

Taking Archives to the Street: The Basics of Archives

A Report by the Professional Development Committee

Society of Southwest Archivists, June 2006

On April 22, 2006, the Professional Development Committee presented a highly successful pilot course in the Basics of Archives to twenty-five eager participants at St. Paul's UMC in Houston, Texas. A goal of the Professional Development Committee is to have this course offered throughout the region during the coming year. We are reporting on the course using the webpage format so all of our members can receive the information in a timely fashion, have their questions answered, and be able to contact the committee directly for further information.

The Basics of Archives is a national program that was developed by the Council of State Archivists and underwritten by IMLS and AASLH. The course has been downloaded onto 2 CDs and is available from each state archivist <http://www.statearchivists.org/statearchivists.htm>. All the materials are included on the CDs including student and instructor materials, PowerPoint presentations, hands on activities, brochures and posters for marketing the course, and an interactive online course that can be used to further the student's knowledge in archives after the workshop. We decided to run a pilot course to test setting up and marketing the course, the quality of the materials, and the participants' reactions.

Some observations concerning the course:

The course is needed!

Although we did only the minimal amount of marketing for the course, it filled completely within 2 weeks. The initial decision was to limit the course to 15 participants, then 20, and then we closed the enrollment at 25. Eleven are on a waiting list for the fall.

The course reaches those currently working with records!

Eighty-eight per cent of the participants currently work with records collections. The breakdown of the participants by affiliation:

- 10 from religious organizations
- 5 employees of local government offices holding significant historical collections with no previous archives training
- 3 employees of an internationally renowned museum
- 3 from educational institutions
- 2 genealogists
- 1 internet museum director
- 1 vendor

The response to the course was overwhelmingly positive!

As noted in the assessments completed at the end of the course, one of the biggest problems was not having enough time for certain units. The assessment results in both [percentages](#) and [raw data](#) are included here. A [post session assessment](#) sent to the participants ten days after the course also yielded positive results.

The course established a network for those working with records!

By being introduced to archivists as instructors and interacting with other participants, the participants began networking to resolve many of their own problems. More opportunities to learn about archives were presented with membership opportunities in SSA and AHA!

- 20 of the participants chose to join SSA.
- 4 of the course participants were currently members of the local archivist's organization, AHA! (Archivists of the Houston Area) with several more taking applications home with them.

The Professional Development Committee would like to see this course offered throughout the SSA region. It's relatively painless! A [checklist](#) has been developed to help with the project.

If you are planning on presenting the course in your community, please contact the Professional Development Committee chairs

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We would be glad to help, offer advice, and cheer you on.