

PERSPECTIVES

## Records Management Education: In Pursuit of Standards

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Without standards, everyday life would be chaotic at best. Imagine, for example, every light bulb manufacturer using different sizes of light bulb bases, different thread widths, and different threading patterns. It might take months instead of minutes to find the right bulb for any lamp in your home or office. Without widely accepted and applied *technical* standards in industry, the use of many products, appliances, and machines would be virtually impossible. Without *quality* standards in the automotive sector, **every** car would be a "lemon." Just as there must be technical standards and quality standards in things we purchase, there must be standards of consistency, quality, and performance in other important areas of social and economic investment as well—including education.

Despite some public dissatisfaction with education these days, each accredited institution of higher education must maintain minimum standards of educational quality to preserve its accreditation status. Additionally, most professional educational programs (e.g., law, medicine, nursing, librarianship) are accredited and then re-accredited (about every five to seven years) using standards widely agreed upon in that discipline. This type of accreditation is performed by a specialized accrediting agency **in addition to** the host university's general accreditation by a general-purpose regional accrediting body (about every ten years). The latter activity serves, primarily, the institution itself while the former is in the interests, mostly, of the profession. While there are some drawbacks to specialized accreditation (e.g., costs to the sponsoring university, costs to the professional association sponsoring the accrediting pro-

cess, and tying up the time of faculty and staff), such program-specific accreditation continues as the accepted form of educational quality assurance for the professional degree programs.

The rise of accreditation of professional degree programs is but one important aspect of the larger development of professions themselves. The essence of professional status is the possession by the discipline's practitioners of a specialized, sometimes arcane, knowledge, a knowledge transmitted through a specific educational and training process. Restricting access to the discipline's knowledge (and to its utilization) has its roots in the rise of the priesthood in the Middle Ages. Here, the Church determined who would be taught, what would be taught, who would teach, and consequently the standards to be applied. Later, the occupational guilds of Europe followed suit by restricting access to their trades by controlling who could learn them and what could be taught in the guilds' apprenticeship programs.<sup>1</sup> Even today, it makes sense that established practitioners of any profession should control the quality of novices through educational programs and other forms of credentialing (e.g., certification, licensure, registration) as a form of endorsement of new professionals.

In theory, professional education programs seek and submit to accreditation by external bodies for several reasons:

- To provide, using agreed-upon standards, a process for self-study of professional education programs and thus continuing self-improvement,
- To provide society an instrument to protect the public from

obsolete knowledge and ignorant practitioners in the professional field,

- To assure those who hire a program's graduates of the program's meeting certain minimum standards of quality,
- To foster continuing excellence in programs being accredited by specialized agencies (e.g., American Bar Association, American Medical Association, National League of Nursing), and
- To provide academic departments offering professional degrees with some leverage as they seek additional resources to improve the program's quality.<sup>2</sup>

Most professional degree programs in the U.S. undergo a wholly voluntary process of accreditation and re-accreditation. Some of the professional fields whose educational programs are accredited according to standards set by their professional associations are:

Architecture  
Art  
Business  
Dentistry  
Engineering  
Forestry  
Law  
Librarianship  
Medical Records  
Medicine  
Physical Therapy  
Psychology  
Public Health  
Social Work  
Speech Pathology and Audiology  
Teacher Education  
Veterinary Medicine<sup>3</sup>

Are there, then, educational programs for records and information management (RIM) which are ac-

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credited; are there also existing standards for judging program quality? For several reasons, the answer is, unfortunately, "No." First, of course, there have to be degree programs to be accredited. There are very few such programs in North America at the professional level (i.e., baccalaureate or graduate) offering even a major or a concentration in RIM.<sup>4</sup> Since the number of programs to be accredited is so minuscule, there is no justifiable need for specialized accreditation by an outside organization.

What, then, are the prospects for new RIM programs? While colleges and universities **could** develop new four-year or masters-level degree programs in records management (or archival studies or imaging technologies, etc.), the plain truth is: they are not going to do it! There are at least four compelling reasons why universities are not likely to establish any new professional studies programs for many years in any discipline, including RIM:

- New degree programs are expensive in faculty and staff salaries and benefits, space and equipment, general university overhead, accrediting costs, and oversight by university administrators.
- Because of continually rising costs, some **existing** academic programs must be either scaled back or eliminated entirely, and many of those being eliminated are smaller, marginal professional studies programs with a smaller number of students (e.g., office systems, library science).
- Strategic planning in higher education suggests that institutions are willing to invest in academic programs **only** if those programs have rigor, academic respectability, a solid theory-based research component, a substantial self-replenishing student population, and credibility in the marketplace.<sup>5</sup>
- Professional-degree programs, except in areas like medicine and law, often lack an effective body of influential practitioners and a forceful professional association which can influence educational requirements.

