A Profession in Peril

Charting a Way Forward for RIM in North America

The records and information management (RIM) profession faces an uncertain future. A large percentage of RIM professionals is on the cusp of retirement, and there is a shortage of emerging ones prepared to fill their positions. This article focuses on the factors that have produced this peril and suggests what might be done to improve the profession's outlook.

Donald C. Force, Ph.D.



ith the median age of records and information management (RIM) professionals fast approaching 60 years old and a dearth of young professionals prepared to fill their positions - as evidenced by ARMA International member demographics - the future of the RIM profession looks to be in peril. Determining the cause for this uncertain future and, therefore, what can be done to resolve it, required a two-pronged approach:

- 1. Analyzing the job market to identify the skills, education, and specialized certifications organizations are seeking in candidates for their RIM positions
- 2. Investigating the opportunities provided by educational and professional institutions for potential candidates to obtain what they need to meet those criteria

The result of this work makes clear why there is a shortage of qualified people to fill RIM positions and what must change for the RIM profession to survive and potentially thrive.

Analyzing the Job Market

An analysis of 100 job announcements for RIM positions in the United States between 2013 and 2016 shows that employers clearly prefer a bachelor's degree level of education, as shown below.

Education Requirements

Of the 100 announcements taken from the records management listserv (recmgmt-l@lists.edu) and Indeed. com, 85 required some level of education. Of these positions, 62 required a bachelor's degree. The rest called for other educational achievements, including associate's degree (9), master's degree (8), high school diploma (4), and certification (1) (see Figure 1).

Education Preferences

Most job announcements made a distinction between required education and preferred education. Sixty announcements listed one or more educational preferences. Among these, certification was the dominant preference, with 43 of the announcements preferring the applicant to be a Certified Records Manager (CRM), a certified Information Governance Professional (IGP), a Certified Information Professional (CIP), and/or Project Management Professional (PMP). The positions also gave preference to other educational backgrounds. Eighteen of the positions preferred a master's degree, 12 preferred a bachelor's degree, and one position preferred a juris doctorate. Of the 16 positions that preferred a master's degree, nine positions also preferred the applicant to have a certification.

Education by RIM Position Type

The type of RIM position being advertised had little bearing on the degree requirements or preferences. Of the six "senior" positions (e.g., senior records manager,

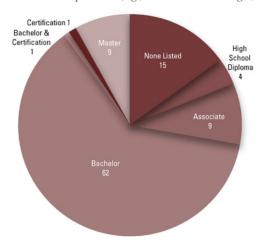


Figure 1: Educational Requirements of RIM Job Announcements

senior records specialist, and senior records analyst), five employers (83%) required a bachelor's degree. The remaining position had no educational requirement.

Of the four "director" positions (director of records and information management, associate director of records management, records and information management director, and records management director), three (75%) required a bachelor's degree and one (25%) a master's degree.

Education by IG Position Type

Within the past several years, information governance (IG) positions have appeared more frequently. These positions also have placed a greater emphasis on a bachelor's degree. Of the 12 IG positions identified (e.g., IG director, manager of IG, IG analyst), 10 (83%) required a bachelor's degree, but five of these positions (42%) preferred a master's degree, four (33%) preferred certification, and one (.08%) preferred a juris doctorate. Two IG announcements (17%) did not list any educational requirements.

Education by Area of Study

Many positions listed multiple degrees and included an "or equivalent" qualification. The majority of the employers sought candidates with degrees in business, records management, or library and information science. The announcements also recognized other backgrounds, such as IT, archives, legal studies, history, and public administration.

Information Degrees. Positions that required a bachelor's degree were slightly more likely to seek candidates with a bachelor's degree in business (25%) over a records management degree (23%).

Positions that required a master's degree (24 announcements) sought applicants with a degree in library science (25%) or archives (25%) over individuals with a degree in records management (17%).

Business Degrees. One announcement that required a bachelor's degree mentioned a preference for a candidate with a master's of business administration.

These educational requirements pose a major challenge for prospective RIM professionals because records management is not taught at the bachelor's degree level, as discussed in the next section. The fact that bachelor's degrees are not offered also means there is not a welldefined path to a master's degree in records management like there is for academic programs that offer both a bachelor's and master's degree.

Insufficient attention is given to critical current RIM-related issues, such as the security and privacy of information and the management of electronic records.



Analyzing Education Opportunities

RIM education primarily occurs at the associate and graduate levels. Associate degrees are regularly earned at two-year programs in community colleges and technical schools. Graduate degrees are typically associated with colleges and universities with master-level coursework.

Associate-Level RIM Education

According to ARMA International Educational Foundation's "International Directory of English Language Courses in Records and Information Management" (available at www.armaedfoundation.org/school_database/main.shtml), there are 270 associate-level programs in the United States that teach at least one course in records management.

A sample of 67 of these programs indicates that the RIM course within these programs is often one component of a degree in office administration. Though this seems appropriate, a closer inspection of these degrees reveals that most programs prepare students for "employment where professional office, clerical, or secretarial skills are needed," as one associate-level program description for a course called "Office Technology - Executive Support Professional" described it.

