

Leadership and Administration of Successful Archival Programs

EDITED BY
Bruce W. Dearslyne

THE GREENWOOD-LIBRARY MANAGEMENT COLLECTION

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LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION OF SUCCESSFUL ARCHIVAL PROGRAMS

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Introduction

This is a book about program building—leadership, planning, administration, and strategic approaches used by dynamic, successful archival programs. Through a series of essays by people marked by excellence in program administration and professional attainment, the book explores what it takes to overcome the challenges of limited resources, changing user expectations, changing formats, and other factors, and to make archival programs succeed. The archival literature has little coverage of leadership issues; this book is intended to provide guidance on exemplary practices and programs.

The articles provide varying perspectives, insights, advice, caveats, and other helpful information based on the experiences of people who have actually developed and administered successful programs.

Richard Cox discusses the role of archival education in preparing leaders of archival programs. Frank Burke's article explores several themes of supervision and leadership. Larry Hackman explores the factors that account for strong, successful programs. Liisa Fagerlund brings an international perspective and shows the need to tailor leadership style to fit institutional realities. Michael Kurtz explores strategic planning at the National Archives and Records Administration. Phil Mooney explains what is required to operate a business archives successfully. Lauren Brown dis-

cusses administrative approaches that are needed for a university archives/manuscripts program. My first article attempts to summarize the traits of successful programs and to analyze leadership skills. My concluding article in the book offers additional insights and documents that illustrate successful, innovative approaches to building strong programs.

Several themes come through in the chapters in the book. The leadership role of the program director is critical in shaping the program and determining its direction and success. The authors exemplify varying leadership styles, but each one was appropriate for the setting and the times where he or she operated. The authors make clear that considerable energy and commitment are required for successful program leadership. Programs need to be customized to fit their settings and to reinforce the objectives of their parent institutions. Successful programs seem to keep on the move, growing and expanding as needs change and opportunities emerge. The essays show the need to balance consistency and continuity with adaptiveness and versatility. Program building and development seems to require, or call forth, a different set of skills than administration or management of a program that is relatively placid and not changing. Education plays an important role in the preparation of archival leadership. The skills and approaches reflected in the essays are similar in many ways to those needed for successful leadership in other settings such as business and government.

I am grateful to the authors of these chapters for sharing their insights and perspectives.

I am also very grateful to Jane Garry, our editor at Greenwood Press, for her advice and guidance as the book was under development.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Susan, for working with me in editing the manuscript and for indexing the book. For nearly thirty years, Susan has been my partner in research and writing, and I am very grateful for her patience, support, and work.

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College Park, Maryland*

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Leadership and Archival Education

Richard J. Cox

INTRODUCTION

If the quality of leadership in the archival field depends on the availability of individuals who rise to become leaders (which it does), then an important question is—where do these leaders come from? I hold to a simple premise that leaders are made, not born, although giving individuals with leadership qualities the opportunity to develop and use them is the critical matter. Holding to such a belief suggests other questions: How are they made? Do leaders emerge from within the ranks of the field, based on a peculiar mix of education, experiences, and personal traits? Do special challenges create circumstances making new leaders?

This chapter explores one aspect of the making of archival leaders, the relationship of education to leadership. Does the educational background of archivists contribute to their emergence as leaders? What does the obvious recent growth in graduate archival education have to do with the question of leadership within the field? Are archival educational programs, any or all, self-consciously trying to train leaders for the future? These are questions not really considered before because of the previously limited nature of archival education. Now, with a growing corps of full-time, regular faculty teaching archival studies and separate master's degrees and expanded curriculum, such issues are worth considering. The chapter also considers

another aspect of archival leadership. What are the leadership responsibilities of this new professional, the archival educator? As is obvious from this chapter, the answers are not yet clear and reflect the fact that our educational programs are still in a transition stage somewhere between apprenticeship and fully developed graduate programs.

