

CALL TO ACTION!

ATTENTION: Archivists, Archival Educators, and Allies of the University of Manitoba Archival Studies Program

This November 8th, the future of the University of Manitoba Joint Archival Studies and History Program will be determined. This is occurring with no opportunity for response to the proposal to be discussed on the 8th from current archival students or graduates of the program, and none from the wider archival community that benefits from the program and its well-educated graduates. **There is a lot at stake. We require your immediate attention and support. Please take a minute to read our call to action.**

Background:

As most of you know, Dr. Tom Nesmith is retiring on December 31, 2017. Nesmith constitutes 50% of the faculty. Instead of finding a new professor to fill his position, the response of the UM and UW Departments of History is a disconcerting proposal that promises to diminish the quality of the distinct research-based professional archival education that Nesmith, Dr. Greg Bak, and the late Dr. Terry Cook have offered to students since the program's inaugural class in 1991.

The key elements of this proposed course of action include: a decision to not replace Dr. Nesmith with an archival educator of *equivalent* academic and professional knowledge; termination of the thesis requirement; and a discontinuation of academic credit for the archival internship course.

The Joint Discipline Committee (JDC) is comprised of representatives of the UW and the UM and conducts the Joint Master's Program in History (JMP). The JDC has already voted in favour of this proposal. However, it is concerning that the committee's decision has occurred without the input from key stakeholders: students currently in the program; former students who have graduated from the program; and the archival community that directly benefits from the program.

Although the JDC voted in favour of the proposed changes, the Committee does not have the power to implement the proposal. The final decision about the fate of the program falls to the UM and the UW History Department's who have it in their power to reject this proposal. The UW department has also already voted in favour of these drastic changes.

What will the proposal mean?

Everyone affiliated with the archival studies program will be impacted if this proposal passes. Some of the obvious repercussions include the following:

#1 - A loss of 50% of faculty with archival expertise and the devaluation of archival education and the archival profession.

It has been proposed that department historians at the UM and UW who are "experts in archives" will replace an archival educator. It has also been suggested that professional archivists in the

region could be invited to facilitate educational sessions. This is a clear devaluation of the role of Archival studies faculty. The assumption that historians could have the same education in archives as a Ph.D. qualified archival professor is clearly problematic. The academic field of Archival studies is now a distinct and substantial one, requiring, like any other, properly qualified faculty. Particularly in the age of rapidly evolving digital preservation, historians do not have the skill set and knowledge to ensure that archival graduates receive the education necessary to succeed in the profession. Without this knowledge they simply will not be hired. While local archival professionals are skillful in their own particular areas of archival practice, few have the time, knowledge, and ability to effectively teach at the graduate level. Further, the notion that a paid tenured professor could be replaced with volunteers should surely be an affront to teaching staff across the university.

Currently, graduates of the UM's Archival Studies program have an excellent reputation worldwide due in no small part to the internationally renowned and high-profile academic work of the former and current Archival Studies professors. There will no doubt be a loss of academic publishing in the field and this well-earned stature in the archival world for Manitoba's program when the academic staff is cut in half.

#2 - The diminishment of a key opportunity for the intellectual development of graduate students and the loss of direct archival support and mentorship.

The replacement of the thesis requirement with an 8,000 word (25-page) academic paper does not compare to the process of developing, researching, writing and defending a master's thesis. The proposal suggests that anyone from the history department could be able to advise on the proposed archival paper, so it is not guaranteed that Dr. Bak or an archival supervisor of equivalent caliber will be available to advise on the papers produced by archival students. While the thesis component is a demanding process, students and professors agree that it has played a pivotal role in the intellectual development of students. Several students in the program have produced innovative, ground-breaking research that is impacting archival thought, and many more have absorbed valuable theory and case-studies and research abilities to carry forward into their workplace as leading professional archivists.

#3 - Deprivation of a mutually-beneficial opportunity for graduate students to access valuable practical experience at local, national and international archives.