For example, a description of one course reads: In this course, students are introduced to the field of records/information management. Students learn the procedures of alphabetic, geographic, subject, and numeric filing and how to apply the alphabetic rules to the computer. Students also learn the principle of records retention and transfer and the various controls of a records/information management program.

Though it is a positive sign to see the course curriculum address retention and disposition issues, the emphasis on filing and classification is a dominant - and dated theme in these programs. Insufficient attention is given to critical current RIM-related issues, such as the security and privacy of information and the management of electronic records. None of the course descriptions mentioned IG, big data, risk management, or change management.

Master's Level RIM Education

Records management coursework in graduate education also has its limitations. Since the early 1980s, RIM education has become integral to most library and information science (LIS) programs in North America. As discovered for a September 2016 Records Management Journal article I co-wrote with Jane Zhang, "Knowledge Discovery from Within: An Examination of Records Management & Electronic Records Management Syllabi," there are 33 LIS programs with at least one records management course today.

Still, LIS education is not preparing students to become RIM professionals. Rather, RIM courses are a component of archival studies. Consequently, the coursework prepares students to become archivists who will have some knowledge of RIM but will probably lack the depth of training needed to take on the full responsibilities of a

RIM professional. For example, consider a RIM course description in one LIS program:

Students learn the fundamentals for an effective records and information management program. They learn about the technology, principles, and practices that are necessary for a systematic control of records throughout their life cycle. They learn the value and implementation of records and information as strategy, management, research, development, and compliance for an organization or institution.

Although RIM courses within LIS education are

more diverse than at most associate-level programs, they similarly do not emphasize RIM topics like information security and privacy, electronic records management, and IG; they generally place more emphasis on archival topics, such as archives, electronic records, lifecycle management, and preservation. (See Figure 2 for a keyword comparison of 33 course descriptions for associate and master's level program courses.)

This analysis highlights that associate-level programs fail to emphasize the current issues RIM professionals face, while graduate-level programs mostly prepare students to become archivists with some RIM knowledge.

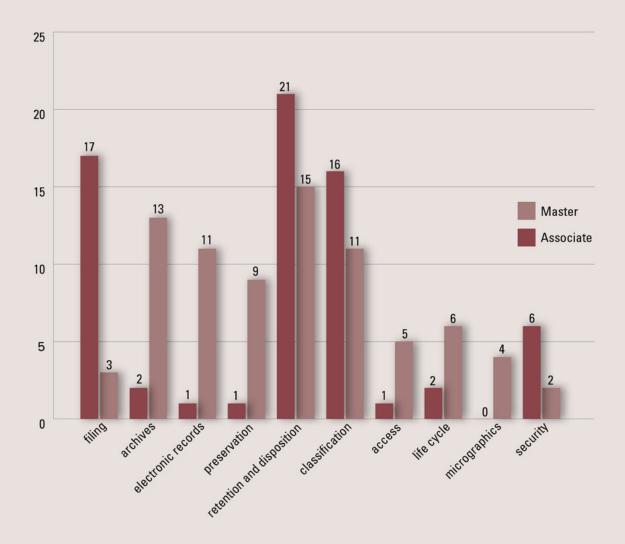
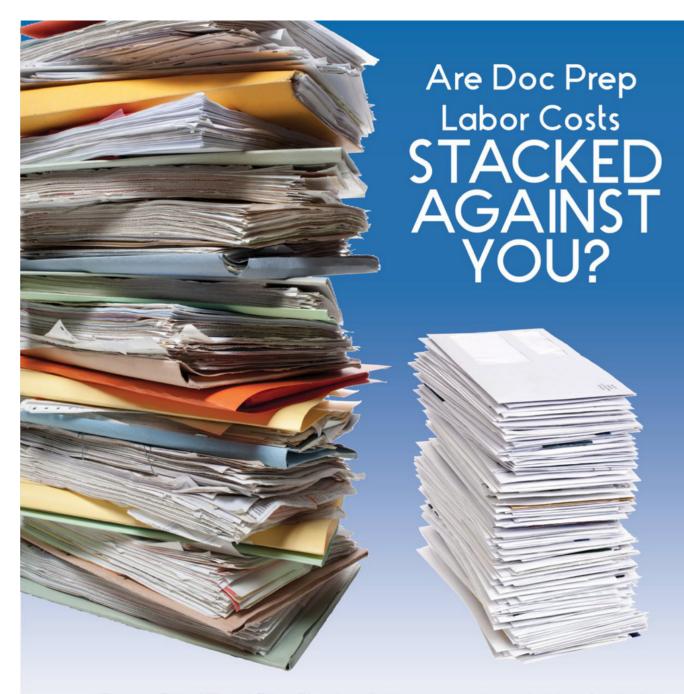


Figure 2: Number of keywords in associate-level and master-level RIM course descriptions. Analysis is based on 33 course descriptions from each type of program.



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Analyzing Certification Opportunities

The degree a candidate has earned may not even matter, though. As mentioned earlier, the majority of RIM positions prefer candidates to have certifications. But earning a professional certification also comes with challenges.

