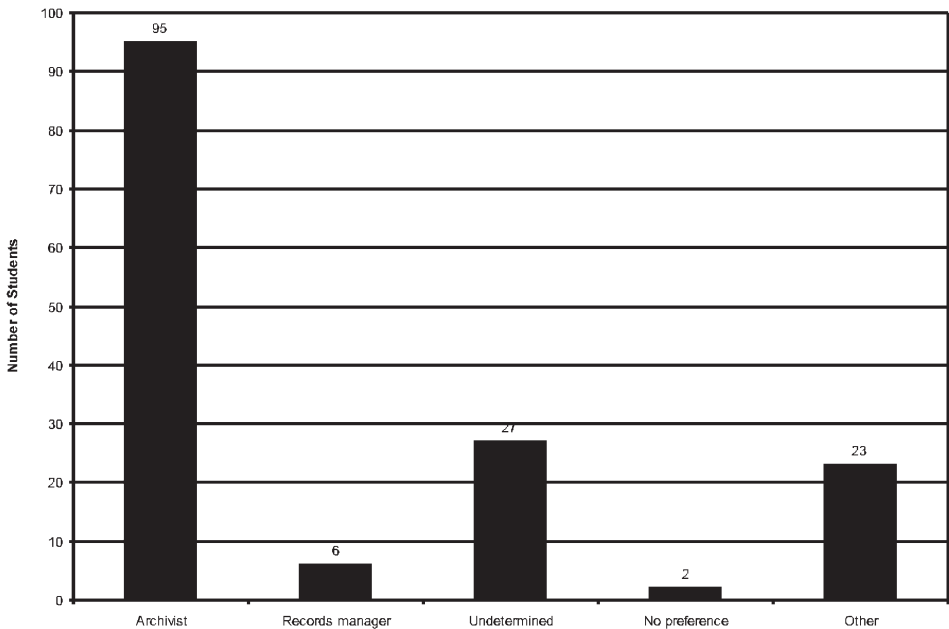


FIGURE 6. Desired Employment Upon Graduation

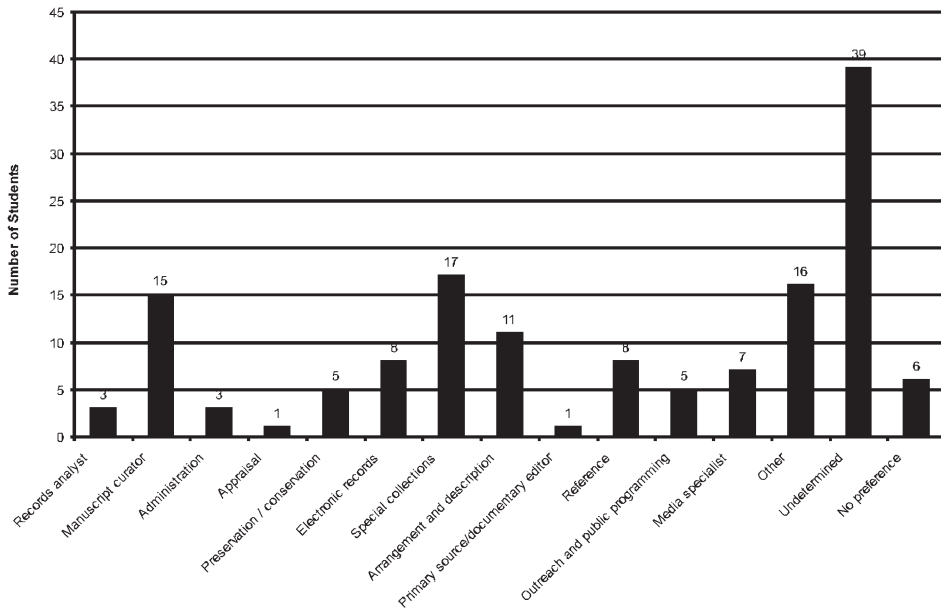


FIGURE 7. Preferred Job Area/Title

respondents (27% or 39 students) indicated that they had not yet determined any preferences for a specific job area or title (see Figure 7).

