Educating archivists in Australia and beyond: the contribution of the University of New South Wales archives course, 1973–2000

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Education is critical to the development of a profession. Programmes of professional education serve to welcome newcomers and to expand the horizons of existing practitioners. So it was with the first university course for archivists in Australia, which began at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in 1973. For the next 27 years, the course and its teachers were to become significant influences in the expansion of the Australian archival profession. The curriculum embraced Australian and international theory and practice, and the strength of the relationship between educators and the local professional community was one of its hallmarks. Many future leaders and innovators received their graduate training at UNSW and the experience created networks that endured over the long term. The reach of the UNSW course went well beyond its home in Sydney, for it included among its graduates the staff of national archives from countries across three continents – Oceania, Asia and Africa. The key UNSW archival educators, Peter Orlovich and Ann Pederson, made significant personal contributions to the profession internationally. The legacy of the UNSW course endures in its graduates and their work in Australia and beyond.

The course is established

The first Australian university course¹ for archivists was offered by the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney. This paper briefly outlines the history of the course and its place in the development of the archives profession in Australia, as well as the broader contribution of the course to education for the archival profession in the Pacific region.

The education required to equip archivists for their professional responsibilities and where and how such education should be provided were long-term concerns of the emerging archival profession in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s.² Single units covering archives and manuscripts were offered in courses for librarians at two institutions, UNSW and the Canberra College of Advanced Education (CCAE) by the early 1970s. Two significant

¹ The term ‘course’ is used throughout as this was the term in used at the time. In this context ‘course’ means a full programme of study leading to a qualification, as distinct from a single unit of study (as is common in North American professional discourse).

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pioneers of the profession in Australia, Bob Sharman and Doreen Wheeler, taught the CCAE unit, which fell victim to cutbacks announced in 1976. This unit provided students destined to work in the major national institutions in Canberra with essential background in archives.3

However, the initiatives leading to the first full qualification in the field were taken at UNSW in Sydney. For some years students had been offered optional archives units in the Diploma in Librarianship. There was now a demand for a separate stream for students who were working or wished to work in archives. A proposal for the introduction of a separate archives course was put to the University’s Board of Vocational Studies in 1972. The proposal argued that the time had now come for

a distinctive programme of professional education which would enable practitioners to serve archives institutions and their users adequately … based on the characteristics of archives administration in its own right.

and further, that

The course has been designed in relation to national needs. National and state governments require increasing numbers of people to work with government archives. Manuscript libraries, and local history collections, provide other openings.4

The Board duly approved the introduction of a new postgraduate course, the Diploma in Archives Administration, to be introduced at the beginning of the next year.

The new UNSW archives course was the first of several that would be established in the next two decades, all located in university library schools and following the mould of librarianship courses in Australia. No vocational qualification or parallel pathway for para-professional training in archives has emerged in the vocational education system, although there is a long history of vocational education in both librarianship and records management.5

The early 1970s was a time of expansion and optimism in the Australian archives world. The national archives6 was expanding its operations and employing more staff around the country, the state archival authorities were experiencing what would become a permanent increase in demand from genealogists and some progress towards legislation that dealt with records management was made when the Public Records Act was passed in Victoria in 1973. The Australian Society of Archivists was founded in 1975 (and the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand in 1976). W. Kaye Lamb visited Australia in 1973 and advised the Commonwealth (national) Government on archives policy, Lamb being the most distinguished archival visitor since T. R. Schellenberg in 1954. There was talk of archives legislation at the national level (however, this did not happen until 1983).

3 WHEELER Doreen, ‘Archival Training: a Canberra Experiment Dies’ in Archives & Manuscripts, 6 (7), August 1976, pp.275-80. The CCAE responded that the unit was continuing, Archives & Manuscripts, 6 (8), February 1977, p.387.
4 UNSW Archives, Minutes of the Board of Vocational Studies, Resolution 72/37, 9 August 1972.
6 Known as the Commonwealth Archives Office until 1974, Australian Archives from 1974 to 1998 and National Archives of Australia from 1998 until the present.
Curriculum and institutional context

Initially, the curriculum for the UNSW Diploma in Archives Administration course included Archives Theory and History, Archives Administration, and Information Environment for Archivists. Conservation was another important presence in the early teaching of the course: the archives course pre-dated the establishment of conservation education in Australia. In the late 1970s, the records management component of the curriculum was strengthened after substantial consultation with the local records management community. The curriculum expanded over time to encompass such areas as electronic records, advocacy and oral history, reflecting changes in the knowledge base and focus of archival practice. The coverage of the UNSW curriculum was consonant with that of courses offered in other countries.7

From 1981, the archives course was offered as a specialisation based on a core curriculum in information management. The qualification was now the Diploma in Information Management–Archives Administration (the other choice being the Diploma in Information Management–Librarianship). This model is recognisable today in the structure of qualifications offered by some of the Australian universities which provide education in archives and recordkeeping. A Master of Archives Administration (by research) was offered from 1981 and later a PhD qualification was offered.