If new or expanded programs in

RIM education are unlikely, what directions might the RIM field (and ARMA International) take? The extent to which ARMA International alone can influence the future of higher education is marginal. It is not a degree-granting institution. On the other hand, the Association might well continue to strengthen its continuing education offerings through multi-level courses (e.g., beginning, advanced) for individuals based on mailed video cassettes and programs for groups using technologies such as audio-teleconferencing. Another useful activity would be the identification of stronger existing academic programs in which RIM is already—or might become—a viable component in broader degree programs in information management/systems/ technology.

Absent the RIM field's having an accrediting body, programs to accredit, and the likelihood of new RIM-specific programs, how can we influence those programs which already exist? While there is not time here to rehearse all the useful initiatives in developing interdisciplinary relationships, one step in the right direction is taking an explicit stand on educational quality.

An image problem from which RIM education suffers is that it is believed by outsiders to be a clerical-level program taught by those with little formal education themselves. For the most part, this is a false perception. One means, then, of encouraging quality in existing RIM educational programs and multidisciplinary programs in which RIM plays a role (e.g., a minor, a concentration) is ARMA International's setting standards of educational quality to be recognized and applied, however informally, by educational institutions. While the Association does not intend—for the near future at least—to become a specialized accrediting body, it has approved the following statement on indicators of quality in educational programs.

### STATEMENT ON EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ENDORSEMENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS, ARMA INTERNATIONAL<sup>6</sup> (Approved: March 11, 1994)

#### Introduction:

The following statement is the position of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) International on post-secondary programs in records and in-

formation management (RIM) with regard to indicators of quality for such academic programs. ARMA does not itself endorse or accredit 1) any institution's entire academic program, 2) any of its departments' entire degree programs, 3) or any single iteration of any courses in an RM/RIM concentration.

#### Prologue:

Indicators of educational quality must be congruent with existing statements on educational policy adopted by the Association. Here the relevant prior statement is "ARMA International: Educational Credentials [1987]," reproduced here in italics:

*ARMA International endorses and recommends the following educational credentials for entry level and beyond in the field of Information and Records Management at the professional/managerial level: a baccalaureate in Records Management or Information Management or a baccalaureate in Business Administration and/or the Masters in Library and Information Science (MLS) or MBA or MPA with demonstrated course work, at minimum, in:*

*records and information management principles;*

*technologies, and practices;*

*forms analysis/design and management;*

*use of micrographics and other records/documents management technologies; and*

*archives management.*

*ARMA International does not accredit or certify specific academic degree programs or courses, but it does strongly suggest that the coursework recommended above should be largely congruent with the ARMA Education Committee's recommended course syllabi and model degree programs documents. Further, the Education Committee recommends that persons with the credentials and coursework indicated above begin study toward the CRM as soon as is practical after their entry into the field.*

Submitted by the ARMA Educational Committee; Adopted by the Board of Directors,

**Educational Quality Indicators:**

**Indicator 1:**

ARMA recognizes degree programs at the baccalaureate and/or graduate level as appropriate for preparation at the professional level. That is, the baccalaureate in Records Management or Information Management, the baccalaureate in Business Administration and/or the Masters in Library and Information Science (MLS) or MBA or MPA.

**Indicator 2:**

Any academic unit offering at the acceptable level(s) an identifiable program (or "concentration" or "minor" or "major" or "track" or "specialization") in "records management" or "information and records management" or "records and information management" or "records management and archives" or "information management" [having primary emphasis on what is generally understood to be records/information management] must be part of a parent institution of higher education which is accredited by its recognized regional or federal accrediting association.

**Indicator 3:**

Any academic unit offering such a program must also be part of a professional-studies department, school, or college which is itself recognized and accredited by either the Council on Accreditation of the American Library Association or the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business or their Canadian equivalents or an accrediting body clearly related to the discipline represented in the given academic program.

**Indicator 4:**

An academic unit offering such a program must also have a body of full-time faculty, 80% of which full-time faculty will have an earned doctorate in a subject area relevant to their teaching area(s); e.g.,

- information science,
- information management,
- information systems,
- management,
- business administration,

- management information systems,
- library and information science,
- computer science, or
- administrative management

**and** with at least one full-time faculty member available and with sufficient knowledge to counsel/advise interested students in:

- 1) coursework appropriate to the RIM field and

- 2) careers and career paths in RIM.<sup>7</sup>

**Indicator 5:**

An academic unit offering such a program should also be able to demonstrate that no more than 50% of the total course content or contact hours in Records/Information Management (RIM) is being taught by qualified adjunct faculty who meet the same qualifications as any adjunct faculty

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teaching other subjects within the unit's academic program.<sup>8</sup>

