Up-and-Comers: News for Student Archivists—Matthew Peek, Assistant Editor, Kent State University

Have any news to share about your own internship, class project, or SAA student chapter? Contact Matthew Peek at freakyhistorian@hotmail.com

The Hiring Manager's View: Unsolicited Advice for Archivists Looking for Their First Job

By Mark A. Greene, University of Wyoming

First, a disclaimer: There are no standards for "How to Hire an Archivist." Any two equally-experienced hiring managers may differ on a variety of points. In other words, do not take what follows as gospel truth. With that caveat presented, let's get on with it.

It is brutal in the job market right now, I might as well tell you. As I write this, we have an entry-level position open, and 65 applications for it waiting to be reviewed; we had nearly identical numbers for an open position last year. One job to 65 candidates is not a good ratio. So you want—you NEED—to do everything you can, in both your cover letter, your vita (or resume), and your interviews to make a distinctly favorable impression on the members of a search committee (usually three to five people for an entry-level job). But, as is often the case, perhaps I can best make some of my points by listing things that will make a distinctly UNfavorable impression.

Six Things Not to Do If You Really Want the Job

First, do not send a generic cover letter that does not specifically and clearly address the job's requirements. Second, do not send a cover letter with even a single typographical error—more than one, and you're guaranteed not to make the first cut. Third, do not send a cover letter containing no indication that you have visited the employing repository's Web site. Fourth, do not use a phrase like, "I don't meet the stated requirements but I really love history/archives." Fifth, do not send a vita or resume that does not make your educational and employment background completely obvious—for example, by listing your "skills" rather than the positions you have held and when you held them. Sixth, do not ignore employment sites such as Monster.com and the importance of researching frequently asked interview questions. While some of the questions in your interview will be very specific to archival work, several will be more generic. There is no excuse for freezing up when asked "why do you want THIS job" or "tell us your greatest strength and your greatest weakness" (and don't dare say "I'm a workaholic" in answer to either part).

Five Things That Set Candidates Apart (in a Good Way)

First, use your cover letter to specifically relate both your skills and your goals to the mission and most significant current activities of the repository. Second, tweak your vita (or resume) for the specific job at hand, to draw attention to experience and education of particular relevance—for example, by highlighting your retail customer service background for a reference and outreach position. Third, pay attention to the formatting of your cover letter and vita/resume. Even though almost all position searches ask for submissions electronically, this does not mean it is acceptable to submit .txt files or files that may display incorrectly on the recipients' screens; if necessary, find a way to convert your documents to PDF to ensure accurate rendition.

Fourth, if you do not, in fact, meet all the requirements, be certain that you can identify a significant attribute you do posses that might cause search committee members to pause and think "hmmmm . . ."—which is to say, it is acceptable to apply for positions that seem a stretch, so long as you bring something special to the table. Fifth, most search committees are looking for individuals who indicate commitment to professionalism, not simply interest in a job. Developing a vita/resume that demonstrates engagement in the profession even during graduate school—e.g., attendance at conferences (presenting a student poster is even better), active involvement in the student SAA chapter, or volunteering at a library or repository—will give you a leg up. Sixth, remember that job interviews, whether preliminary over the phone or on-site as a finalist, require a certain degree of formality. Do not conduct your phone interview with a TV, barking dog, or any other distracting noise audible in the background. And it is still appropriate (indeed, expected) to "dress up" (in a relatively conservative fashion) for on-site interviews.

A Few Odds and Ends

I am frequently asked whether being a Certified Archivist (through the Academy of Certified Archivists Exam) will help a job candidate land a job. Unfortunately, this

depends very much on who is doing the hiring. As any glance through the SAA job postings will verify, it may be helpful in some settings, but it will be irrelevant in others. I would venture that even in many situations where certification is preferred, the quality of your cover letter and vita (overall)—as well as your coursework and experience—will be more significant than your certification status. But certainly, if the positions you find most attractive seem frequently to list certification as a preference, it would make sense to add that credential.

I am also often asked whether experience, in the form of a practicum, internship, or volunteer work, is important. In general, I would say that, yes, other qualities being roughly equal, a candidate with such experience will appear stronger than one without. However, experience processing family papers will not be a great selling point when applying for a position in a corporate archives as a reference and outreach specialist (or vice versa). Having a variety of experience is likely to be most helpful, although most search committees are reasonably realistic about how much experience they can expect for an entry-level position.

Additionally, many prospective employees want to know whether a strong background in electronic records, digitization, or Web 2.0 is the key to landing that first job. Alas, like so many things, it depends, particularly with regard to the job for which one is applying. If the repository is trying to process a ten-year backlog of analog collections and needs a new archival processor, advanced skills with born digital material is not going to be critical. On the other hand, of two otherwise equally qualified candidates, the one with Web 2.0 experience may have an advantage. Plus, digital competency may just be the ticket to your SECOND job, and it's never too early to begin thinking that far ahead.

Indiana University Student SAA Members Blog Away Archives Month 2011

By Danielle Emerling, Indiana University–Bloomington School of Library and Information Science

To celebrate American Archives Month 2011, the Indiana University Society of American Archivists student chapter (SAA-SC) traveled to archival and historical institutions in southern Indiana and blogged about their Civil War collections. The purpose of the project was to bring the knowledge of these holdings to a broader audience through the use of the SAA-SC blog (http://saaiu.wordpress.com/category/american-archives-month/) and to encourage a greater appreciation of the materials held in these smaller institutions. In addition, the project provided students with experience in the areas of outreach and advocacy.

The first trip was to the John Hay Center in Salem, Indiana, where students blogged about records documenting Morgan's Raid, the only major Civil War action seen in the state. In the same trip, students visited the Depot Railroad Museum, which memorializes Salem's leading role in Indiana's railroad history, and is a replica of Salem's original train station, burned during Morgan's Raid. The following week, students made a trip to the Hanover College Archives Center in Hanover, Indiana, where they encountered a number of rare books, autograph books, and enthralling stories in soldiers' letters to home. In their final trip, students discovered intimate historical artifacts, a certificate of service signed by Abraham Lincoln, and even a Union soldier's uniform.

Danielle Emerling (left), Amy Jankowski, and Heather Stone of Indiana University's SAA student chapter with their poster on August 26, 2011 at SAA.