The 1990s was to be an unstable and ultimately the terminal decade for teaching archives at UNSW. In 1992, the School of Librarianship became the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies, usually known by its initials, SILAS. In 1995, the course structure was updated and a Master of Information Management–Archives and Records Management (by coursework), equivalent to one and a half year’s study was offered in addition to the traditional Graduate Diploma. In 1997, the Faculty of Professional Studies, to which SILAS belonged, was abolished and SILAS was moved into the Faculty of Commerce. The MIM–Archives and Records Management was retained, but the diploma course became the Graduate Diploma in Commerce–Archives and Records Management and a new qualification, the Master of Commerce–Archives and Records Management was offered. In 1999, SILAS was abolished and teaching moved into the new School of Information Systems and Management. The University decided to cease offering its courses in archives and records management and the online course in audio-visual archives in mid 2000. There were other factors, but the move to the Faculty of Commerce which imposed minimum class sizes and mandatory commerce-related curriculum content, in addition to the requirement that local students pay full fees (most paid their own way and did not receive support from their employers), tipped the balance. The climate at UNSW had now changed completely, with the result that teaching archives and records management was no longer viable.

The teachers

The individual most closely associated with the UNSW course over its whole life was Dr Peter Orlovich. Orlovich was its initial architect and main teacher, having been a member

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of the teaching staff of the School of Librarianship specialising in archives before the separate archives course was launched. Orlovich had a background in government archives and manuscripts. In a paper presented at a meeting associated with the establishment of the Australian Society of Archivists in 1975, he espoused the principles of his approach to teaching. They included the primary responsibility of the archivist to the archives, the need for students to acquire a deep knowledge of the theoretical concepts and principles underlying archival professional practice, a breadth and depth of knowledge of methods and techniques that could be applied in many archival environments (rather than a single institution), theoretical training integrated with practical training in archives institutions, ‘an appreciation of the continuity of the relationship between archives and records management’, a broad view beyond the role of custodian extending to the role of advocate for archives to the public and to ‘a deep conviction of the important nature of the work they perform.’

Orlovich was an avowed follower of the teachings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson, yet he was also keenly aware of the implications for education and practice of the different context in which archives administration had developed in Australia.

The second key teacher was Ann Pederson, who arrived from the United States in 1981, where she had been Director of the Archives Division, Georgia Department of Archives and History. Pederson’s teaching focus was largely on management, and her background in public programmes and her strong interest in photographs and photographic media became an important ingredient in the teaching of the course from that time on. She became a leading member of the profession in Australia and was the critical conduit between Australian and North American practitioners and practice over the years. Other professional archivists were employed full-time or part-time to teach archives at UNSW over the years. Among these were several UNSW graduates, in particular Baiba Berzins who taught in the late 1970s and again in the early 1990s. Paul Wilson joined Orlovich and Pederson as the third archives teacher from the late 1980s and was responsible for developing an audio-visual archives specialisation, the first of its kind in Australia. Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Sigrid McCausland and Paul Scifleet were other graduates who later returned as teachers.

The students

Students were to be graduates of the University of New South Wales or ‘any other approved university’. Initially, a background in Australian history and politics was preferred, but over the years students came to the course with a wide range of previous studies and life experiences. For some students archives was to be their first career; for some a new direction. Many Australian and international students were already working in the field and undertook the course to gain a professional qualification for personal or career reasons. Some but not all received financial or other support from their employers. Some employers encouraged their staff to do the course and thus gain a formal qualification. However, government archives in Australia generally do not require staff employed to undertake work of a professional nature to have a qualification in archives or recordkeeping. This has been the situation since the 1970s, despite the fact that the need for trained archivists for government archives work was identified in the original rationale for the UNSW course.

8 ORLOVICH Peter, ‘Some Basic Assumptions underlying the Education and Training of Archivists’ in Archives & Manuscripts, 6 (6), February 1976, pp.215-22.
The majority of local students came from Sydney and surrounding areas, while others moved to Sydney from other areas of Australia for the duration of the course, particularly in the years before the next full Australian university course in archives, at the Melbourne College of Advanced Education, was established in 1985. From the outset, the UNSW course was offered on a part-time basis as well as a full-time one, accommodating the needs of students whose work and other commitments made full-time study difficult.

