

Library and Archives Conservation Education Needs: Results of a Study of Current Practitioners

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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.

I. BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION
1. Did you complete an undergraduate degree in Conservation?
○ Yes
○ No, I received my undergraduate degree in the following area:
2. Did you complete one (or more) of the following graduate degrees to enter the field? (Check all that apply)
□ MLIS/MIS (or comparable degree)
□ MA
□ MS
□ MFA
□ PhD
□ Other
□ No graduate degree completed
2b. If you earned a graduate degree, in what year was your degree confirmed?
3. Did your graduate degree include a specialized focus in Conservation?
○ Yes
○ No
4. If yes, in which of the following areas was your focus? (Check all that apply)
□ Book and Paper

Example of the layout and first few questions of the online survey form

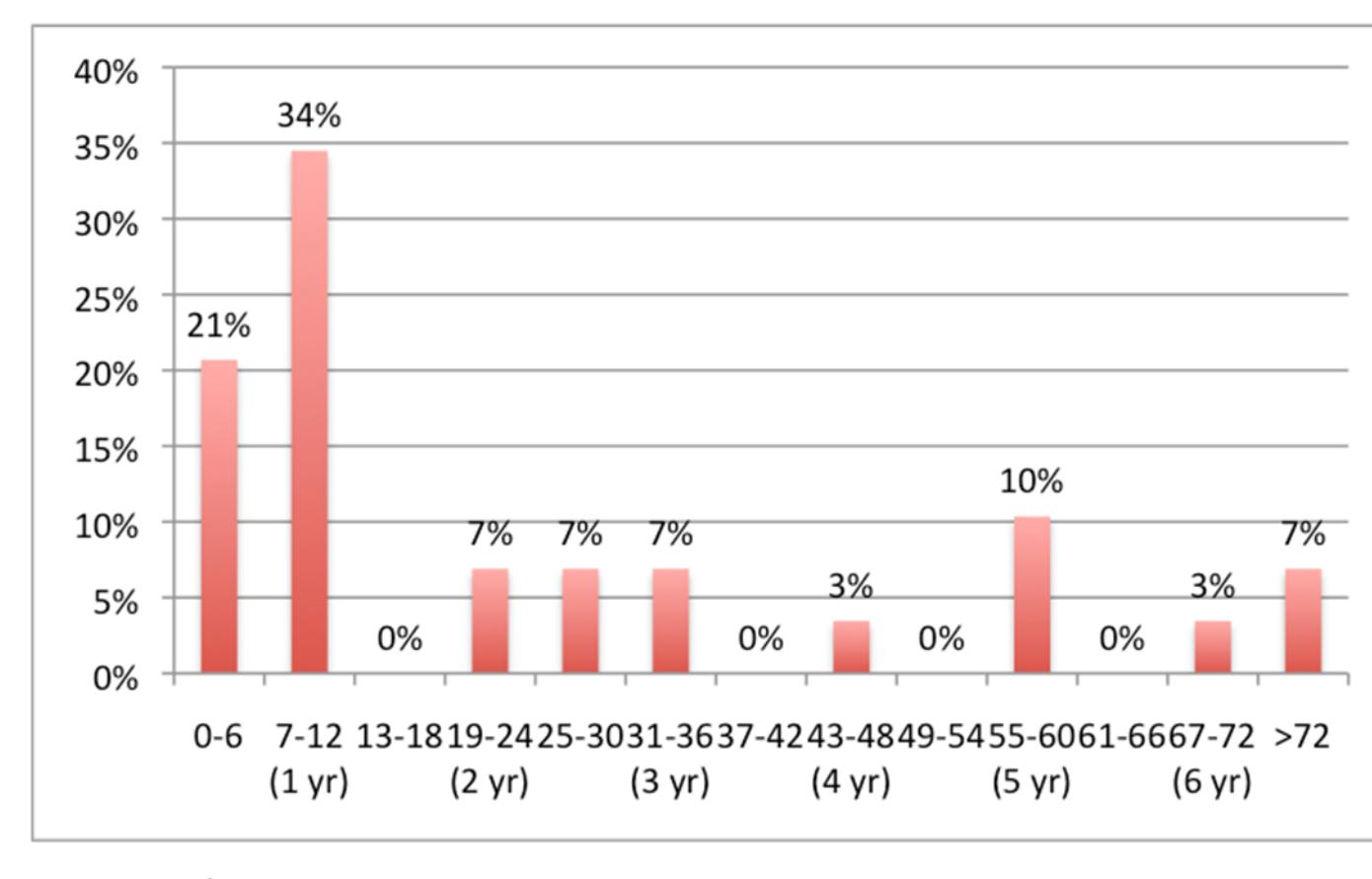
Survey Content

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 with graduate degrees who had:
• A pre-graduate internship: 39.4%
• A post-graduate internship, not as part of their training: 24.7%

Type of first professional appointment:

Grant funded: 17%

Fellowship: 10%

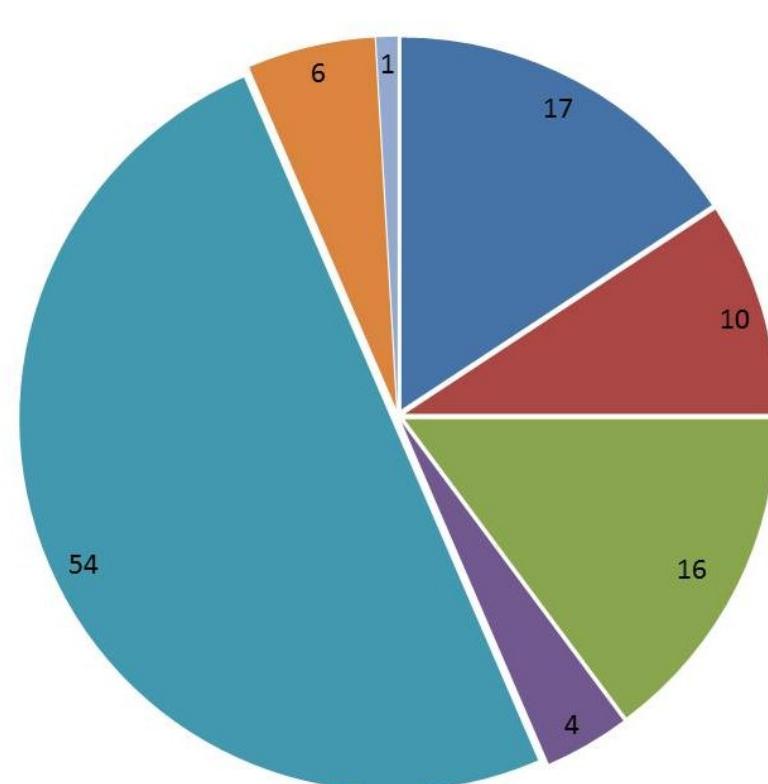
Contract: 16%

Part Time, Permanent: 4%

Full time, Permanent: 54%

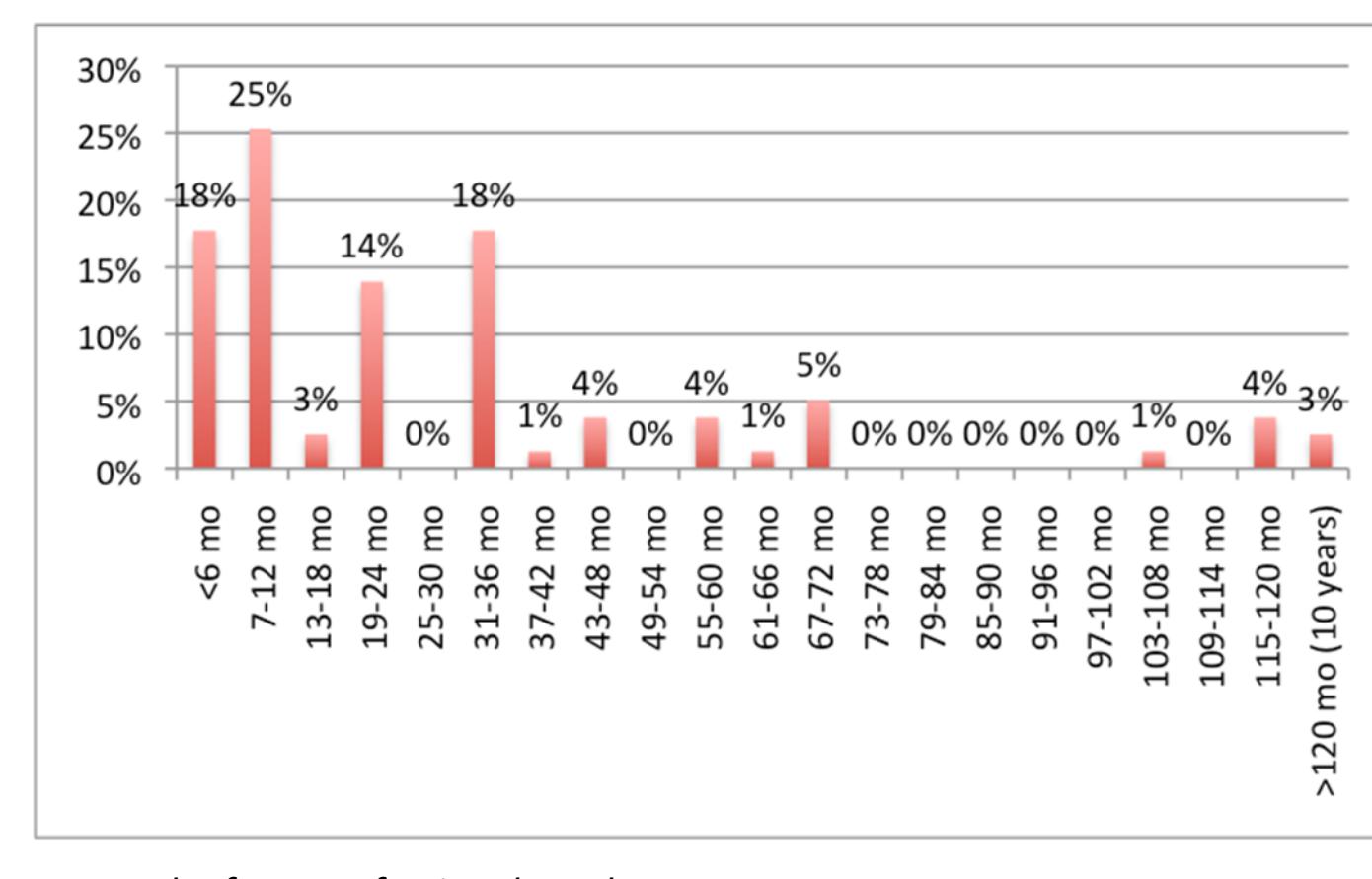
Private Practice: 6%

Other: 1%



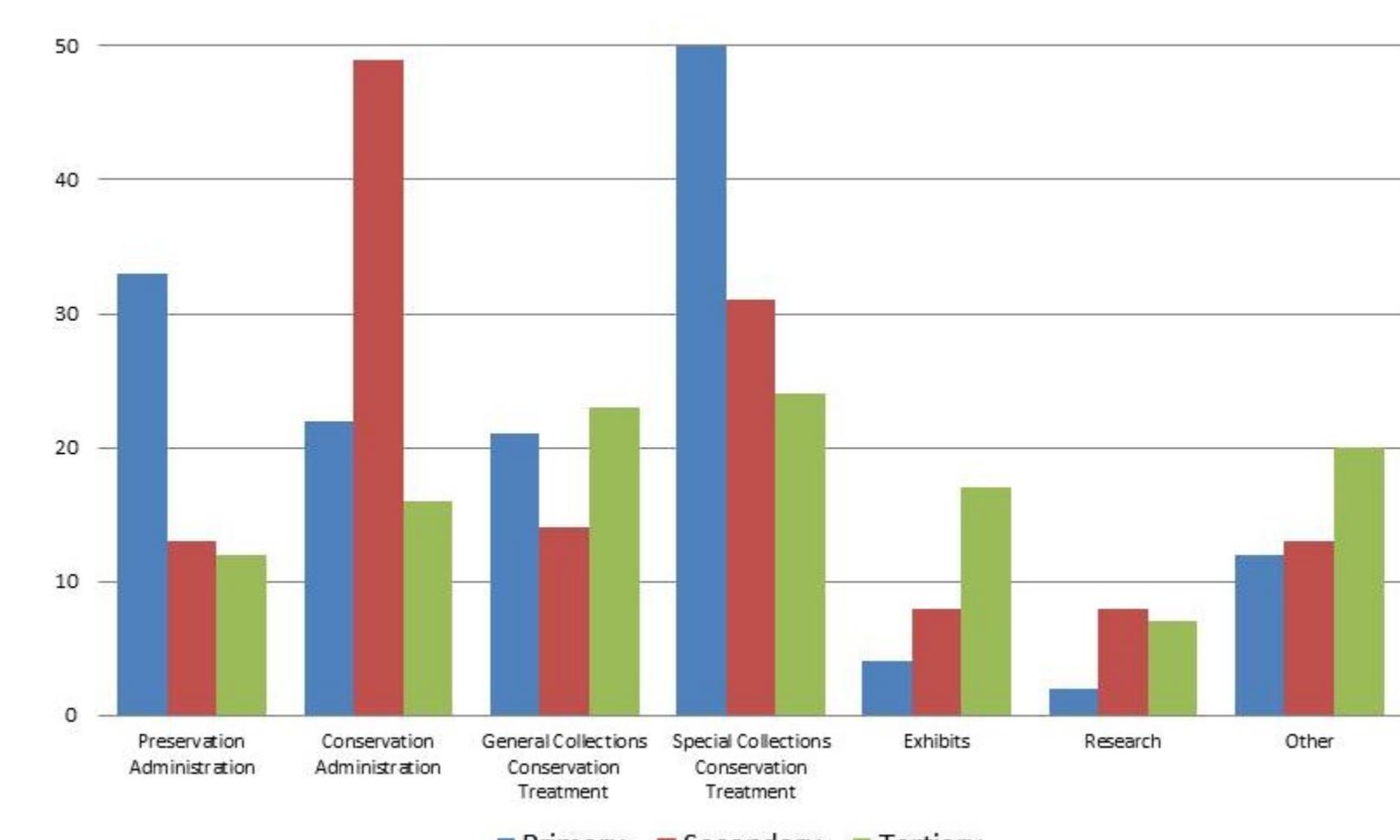
Average time in first professional position: 6.1 years

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-graduate internships and temporary positions: 3.2

Priority of job responsibilities in current position:



Undergraduate Education

Of the 145 respondents, 6.8% had completed an undergrad degree in conservation. The most popular other undergrad degrees were:

- Studio Art (20%)
- Art History (14%)
- English (9%)

77% of respondents were single majors
22% were double majors
1% were triple majors