ARCHIVAL EDUCATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF LEADERS

If we were writing this book several decades ago, it is doubtful that we might even have considered archival education as a part of leadership. Despite considerable attention by our professional associations to matters like mission and planning, these associations seemed to assume that leaders were available and suggested little of a role for education (except to educate policy makers and the public about the nature and importance of archives, archivists, and archival work). Until the beginning of substantial changes in the educational infrastructure in the mid 1980s, the archival profession focused on short-term training in basic work while its associations stressed long-term planning. Apprenticeships, workshops, institutes, and the traditional three course sequence often taught by adjuncts provided little opportunity to consider matters of leadership or broader professional issues and trends since the focus was on short-term training. The limitations of these earlier educational programs may explain why professional associations like the Society of American Archivists did not naturally think of them as sources for individuals to lead the profession into the future.¹

This older educational model turned out excellent practitioners, with its bench-like focus on archival work. There is certainly no question that from this approach emerged some future leaders (although they often had to gain the broader perspective needed for leadership by immersion into the field).² As far as leadership is concerned, the emphasis then seemed to be on leaders being born, or at least developing from innate traits and other interests and incidents. While certain aspects of the archival field, like bench conservation, require very traditional apprenticeships because of the nature of the work involved, it is obvious that training of this sort is severely handicapped in turning out individuals who would want to assume leadership roles with views much broader than the individual objects they work on in their repositories.³ This old approach can nurture skills and attitudes, including a substantial socialization to the field. But it is limited, not addressing the needs to contribute to professional knowledge, resolve ever-changing challenges such as those posed by technologies, or prepare practitioners to deal with unanticipated future consequences of changing

recordkeeping practices. If a person happens to connect with a dynamic leader, either early in the career or even while they are in the classroom, then such limitations might be counterbalanced.⁴

We have some notable instances of individuals who became leaders in the field being mentored by archival leaders who were also teaching as adjuncts. F. Gerald Ham's teaching at the University of Wisconsin at Madison while State Archivist is one example, at least partly attributable to Ham's interest in change in the profession as exemplified by his writings on appraisal and collecting.⁵ We continually run across professional leaders who were mentored by Ham through the courses he taught.⁶ This perhaps suggests that the mentoring role, in the old days or the present, is one way in which educators play a role in developing future archival leaders. Individuals in the courses taught by educators are certainly influenced by perspectives presented by these teachers within the classroom (no matter how careful we are in trying to present differing viewpoints and introducing students to the many debates within the field), through closer interaction in research and writing papers for these courses, and in subsequent relationships maintained in the years after graduation. Still, the old "lone arranger" model, with the expectation that most graduates of these old and present programs will go out and work as the solitary professional and do everything, puts pressure on trying to orient students new to the field to all functions and responsibilities.⁷ This diverts attention away from examining in the classroom the critical responsibilities of leadership within the field or any expectation that these students when they graduate may assume leadership responsibilities within a particular organization.

Under the old model of archival training, the birthing of leaders would have to be an accidental process, depending on a fortuitous attraction of the right individuals to the profession and to the right part of the discipline whereby these individuals could get to meetings, assume professional positions, develop networks, become known, and demonstrate a capacity for leadership. In other words, except for what might happen between a student with leadership qualities and interests and their teacher, people coming through these earlier education programs just figured out the business of leadership on their own (or they ignored it). The focus of these earlier programs was on basic archival functions, as you would expect from apprenticeship. Could the expansion of graduate archival education, as has occurred in the past two decades, perhaps make the process of identifying and developing professional leaders less of an accidental process? It is worth some consideration.

For the past twenty years we have witnessed the development of multiple course curriculum far exceeding the old three-course model (that was

really just two courses and fieldwork) along with the emergence of a substantial regular faculty (including in a small number of places multiple faculty). Slower to develop has been separate master's degree programs, but there is some evidence to suggest that this might be about to change as well.⁸ The sheer act of growing such education programs should cause us to reflect on what graduate education supports, what must be taught, and (most importantly for this present chapter) the purpose of what such programs serve. After all, the internal expansion of these programs provides a much greater opportunity for teaching about certain matters than just a few courses would allow. But the expanded programs may have been swallowed up by bigger challenges to deal with, such as technologies (just as the information technology courses pushed out or reformed older emphases such as the history of books and printing) and the preparation of students for the widest range of archival positions (including non-archival positions with the potential for influencing archival work). Moreover, because of the lack of separate degrees, much of the expansion of the program has been directed to building connections with library and information science schools or history departments, and this may have provided a more limited opportunity than what it seems we now have before us.