Certification Challenges

Potential candidates for certification may struggle justifying the costs required to take the certification exams - particularly those who may be paying off thousands of dollars' worth of student loans for their education.

Those who can justify the cost may have another obstacle to earning a RIM-related certification: acquiring the practical professional experience often required to sit for a certification exam, either through internships or a paid position.

Internships. As a good example, the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin -Milwaukee (SOIS-UWM) has had difficulty placing its master's-level students in RIM-related internships or field work because the local organizations accepting interns believe candidates should be in a bachelor's program, which - as mentioned above - does not exist for records management.

Paid positions. As shown by the job analysis above, a RIM position candidate needs a bachelor's degree in business (presumably with a focus in records management), library science, or records management. Because records management coursework does not exist at this level, most candidates lack the necessary education - or they may

have a master's degree, which could be too much education - to be considered for many RIM positions.

Thus, the future of RIM is threatened because those who should be its emerging professionals do not have sufficient opportunities to earn the degrees or certification most often sought by potential employers.

Unfortunately, these challenges to the profession are not new. University of Tennessee Professor J. Michael Pemberton, Ph.D., CRM, called for the profession to align itself with LIS education in his April 1981 Records Management Quarterly (RMQ) article "Library and Information Science: The Educational Base for Professional Records Management."

A full decade later, the situation had not improved. In his January 1991 RMQ article, "Does Records Management Have a Future?," Pemberton encouraged the profession to embrace master-level education that represented the type of diverse knowledge required of RIM professionals.

Though the analysis that is the basis for this article doesn't support the necessity of a master's level education, it does support Pemberton's recommendation for the RIM profession to align itself with educational institutions as a means to ensure its future.

Proposing a Way Forward

RIM organizations and professionals must take four actions if the RIM profession is to remain relevant.

1. Develop College Curriculum

First, ARMA International needs to collaborate with the ARMA International Educational Foundation and other RIM professionals to create educational guidelines akin to the Society of American Archivists' "Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies," which was published in 2016 (see http://www2.archivists.org/profeducation/graduate/gpas).

The guidelines should emphasize the development of a RIM specialization or minor degree within existing bachelor's-level programs. A good candidate, for example, is the Bachelors of Science and Information Science and Technology (BSIST) degree at SOIS-UWM, which focuses on the development of such IT skills as database and web design, human-computer interaction and usability, and data analysis, but lacks a clear connection to RIM. A BSIST with a concentration or a minor in RIM would cover the diverse knowledge set that represents

what is needed by today's RIM professional.

In addition, RIM can and should be a component of master-level courses, such as those in information management systems, project management, metadata, and administrative management programs. A RIM specialization in these programs could attract these students to a RIM-related career.

2. Develop Internships

Second, current RIM professionals need to help develop internships or field opportunities at their organizations, allowing students to work with them to do such things as draft or revise RIM policies, interview employees about recordkeeping practices, and conduct research for the development of records retention schedules. Such practical experience would help the interns find employment as RIM professionals, thus making it easier for them to pursue certification exams.

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3. Change CRM Requirements

Third, because the CRM was the certification sought for a large majority of positions, its certifying organization, the Institute of Certified Records Managers (ICRM), should amend its practical experience requirements, allowing students to take the first two or three exams toward certification after they complete specified types of courses. Students would then be able to inform potential employers that they have begun the certification process, perhaps enabling them to get a RIM job through which they could attain the necessary work experience to qualify for and complete the remaining parts of the exam.

This change would not only introduce students to the profession, their pursuit of the certification (and recertification) would encourage their long-term commitment to RIM.

4. Attract Students to ARMA

Fourth, ARMA International should reinstate student memberships at an affordable fee that will enable students to take advantage of discounted resources and education and to join local chapters. ARMA chapters should encourage students from local college programs to participate in their educational meetings and to network with local RIM professionals. To make these sessions more appealing, the chapters should make them free for students or - as some chapters are already doing - offer them at a discounted rate. Further, chapters should permit students to be eligible for board positions.

The association's newly formed Student Advisory Group, which is composed of representatives from higher education and ARMA chapters, has been tasked to discuss and provide recommendations about these very issues, according to ARMA International CEO Robert Baird, IGP, CRM, PMP. He said this group will be making recommendations about a student membership structure and strategies for recruiting students. ARMA's mentorship program that launched last fall at the suggestion of the Young Professionals Advisory Group, will also be instrumental in engaging students, Baird added.

Ensuring RIM's Future

The alarming disconnect between practical and educational expectations for RIM professionals that threatens the RIM profession can be resolved only by establishing a clear educational path that ensures the availability of emerging RIM professionals who have the knowledge and skills to meet the challenges of the rapidly evolving information environment. Competence in dealing with issues like big data, cloud computing, legal risk, and organizational change will not only ensure the survival of the RIM profession, it will help propel RIM professionals into what should be an indispensable role within their organizations. 6



About the Author: Donald C. Force, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where he teaches courses in records management and archival studies. Force received his doctorate in library, archives, and information studies from the University of British Columbia. He is the current president of the ARMA Milwaukee Chapter and a Trustee of the ARMA International Educational Foundation. Force can be contacted at force@uwm.edu.