An important feature of the UNSW archives course was the international character of its student population. From its origins as a technical university in the 1950s, UNSW had welcomed considerable numbers of international students, particularly from South-East Asia. UNSW’s School of Librarianship, established in 1960 and the first in Australia, had historically attracted international students (as well as interstate ones until library schools were established in other states). This was to be the experience of the archives course, too. Peter Orlovich established and maintained contacts with national archives in countries near and not so near Australia. The UNSW course thus became a source for professional education for archivists well beyond the state and national boundaries of New South Wales and Australia. By 1993, staff from the national archives of twelve other countries had undertaken the course. They were from the Pacific region: New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji; from Asia: Hong Kong, People’s Republic of China, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Pakistan; and from Africa: Ghana and Kenya.

It would be difficult to name all the UNSW archives graduates who have made a contribution to the profession at a national or international level. However, it is important to record that some of its graduates have gone on to hold significant positions in their respective countries. In Australia, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich is the current Director-General of the National Library of Australia. At the state level, David Roberts served as Director, State Records NSW. Both Baiba Berzins and Greg Coleman have held the position of Principal Archivist of the Northern Territory. Several Presidents of the Australian Society of Archivists have been UNSW graduates – Baiba Berzins, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Mark Stevens, Catherine Robinson, Kim Eberhard and Jackie Bettington. On the international stage, Barbara Reed, among her many contributions to the profession, leads the Australian delegation to the International Standards Organisation’s committee on records management. In recent years, Kim Eberhard was one of those responsible for developing and promoting the Universal Declaration on Archives. Colleen McEwen has also been involved in this project, as well as representing the ASA on the ICA’s Section for Professional Associations. Beyond Australia, UNSW graduates have headed the national archives of other countries – Jacob Hevelawa in Papua New Guinea, Setareki Tale in Fiji and Greg Goulding in New Zealand.

Relationships with the profession

In his 1975 conference paper, Peter Orlovich noted the critical role that practical training must have in education for the archives profession. The study of theoretical concepts and principles, must be ‘closely and substantially integrated with practical training within

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10 Noel Butlin Archives Centre (NBAC), Records of the Australian Society of Archivists, Education Committee, UNSW Accreditation Part 4, N187/937.
archive institutions’. In support, Orlovich quoted Kaye Lamb’s dictum that ‘No one can become an archivist just by frequenting a classroom.’ In the case of the UNSW course, this meant locating sites which could provide the sort of challenges students needed to experience if they were to gain an understanding of the practical side of working with records. This was combined with a group work approach, another dimension of learning important for students new to archives and for those with some experience. The fieldwork component of the course confirmed that working with records also meant working with people and often meant having to explain the nature and significance of records to their host organisations. Many students literally did get their hands dirty when presented with untidy accumulations of unsorted records in cramped basements, underneath grandstands, in disused woolsheds and the like. As the course evolved, students were more likely to be placed in organisations with formal recordkeeping programmes where their host supervisor was a qualified archivist and often a graduate of the UNSW course.

The staff were keen to ensure that students heard directly from practitioners. This was done not only through incorporating tours of repositories and using ‘real-life’ examples in teaching. The relationship was a two-way one. As well as hosting student placements, many graduates returned to UNSW as guest lecturers to report on current projects, debate professional issues or reflect on their careers. When opportunities arose, graduates were selected to fill full-time and temporary positions teaching in the course.

These were not the only ways in which students benefitted from the close links between the course, the profession and local institutions. They shared in the innovative culture of the Australian archival profession through learning from some of its leading participants. For example, in the 1970s and early 1980s students were exposed to the records series system through lectures from Peter Scott (then Director of the NSW Regional Office of Australian Archives) himself. In the mid 1980s, students were taught from the content being developed for the first edition of Keeping Archives, the first comprehensive archives manual produced in Australia and published by the ASA in 1987. This was the first manual in English written anew to reflect current professional consensus across many institutional settings. Ann Pederson was its editor-in-chief and the project to produce the book was a collaborative effort that involved many members of the profession in Sydney. Almost all the chapter authors were graduates of the UNSW course. In the mid 1990s students were part of the audience for the development of the Australian recordkeeping standard (AS4390) and the Designing and Implementing Record Keeping Systems (DIRKS) methodology through lectures and workshops delivered by David Roberts and other staff from the Archives Office of NSW (later State Records NSW).