Of those job areas/titles that were identified, traditional career paths such as special collections (12% or 17 students), manuscript curator (10% or 15 students), and arrangement and description (8% or 11 students) were the most prominent. Other careers that counted for between 3–6% of responses, representing between 5 and 8 individuals each, include preservation/conservation, electronic records, reference, outreach and public programming, and media specialists (primarily film and video). Practically non-existent were students desiring careers in records analysis, administration, appraisal, and documentary editing.

8. Sectors Respondents Want to Work in After Graduation

This question sought to broadly determine respondents' employment preferences by asking in which sector of the economy they would like to build their careers and the results are presented in Figure 8. Just over one-third (37% or 56) of the respondents indicated that they would like to find employment in the cultural heritage/fine arts sector upon graduation. This preference powerfully exceeds interests in all other sectors. Nearly one-fifth (roughly 18% or 27) of respondents indicated that they would like to obtain work in the education sector upon graduation, making education the second choice among

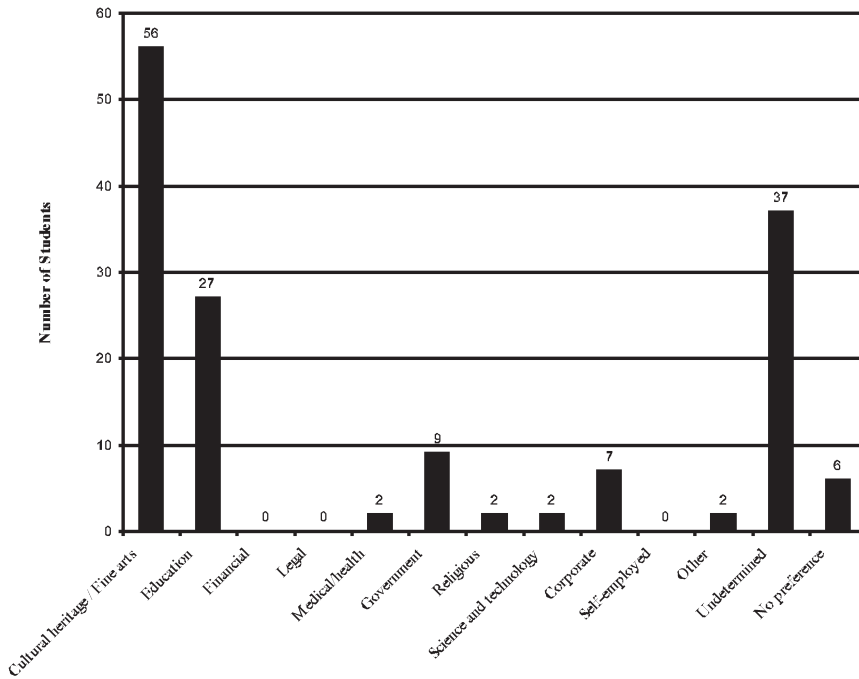


FIGURE 8. Respondents Who Want to Work in the Following Sectors after Graduation

employment sectors. As with the previous two questions, a substantial number of respondents (some 27% or 37 students) indicated that they had not yet made up their minds as to where they desired to obtain employment after graduation.

Negligible responses were received for the following sectors: government (6% or 9 students), corporate (5% or 7 students), medical/health, religious, and science and technology (each accounting for 1% or 2 students). Interestingly, the sectors of law, finance, and self-employment did not receive any votes among the survey respondents.

9. Employment Time Commitment Sought After Graduation

Over 90% (137) of all respondents indicated that they would be searching for full-time work upon graduation. Four respondents said they would seek part-time employment and nine were undetermined. This is not at all surprising for professional schools that are training graduate students to enter a professional field of practice. This finding merely underscores what is likely common knowledge—that individuals enter graduate ARM education programs in order to develop true career tracks within this field. As such, they will normally seek full-time employment upon graduation.