Some archival educators are recognizing that their graduates may assume non-traditional archival positions but with implications for archival work. Most commonly, graduates may be accepting records management positions. But it is likely we will also see graduates accepting positions with a focus on information resources management, knowledge management, policy, and digital libraries or digital resources management. Archival educators spend an increasing amount of attention weaving these connections, and since some of these areas are relatively new and changing quickly this may challenge educators to put more attention on the use of information technologies and related matters that are vital to these kinds of positions rather than focusing on other topics like management or leadership. The expansion of graduate archival education programs may subsume more new materials, approaches, and responsibilities than we really imagined at any point in the past two decades of this educational growth and change.⁹

In this expansion both of graduate archival programs and the breadth of programs and organizations their graduates might work in, there may be some indirect possibilities for dealing with leadership. In order to demonstrate that archives and archivists are relevant to other fields relating to information and evidence, they will need to describe the value of records and the value of archivists in a manner in which this might be more easily understood by others. Archival educators, in addition to introducing students to the basic knowledge and practices of the field, also take on a heavy re-

sponsibility for teaching about advocacy.¹⁰ At the least, given that there is some backlash within the field and within the public sphere over traditional curatorial and cultural roles and their loss, the archival educator will find him or herself considering the matter of how archivists can balance traditional, new, and emerging roles and responsibilities. From my vantage, this means considering some matters of leadership, some of which may be quite new. Whether this can really be taught is, however, another matter both because of the broader pedagogical issues and more mundane matters related to archival education.

Some of the mundane matters can be seen in the inner construction of a single program. When I first arrived at the University of Pittsburgh in 1988 my focus was on course content, the result of having moved from the practitioners' ranks and then needing to turn experience and knowledge into systematic courses. As anyone who has done this knows, making such a move can be both a tedious and time-consuming process. However, the emphasis shifted somewhat from course content as I gained experience in teaching and building a program. This was the result of many factors, including the need to explain what a graduate archival education program included to my non-archivist colleagues and archivists along with the recognition of opportunities to have flexibility within my school for building a graduate program. Building such programs is largely an internal process (although it is one that would be helped by having stronger professional standards and advocates from the outside) of building support, fabricating alliances, and making cogent arguments.¹¹ In other words, the process of building graduate archival programs is one that is somewhat a leadership process in its own right within a complex and rapidly changing structure of higher education.

While building a program seems to be a process that never ends, doing this leads to a series of questions about what the program represents. For myself, I resolved that my primary purpose is to make my students experts about records and recordkeeping systems, giving them a set of tools for working in a variety of institutional settings, serving diverse constituencies, and facing diverse and continuously more complex records issues ranging from technologies to matters like privacy and access. This did not happen overnight, but it was part of a process of observation about needed changes within the field, a market for our graduates, research about electronic records management, reading, and discussions with an ever-changing group of students. Some within the field criticize such a records centered approach as being more akin to what is represented by a related field—namely records management. In this, I admit that I firmly believe that archives and records management to be inextricably linked (at least in

the organizational sense), and this is based on both previous professional experience and my own searching for ways to present the knowledge about archives and records in a logical, coherent fashion. Individual archival educators develop particular frames of reference for teaching, something akin to a leadership role in that faculty lead students (although I prefer to present conflicting viewpoints for students to grapple with)¹² through complicated and controversial issues, case studies, and other concerns stemming from a field that must have a fluid approach to new technologies creating and sustaining records.

Focusing on making these students experts leads to another series of questions. Am I merely equipping these individuals to assume entry-level positions or preparing them to do something else? The impetus for such questions was mostly due to the fact that my emphasis on records and recordkeeping systems was not necessarily the normal or traditional manner in which archivists viewed themselves. Many archivists stress the cultural value of archives, which is quite important (and, I might add of great interest to me), but it is problematic whether this cultural value has been stressed in quite the coherent fashion it needs to function in the modern digital era. The self-image and public profile of archivists remain confused.¹³ These images range from historians working as archivists to serve other historians to much broader roles of protecting records for evidence and accountability purposes. In between these two very different perspectives, we find archivists who view themselves as custodians, curators, technicians, policy makers, and in other ways. Is one more appropriate than another? Do they change from institutional setting to another? Grappling with these different roles also relates to another leadership issue, one encompassing focusing on complex and sometimes contradictory professional, personal, and organizational missions. Archival educators, as they teach, discuss the business of making choices, discerning how and when to present one aspect of the mission rather than another.