Graduate Degrees Completed

MLIS/MIS (or comparable degree): 52.7%

MA: 26.0%

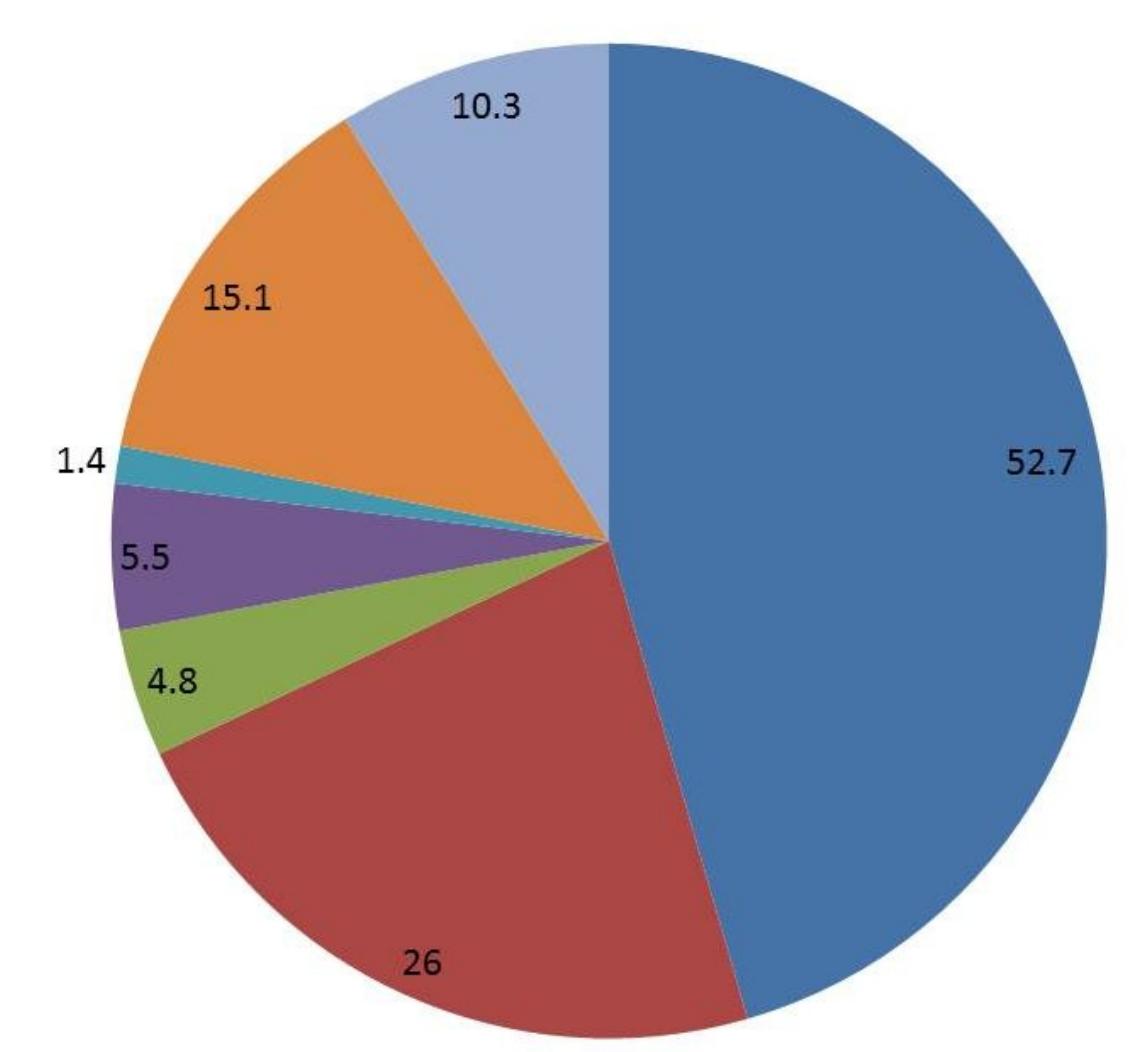
MS: 4.8%

MFA: 5.5%

PhD: 1.4%

Other Degree: 15.1%

No graduate degree completed: 10.3%



52.7% of respondents received graduate degrees with specialization in conservation, broken down into the following areas of concentration:

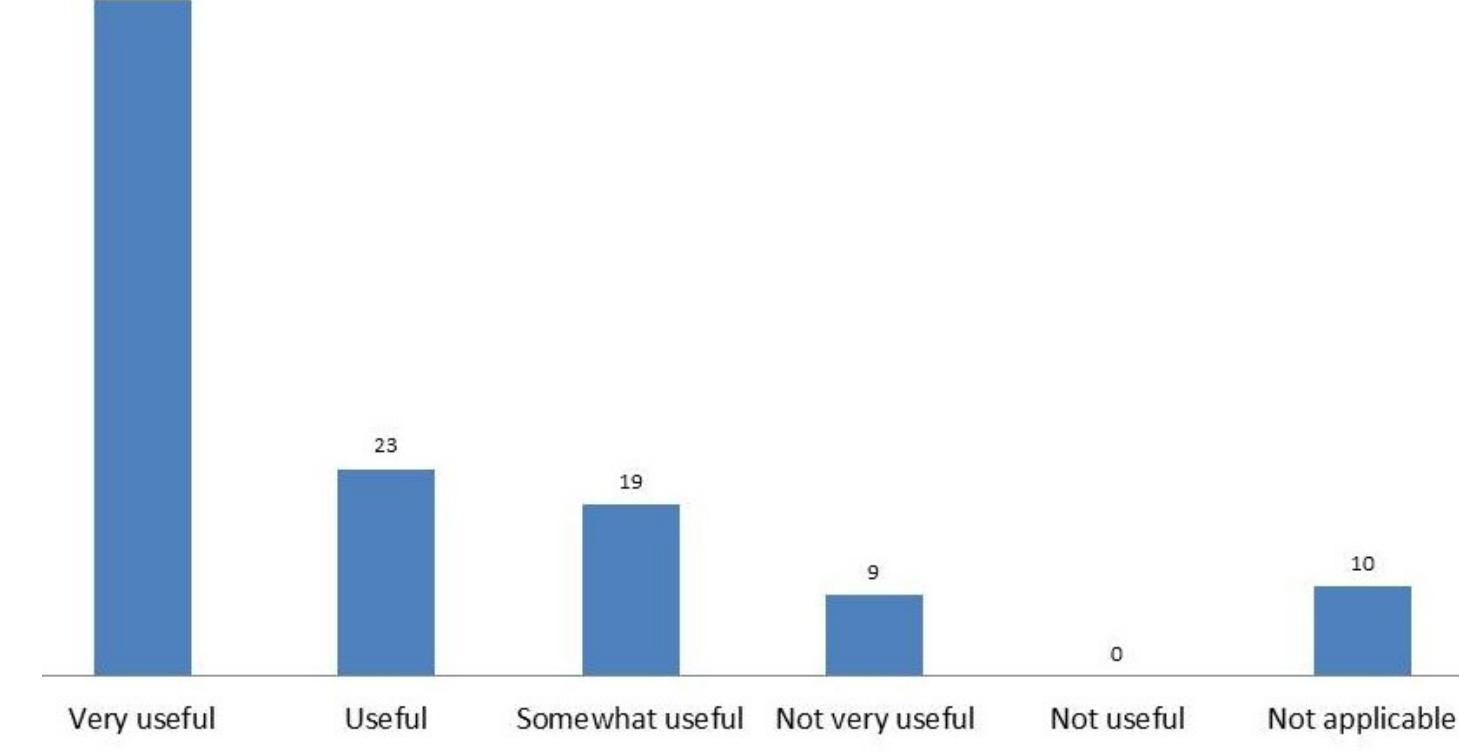
If yes, area of concentration?						
Book and/or Paper	Library and Archival Materials	Art on Paper	Photographs	Paintings	Objects	Other (please describe)
44.5%	39.0%	15.8%	11.6%	0.7%	0.7%	3.4%

At the time of the survey, out of the 68 respondents who had not received a MLIS/MIS degree, 6 were currently pursuing them.

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 MLIS/MIS degree said it would not be advantageous to their current position.

Respondents' perception of value of graduate degree in day-to-day job



In the coming years, library and archives conservators graduating from the current Mellon-funded pilot programs need to be surveyed to assess whether the ratio of time spent gaining bench and preservation skills gained through their recent education adequately prepared them for their current positions.

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.

Excerpts of open-ended responses regarding a need for an MLIS 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.

Need

While one can gain an understanding about the context of conservation treatment decisions 'on the job', the MLS/CAS fast tracks this.

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