The discontinuation of course credit for the archival internship program means that students will be on their own to find and develop an internship. Lacking proper faculty guidance and support, this means that students will be deprived of the opportunity to gain the kind of outstanding "real-world" working experience they have had so far during the Archival Studies program. If the university does not value the internship any longer as a credit course, why would archival hosts of interns continue to take it seriously as an important investment to make in the education of students? Internships provide the means by which students apply theory to practice in a mentoring environment. This experience, taken after the first year of study in the program, enhances the students' experience during the remainder of the program by grounding their understanding of theoretical, practical and ethical issues faced by working archivists.

Students in the Archival Studies program have completed internships at a tremendous variety of archives, including such international archives as the Nelson Mandela Foundation Archives in South Africa, the Archives of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva, the National Archives of Scotland, the National Archives and Records Administration (USA), and the National Archives (UK), to Library and Archives Canada (both in Ottawa and Winnipeg) and local archives such as the City of Winnipeg Archives, the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies Archives, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights Archives, the Archives of Manitoba, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Archives. It is highly unlikely that such training positions would be available to students without the Internship as a formal course component of the program.

Further, most of these internships have been funded by their host institutions. Funding arrangements for U interns at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives and the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections have been especially valuable and allowed many students to gain experience at these institutions while also benefiting the archives by providing temporary staff for projects that may not otherwise be attempted or completed. Many students are also hired by their placements to continue work past the length of their internship, providing them with a stable income and relevant work experience while they pursue their studies. The disintegration of the Internship program will adversely affect these, and other, archival institutions and thus the archival community as a whole. The lack of internship experience will also make graduates much less desirable while competing for employment in the archival field.

#4 - A less attractive program for Indigenous and settler archival students, and a reduction in the worth of current and former student master's diplomas.

The proposed changes will result in a watered-down version of the program that will not aid in enticing new students to enrol in the program. In the last few years, the program has been successful in attracting an increasing number of Indigenous students. The program's emphasis on decolonization has supported students who work together to give technical and capacity building support to First Nations and Métis groups seeking to develop archives in their communities and nations.

Importantly, one of the deciding factors in the UM's procurement of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) was the promise of the existence of a high-quality Archival Studies program at the UM to give support to its work. Indeed, a majority of the NCTR's current staff at the NCTR are graduates or current students of the program. Weakening the Archival Studies program will be a detriment to the NCTR and any other Indigenous effort that seeks control of their own records.

The loss of reputation that will occur with the dilution of the Archival Studies program will also have the effect of diminishing the perceived quality of the diplomas held by former graduates.

An Alternative Solution? Build on the Strengths of the Program!

In 2017 an external review of the history department extolled the Archival Studies program and highlighted its positive national reputation. The students were judged to be more than satisfied with their education, and the faculty similarly pleased with the accomplishments of the program. Instead of reducing this well-functioning and effective program that is producing top-notch archivists, an alternative to this proposal is to build on the strengths of the program through a firm commitment to hire a qualified Archival Studies professor; maintain the thesis component and status of the archival thesis supervisors; and secure the place of the internship as a course.

HOW TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT – LET’S TAKE ACTION!

We have launched a letter writing campaign to pressure the UM to reject the proposal.

We need YOU to let the Department of History know why the program in its current state is worth saving. We are asking everyone who has directly or indirectly benefitted from the work of the program to take a few minutes to write an email in support of saving the existing program.

Questions to get you thinking about what to include, or how to personalize your letter:

Graduates: How has your career benefited from the program? What role did your internship have in establishing your archival career? What did you gain from writing your thesis?

Current students: Why is it important to you that the Archival Studies program continue with these three core elements in tact?

Archival educators and archivists: What is the value or importance of hiring qualified archival educators to teach graduate level Archival Studies students?

Internship partners: What value have students of the program brought to your organization?

Community organizations and members: How have the faculty and graduates of the program given support to your organization?

DEADLINE FOR LETTERS IS NOVEMBER 3rd.

Please send letters to UM History Department Head (Tina Chen): Tina.Chen@umanitoba.ca **and** UW History Department Head (Dr. James Hanley): j.hanley@uwinnipeg.ca **Please be sure to CC the Association for Manitoba Archives: ama1@mymts.net** (We will print and deliver all letters to the Faculty of Graduate Studies Dean, Dean of Arts, VP Academic, and President).

Thank you for your support! PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD!

Sarah Story & Mary Horodyski

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Co-Chairs, AMA Information and Outreach Committee