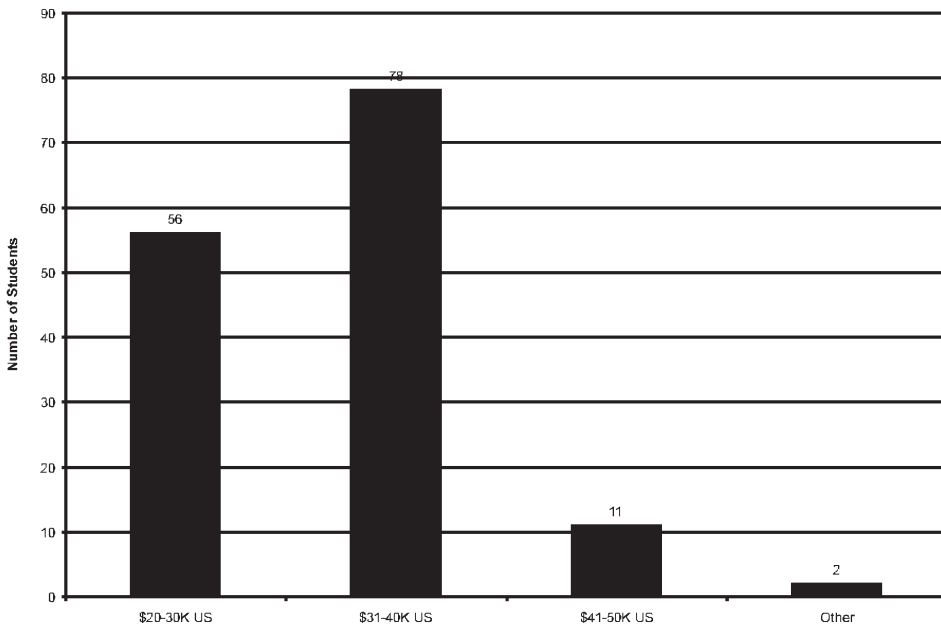


FIGURE 9. Salary Expectations Upon Graduation

10. Salary Expectations Upon Graduation

A majority of respondents (53% or 78 students) stated that they expect to earn between \$31,000–\$40,000 (U.S.) upon entering the ARM job market. Another 38% (56 students) expect to earn between \$20,000–\$30,000 (U.S.), and only a slim 7% (11 students) expect to earn above \$41,000 (U.S.) once they obtain their masters degree (see Figure 9). These salary preferences appear to be roughly comparable to offerings in the current ARM job market for entering professionals. Hence, there is not a strong disconnect between what graduate student expectations are and what the job market is currently offering newly minted graduates.

11. Willingness to Relocate

Nearly two-thirds (approximately 65% or 98) of the respondents expressed a willingness to physically relocate in order to obtain the ARM employment they desire. This portends well for ARM employers who have positions they wish to fill, as this finding indicates that a vast majority of graduate ARM students do not have strong geographic constraints on them as they enter the profession.

12. Possible Interest in ARM Doctoral studies

Finally, the survey also sought to determine the level of interest ARM master's students have for pursuing a doctoral degree within the ARM area. While roughly half of the respondents indicated that they are not interested, the other

half stated, in equal parts, that they are either indeed interested (25% or 37 students) in ARM doctoral research or are unsure (25% or 38 students) at this time. This finding would seem to indicate that the recent trend towards ARM doctoral research will continue to expand, and ARM faculty with doctoral level ARM programs should be keenly aware of this heightened interest in the field at the doctoral level and should adjust their recruitment practices accordingly.

Conclusions

The driving rationale for the survey was the realization that there existed no good baseline summary data on ARM graduate students' backgrounds or career aspirations and expectations. To overcome this gap, this survey developed some preliminary data along these lines. It is hoped that this initial survey will stimulate ARM educators to collect and use non-personally-identifiable data from their ARM graduate student populations for program development and planning. The 152 ARM graduate student respondents from both the United States and Canada have provided a wealth of primary raw data for understanding who pursues ARM graduate studies and what their career ambitions are.

