ARCHIVAL CERTIFICATION

To certify or not to certify: That is the question

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March 24, 2006
What is Archival Certification?

- A program certifying a professional level of knowledge in the archival field
- Offered by the Academy of Certified Archivists (www.certifiedarchivists.org)
- Certified Archivists are “practitioners who have demonstrated mastery of the knowledge and experience necessary for modern archival practice.” (ACA Handbook)
The Academy of 
Certified Archivists

Latest edition of the ACA News (#52) (PDF format)

Greetings and thanks for visiting the Academy of Certified Archivist (ACA) website. I hope that you find the information for which you are searching. As the credentialing organization for archivists world-wide, we are especially interested and engaged in helping young and new archival practitioners in their careers by testing and verifying to employers that the Certified Archivist (C.A.) has a thorough knowledge of the fundamentals of the archival enterprise. If you would like to discuss certification or if you are not finding the information you need from the ACA website, please don't hesitate to contact me or our membership ombudsman, Cindy Smolovik, Vice President / President Elect.

Thank you for your interest in the Academy of Certified Archivists.

Michael Holland, C.A.
How do archivists become certified?

1. Applicants must meet defined educational standards.
2. They must meet defined levels of professional experience.
3. They must pass the archival certification examination.
What is the history of archival certification?

- 1970s: Efforts to establish credentials in the archival field
- 1987-1989: Interim Board for Certification formulated qualifications, developed examination
- 1989: “Grandfather clause”—certification by petition
- 1989-present: Certification by examination (or recertification)
How do archivists qualify for certification by exam?

- Option 1. Master's degree with a concentration in archival administration plus one year qualifying professional archival experience
- Option 2. Master's degree without a concentration in archival administration plus two years of qualifying professional archival experience
- Option 3. Previously qualified certified archivist (lapsed certification)
- Option 4. Previously qualified certified archivist (current certification)
Is there any way archival students qualify for certification by exam?

- Recent graduates of graduate archival programs
  - Must have a degree that includes at least 9 semester hours or 12 quarter hours of graduate study in archival administration
  - May take the exam without meeting professional work experience requirement
  - If a graduate passes the examination, he/she becomes provisionally certified
  - May become fully qualified after 1 year of qualifying professional experience
  - Must qualify within 3 years, but you don’t pay the fee until you’re fully certified
How do archivists prepare for the examination?

- Study bibliographic resources recommended by ACA
- Use ACA website resources as a guide, especially:
  - Handbook
    - Discusses preparation, qualifications
    - Outlines specific tasks and knowledge for each role delineation
    - Provides a study guide, with sample questions
    - Lists bibliography of major sources, organized by domain
What is role delineation? What are the roles?

- Domain 1: Selection, Appraisal and Acquisition
- Domain 2: Arrangement and Description
- Domain 3: Reference Services and Access
- Domain 4: Preservation and Protection
- Domain 5: Outreach, Advocacy, and Promotion
- Domain 6: Managing Archival Programs
- Domain 7: Professional, Ethical, and Legal Responsibilities
How did I prepare for the examination?

- Using bibliography, systematically worked through sources for each domain
- Started in spring for August test date
- Studied by myself, but group study an excellent idea
- Used handbook as study guide
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K-208 the applicability of such standards as the MARC format, Encoded Archival Description (EAD), Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR2), and Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCHS), SGML, XML, HTML/XHTML, and Dublin Core.

K-209 the use of descriptive standards for records and papers stored in any form or medium.

K-210 how the descriptive process may begin at or before records creation and continue throughout the life of the records and papers.

**Domain 3: Reference Services and Access**

**Task 1** Define the informational needs of users by such techniques as customer surveys, analysis of user requests, and keeping abreast of current research trends and strategies.

**Task 2** Develop policies and procedures designed to serve the information needs of various user groups, based on evaluation of institutional mandates and constituencies, the nature of the collections, relevant laws and ethical considerations, and appropriate technologies.
Task 3  Make an appropriate response to user requests by:† providing information about records and papers, providing information from records and papers, providing access to records and papers, making copies, referring to other sources, or denying the requests for information.

Task 4  Create, maintain, and periodically review, for self-evaluation and planning purposes, records of user requests.

**Knowledge Statements**

Archivists know and can apply knowledge about:

K-301  issues and elements of archives user services, including policies and procedures governing access, reference services, and reproduction.

K-302  laws, regulations, and ethical principles governing copyright, freedom of information, privacy, confidentiality, security, and equality of access.

K-303  research strategies, needs, and past and current research interests and trends of genealogists, scholars, journalists, and other major users of records and papers.

K-304  reference strategies based on varying holdings, formats, media, and user needs.

K-305  the subject areas of an institution’s holdings, and how they relate to holdings in other repositories.
Where is the exam offered? What is the schedule?

- 5 testing sites nationwide (one is always the site of the SAA Annual Meeting)
- Also possible to choose the “Pick Your Site” option
- Dates
  - May 15th deadline for exam application
  - August 2nd exam (Wed. before sessions/papers)
  - Late Sept/Early October: Exam results mailed
  - Certification fee due if exam is passed; annual membership dues thereafter
How is the exam written?

- ACA Regent for Examination Development and Examination Development Committee write the exam
- Professional testing service oversees exam development and grading
- 100 multiple-choice questions
ACA Sample Question No. 4

“The newly hired archivist of a local historical society in a town of 10,000 people wishes to raise funds for publicity and outreach. The first step is to:”

1) send a letter of appeal to members of the community.

2) set up an advisory board.

3) assess the institution’s mission and goals.

4) submit a grant proposal to a government agency or local foundation.

Correct answer: 3

Rubric: Domain 6, Task 1, Knowledge Statement 1

This question was constructed to test the applicant’s understanding of management issues, particularly planning. It is an example of a situation requiring the application of knowledge.

All four answers are steps that might and should be taken to raise funds and to garner publicity for the society; however, the correct answer (#3) is the one that should be accomplished first.
If I fail the exam, may I take it again?

- Yes, there is no limit to the number of times you can take the exam.
- Exam results show strengths and weaknesses in terms of domains.
- Ways to minimize chances of failure:
  - Study using most significant bibliographic sources
  - Cover all the domains
  - Consider group study
Why certify? Some critiques of certification

- Why should I certify, if I can already demonstrate archival knowledge by having a master’s degree with strong archival administration coursework?
- Don’t most jobs require the MLIS, and not the CA?
- How is a multiple-choice test of 100 questions any measure of how good an archivist I am?
Why did I certify?

- Provided me with a professional archival credential
- Increased my credibility as an archivist
- Allowed me to qualify for promotion (spring 2002)
- Gave me ability to qualify for my current position (fall 2004)
Why should you certify? Some reasons for certification

- Demonstrates your commitment to the field
- Provides you with a qualification that is understandable to the rest of the world
- Qualifies you for positions that require C.A.
- Allows employers to identify you as a prospective employee with requisite knowledge and preparation
- Allows you eligibility for possible promotion or advancement
THANK YOU!

- Questions and discussion
- Contact information
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