Introduction and Survey Methodology

Introduction

Upon the dissolution of the University of Texas at Austin’s book and paper conservation training program, numerous discussions took place simultaneously amongst practicing library and archives conservators concerning the future of professional education for their future colleagues in their field.

In response to these discussions, the authors sought to gather information on the various training components practicing book and paper conservators felt were relevant to a successful career in library and archival settings.

In examining the variety of training avenues current practitioners travelled to gain their expertise and knowledge, the authors hoped to identify the most valuable educational and experiential aspects so they might be prioritized in the evolving future of conservation training.

Methodology

The authors designed a combination multiple-choice and open-ended question survey, which was posted on the Conservation Distribution Listserv, Bookarts-L listserv, and Preservation Administrators Discussion Group listserv in the spring of 2011. The anonymous survey was open for one month, from April 21 to May 20, 2011. Upon its close, the survey had received 145 viable respondents.

Survey Content

A total of 35 survey questions (some with multiple sub-parts) focused on the following areas:

- Educational Background and Training
- Professional Career and Current Responsibilities
- Role of Degree in Ability to Perform Job
- Contributions to the Field
- Professional Memberships

Results: Professional Career & Current Responsibilities

Percentage of respondents who had a traditional conservation apprenticeship to enter the field: 24.7%

Percentage of respondents who had a pre-professional job in the field of conservation before working as a professional: 56.2%

Average number of professional positions held by respondents to date, including post-professional internships and temporary positions: 3.2

Priority of job responsibilities in current position:

- Book binding...without one or the other, I would not be qualified to do... 2%
- Some/Little Need
- My MLS is only one piece of my educational background - it is important to my professional life, but so is my education in bookbinding...without one or the other, I would not be qualified to do my job. 10.3%
- Excerpts of open-ended responses regarding a need for an MLS degree:
- No Need
- As a bench conservator, I feel that there is very little need for a library degree. Of far greater importance is ensuring adequate bench-training and research skills for future generations of conservators.
- Some/Little Need
- My MLS is only one piece of my educational background - it is important to my professional life, but so is my education in bookbinding...without one or the other, I would not be qualified to do my job.
- I must strongly emphasize that it is wasted on a bench conservator...... it is essential for someone who plans to transition into more administrative positions within a library.

Conclusions and Next Steps

While respondents perceived a strong value in having an unqualified graduate degree for their current employment, 60% of those who did not have a MLS/MS degree said it would not be advantageous to their current position.

Open-ended question responses indicated a strong need for education to focus on building solid bench skills, and that preservation related knowledge could be gained on the job.

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