Results compiled from these 152 respondents from ten graduate ARM programs indicates the following:

- While history continues to be the most prominent type of undergraduate degree held by graduate ARM students, relatively strong representations were found for degrees in other social sciences, languages and literature, and the humanities.
- Roughly one third of respondents enter graduate ARM education programs with either a master's or a Ph.D. already in hand or were actively pursuing a second master's while obtaining their ARM master's.
- Half of all respondents enter their program with no prior ARM work experience; the other half have at least some direct ARM work experience ranging from less than a year to more than five years, though only a slim portion have more than two years experience.
- Nearly 40 percent of all respondents claim to have discovered the ARM profession while in school—a response which far outstripped all other possible responses. Other effective means through which ARM graduate students learn about the profession include personal contact, prior work experience, and, to a lesser extent, professional literature. Less effective means for discovering the ARM profession include the World Wide Web, the mass media, and career counseling.
- Nearly half of survey respondents pointed out that a personal reference informed them about the ARM graduate education program they eventually enrolled in. The value derived for personal references exceeds the combined total for both print and on-line resources.

- Program reputation and geographic convenience were the two most important factors considered by prospective graduate students in selecting an ARM program.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated career preferences within the field of archives; very few indicated any interest in records management careers.
- Respondents identified traditional ARM career paths such as special collections, manuscript curatorship, and arrangement and description as the most desired employment tracks. Minimal interest was expressed for career tracks in preservation/conservation, electronic records, reference, outreach and public programming, and media specialization (i.e. film or video curatorship).
- Cultural heritage/fine arts and education are the two most desirable employment sectors identified by respondents. Respondents expressed negligible or no interest in working in the following sectors: government, corporate, medical/health, religious, science and technology, law, and, finance.
- Over 90 percent of all respondents indicated that they would be searching for full-time work upon graduation.
- A majority of respondents expect to earn between \$31,000–\$40,000 (U.S.) upon entering the ARM job market. Most others expect to earn between \$20,000–\$30,000 (U.S.), and only a small minority expects to earn over \$40,000 (U.S.) right after graduation.
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents are willing to physically relocate in order to obtain the ARM employment they desire.
- While roughly half of the respondents are not interested in pursuing doctoral level studies in ARM, the other half stated, in equal parts, that they are either indeed interested in ARM doctoral research or remain unsure at this point in time.

While this survey provides some sense of who graduate ARM students are and what their career aspirations are, it should be seen only as an initial survey into the collective body of ARM students across the United States and Canada. While the number of respondents is not insubstantial, it is by no means comprehensive. Any future surveys into the ARM student body in North America should seek to extend the return rates achieved here.

Appendix: Survey of Archives and Records Management Students

The purpose of this survey is to collect non-personally-identifiable data in order to profile the body of archives and records management students currently enrolled in graduate archival education programs across the U.S. and Canada. Please be advised that no linking of responses to respondents will be attempted.

7.b. **More specifically, my preferred job area/title is:**

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Records Analyst | Arrangement and Description |
| Manuscripts Curator | Primary Source/Documentary Editor |
| Administration | Reference |
| Appraisal | Outreach and Public Programming |
| Preservation/Conservation | |
| Media Specialist (please specify) | _____ |
| Electronic Records | Other (please specify) _____ |
| Special Collections | Undetermined |
| | No Preference |

8. **When I graduate I want to work in the following sector:**

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Cultural Heritage/Fine Arts | Science and Technology |
| Education | Corporate |
| Financial | Self-Employed |
| Legal | Other (please specify): _____ |
| Medical/Health | Undetermined |
| Government | No Preference |
| Religious | |

9. **I will be seeking (circle one) employment upon graduation**

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| Full-time | Part-time | Undetermined |
|-----------|-----------|--------------|

10. **My salary expectations immediately after graduation are: (circle one, please use or convert all figures to U.S. dollars)**

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| U.S. \$ 20,000 – 30,000 | U.S. \$ 31,000 – 40,000 |
| U.S. \$ 41,000 – 50,000 | Other: (please specify in US \$) _____ |

11. **I am willing to relocate when I graduate in order to obtain the job I want: (circle one)**

- | | | |
|-----|----|----------|
| Yes | No | Not sure |
|-----|----|----------|

12. **I believe that at some point in the future I might be interested in pursuing Ph.D. studies in archives and records management: (circle one)**

- | | | |
|-----|----|----------|
| Yes | No | Not sure |
|-----|----|----------|