Trying to situate my program to turn out records experts was another way of equipping individuals to become leaders in organizational and professional change. The students do not focus on immutable notions of archival work, but they learn principles and approaches hopefully enabling them to manage records with archival value in systems constantly undergoing transformation. Moreover, the students learn about the necessity of communicating their principles within organizations and society with those who may not understand and may not share the importance of records and archives. Integrating field experiences that students are participating in as part of their graduate program is another means for students to question and probe how archivists should function as leaders within their

organizations. Whether I am succeeding or not is a question that becomes very difficult to answer and sits at the heart of a dilemma facing individuals serving as professors in professional schools in universities. Such faculty often have very conflicted roles between serving the traditional role of scholars, researchers, and educators and having to relate to and serve the interests of a field devoted to often very pragmatic responsibilities.¹⁴

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ABOUT CHALLENGES IN LEADERSHIP AND ARCHIVAL EDUCATION

There are many challenges working against weaving leadership within the archives curriculum. Not every student coming into an archives education program wants to be a leader. A study of personality types a few years ago suggests what many of us have long suspected, many are still attracted to the field because they see it as a kind of monastic refuge.¹⁵ My own personal experience in reading letters of reference often suggests this as well, whereby individuals comment on applicants' social dysfunctions, and then indicate that they have the perfect disposition to do the work of an archivist. This is made more difficult by the diversity of students we attract into our educational programs. We have diversity primarily from educational backgrounds and age, and this often suggests an equally disparate set of personal career objectives. Many are still coming into the field because of second or third career choices, and trying to mold such individuals into leaders for the archives field seems to be a tough road to travel. They are often more interested in just making a change, not in changing the profession or public perceptions about it.

Then we have the daunting task of thinking about turning these individuals into professional leaders by inviting them into already crowded one-or two-year programs. Programs are already stretched with courses educating students in basic principles, theory, and methodologies of the archival field, and by our attempts with socializing students to the field by providing them both a historical orientation and assessment of current issues and concerns. Much of the time is already committed to grounding students into archival science, records and recordkeeping systems, and methodologies and practices of the profession. Moreover, many employers want archival education programs to do everything. They want instant, fully equipped experts emanating from the programs. They want new experts on electronic records and automated descriptive standards. The employers often want subject experts, at least for the specialized repositories. They also want managers, often placing even entry-level archivists in reasonably complex positions where they deal with the public and supervise

volunteers and technicians. Can we really add leadership as one more objective to this list?

Perhaps the greatest challenge is wrestling with the notion whether leadership can be taught at all. Educator V. A. Howard notes, “Leadership, like creativity or human potential, is not a scientific concept. It belongs in ordinary discourse about practical affairs and achievements and failures.”¹⁶ Howard acknowledges that we can teach about leaders or the strategies or skills used in certain situations, but he disagrees that it can be taught as a “how-to” or “procedural” subject: “While it cannot be taught directly, it can be learned depending upon the interpretive abilities and practical opportunities of the learner given everything that has been taught.”¹⁷ Maybe we should consider more about this basic pedagogical issue before worrying about whether leadership is an essential topic in graduate archival education programs?

ARCHIVAL EDUCATION, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND LEADERSHIP STUDIES

How does the current state of higher education and its interest in “leadership studies” relate to the role of archival education programs and our broader question of the relationship of education to leadership? All over higher education, courses and programs in “leadership studies” have been established and are being developed, part of what has been termed the “leadership industry,” deriving from concern in the corporate world for leadership. Self-help books, seminars, institutes, and college and university leadership programs are all part of this industry.¹⁸ These programs come in all shapes and sizes. In late 1998, it was estimated that there were nearly 700 leadership-development programs at American academic institutions, a doubling from four years before, and a year later the number had risen to 800.¹⁹

The development of leadership programs in higher education has been meteoric. The first bachelor’s degree in leadership only dates to 1992 and is located at the University of Richmond and others offer minors in leadership. One course stresses “ethics, multicultural diversity, communication skills, an understanding of people, and a knowledge of the leadership process,” offered in the firm belief that someone with certain attributes can be made a more effective leader by such training.²⁰ Wright State University offers a two-year program focusing on service and leading by persuasion, not coercion.²¹ The Eisenhower Leadership Development Program at Texas A&M University is an interdisciplinary, one-semester course for undergraduates, stressing “classroom instruction, various classroom exercises