### Indicator 6:

An academic unit offering such a program must also be able to demonstrate that at least 25% of the total course content or contact hours available in the degree program (e.g., nine hours in a 36-hour master's program or 12 hours in a 48-hour program) are specifically in Records/Information Management (RIM) and which courses will (per "ARMA International: Educational Credentials") focus on:

records and information management principles, technologies, and practices;

forms analysis/design and management;

use of micrographics and other records/documents management technologies; and

archives management.<sup>9</sup>

### Indicator 7:

Records management is a discipline emphasizing the **management of information resources**. An academic unit, then, offering such a program should also be able to demonstrate that at least an additional 50% of the total course content or contact hours are available (required courses, electives, acceptable courses from outside the unit) and usable toward the degree will focus on:

- 1) management functions (e.g., planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, budgeting, evaluating),
- 2) management techniques (e.g., project management, cost-benefit analysis, unit costing/cost analysis),

and

- 3) concepts and techniques in information management which are clearly applicable to RIM (e.g., "principles of indexing" but not the more narrowly scoped "book cataloging for libraries"; "ethics of the information professions" but

not "ethics for data processors"; "preservation of recorded information" but not "preservation of library collections," etc.).

### Indicator 8:

An academic unit offering such a program must also be able to demonstrate that a for-credit practicum experience (or "field experience" or for-credit "internship") is available to any interested and otherwise qualified student and that at least one three-credit-hour practicum of a **minimum** of 150 clock hours on site in RIM activities at a professional level is available, and preferably "recommended," to any student pursuing the RIM track, concentration, etc. An educationally significant and departmentally endorsed and monitored internship for which the student receives monetary compensation is also satisfactory here.

### Indicator 9:

An academic unit offering such a program should also be able to demonstrate that the quality of instruction (by full-time and adjunct faculty) and course content in RIM are evaluated regularly, using the same methods used to evaluate other aspects of the (larger) degree program and that the quality of instruction and course content in RIM continue to meet the same standards for any other courses, programs, concentrations, specializations, or tracks in the (larger) degree program.

### Indicator 10:

As part of the use of its indicators of quality, ARMA asks that such programs will participate in its Directory of Collegiate Programs on an annual basis. Participation in this effort and listing in this ARMA publication requires that syllabi of all relevant courses be forwarded, along with course numbers and titles, to ARMA headquarters in Prairie Village, KS.

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Comments on, criticism, and suggestions for improvement of this document are certainly welcome

and should be addressed to: Executive Director, ARMA International, 4200 Somerset Dr., Suite 215, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

## REFERENCES

1. Corrine W. Larson, "Trends in the Regulation of Professions," in Kenneth E. Young, et al, *Understanding Accreditation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1983), pp. 317-18.
2. Bonnie M.K. Hargerty and Joan S. Stark, "Comparing Educational Accreditation Standards in Selected Professional Fields," *Journal of Higher Education*, 60, i (January/February 1989), 1-2.
3. "Accrediting Groups Recognized by COPA [Council on Postsecondary Accreditation]," in Kenneth E. Young, et al, *Understanding Accreditation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1983), pp. 409-414.
4. See J. Michael Pemberton, "Education for Records Management: Rigor Mortis or New Directions?" *Records Management Quarterly*, 25, iii (1991), 50-54 and Pemberton, "If Being a CRM [Certified Records Manager] Is the Answer, What Is the Question," *Records Management Quarterly*, 25, ii (1991), 50-53, 57.
5. In many universities, particularly private ones, academic units must increasingly have enough tuition-paying students and bring in enough research money so as to be virtually self-sustaining.
6. Revisions to successive drafts of this statement were suggested by members of the ARMA Board of Directors, ARMA headquarters staff, the Chair of the Education Development Committee, and selected educators who teach RIM.
7. There are virtually no degree programs in which one may receive a doctorate specifically in RIM; thus, much of what students learn about RIM more broadly will be taught by persons with degrees in areas adjacent to the explicit RIM domain. *Indicator 5* opens the student to an opportunity to be taught by adjunct faculty with more direct, focused experience in RIM.
8. "Qualified adjunct faculty" are defined as persons from the local community—or in other academic units in the institution—who have RIM experience, teaching ability, and one or more of the degrees listed in *Indicators 1* or *4* but lack additional advanced degrees, faculty status, or research experience. If there were, say, four RIM courses, adjunct faculty might teach as many as two; if there were sixty contact hours in two RIM courses, adjuncts could teach as many as thirty of the hours, etc.
9. ARMA recognizes that there are no four-year or graduate degree programs specifically in RIM. That is, a student may obtain a bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a major or, even more likely, a concentration or a minor in RIM. Therefore, the RIM content within the larger degree program simply will not be as extensive in the number of courses as the student's general education requirements (e.g., math, science, composition) **plus** his/her courses in the major (e.g., accounting, marketing, business law, etc.).