There was also a strong commitment from the teaching staff to the Australian Society of Archivists. Peter Orlovich was a member of the first ASA Council in 1975–77 and was made an Honorary Member of the ASA in 1983; in 1991-93, he served a further term on Council. Ann Pederson’s vision for Keeping Archives was realised, bringing the ASA not only acclaim for its writing and publishing efforts, but also a revenue stream that provided a sound

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11 Archives & Manuscripts, 6 (6), February 1976, p.218; Peter ORLOVICH, ‘Some Basic Assumptions Underlying the Education and Training of Archivists’.
12 The text of a 1979 Peter Scott lecture to UNSW students appears in CUNNINGHAM Adrian (ed.), The Arrangement and Description of Archives amid Administrative and Technological Change: Essays and Reflections by and about Peter J. Scott, Australian Society of Archivists, Brisbane, 2010, pp.263-304.
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financial base for its activities for many years afterwards. Pederson was a member of the ASA Council for two terms, 1987–89 and 1989–91. UNSW students were encouraged to join the ASA, ‘which made them feel very welcome.’ They also felt that they were being introduced into an exciting profession.\(^\text{13}\) Many office-bearers of the NSW (originally Sydney) branch of the ASA have been UNSW graduates. The strong presence of UNSW graduates among its active members has provided the branch with the base for its active contributions to the profession, and the same can be said for the school archives scene in Sydney.

The high regard for the course and its teachers held by former students made a strong impression on the ASA’s course accreditation panel in 1993. In the preface to their formal report, panel members Chris Hurley, Glenda Acland and Michael Saclier (none of them UNSW graduates) made a particular point of noting the depth of interest taken by staff in their students, which included keeping in touch with and advising former students on employment opportunities. The panel wrote: ‘These efforts, which go far beyond what is normally expected or offered, are widely attested to and appreciated.’ For their part, former students had ‘an especial warmth’ for the staff and the course.\(^\text{14}\)

**International connections**

As we have seen, the reach of the UNSW course went beyond the Australian continent through the opportunity presented to staff of national archives from other countries to study for and receive a professional qualification. Strong connections between the profession in Australia and New Zealand were formed through the UNSW course, well before Archives New Zealand joined the two-nation body representing government archives (currently the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities).

From the early 1980s, Peter Orlovich made a significant contribution to the Pacific Region Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA). Orlovich worked with fellow Australians Bruce Burne and Lindsay Cleland, among others, towards the establishment of PARBICA in 1981. He was responsible for conducting the first PARBICA training seminar, held in Sydney in 1985. He designed and presented later PARBICA seminars, including those in Port Moresby and Wellington. He also served as PARBICA treasurer from 1989 to 1991. His other work in the region included undertaking a survey of records in Western Samoa in 1990, assisting in the development of the University of Papua New Guinea Certificate in Archives and Records Management and assisting the Fiji National Archives in developing local training courses.

Drawing on her knowledge of and contact with the profession in North America, Ann Pederson was instrumental in bringing a number of leading North American practitioners and educators to Australia. The visitors included Helen Samuels, Jane Nokes, Terry Eastwood, David Bearman, Hugh Taylor, Terry Cook and Luciana Duranti. For some of these individuals, notably David Bearman and Terry Cook, these visits would become the beginning of a continuing engagement with Australian archival theory and practice. Pederson’s other contributions on an international level included serving on the ICA Section on

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\(^\text{14}\) NBAC, Ns87/937 Education Committee – Course Accreditation University of New South Wales (Part 4).
Archival Education and being a contributor to and editor of the joint ICA–International Records Management Trust ‘Managing Public Sector Records’ series of case studies.

**Accreditation**

In Australia, courses leading to an initial professional qualification are usually accredited by the relevant professional association or associations. The ASA’s rules state that a person who has worked in an archives institution for one year and who holds a qualification in archives administration accredited by the ASA or such other qualification as may be deemed by the Council to be the equivalent thereof may be admitted as a professional member of the ASA. Initially, the archives diploma course was recognised by the Library Association of Australia (LAA), which meant that archives graduates could be appointed to positions which stipulated eligibility for membership of the LAA (later the Australian Library and Information Association). The ASA assumed responsibility for accrediting archives courses in the 1980s, and undertook its first major accreditation of the UNSW course in 1993. The panel thoroughly studied the curriculum and its context, examined the relationship between the university and local employers, and solicited the views of current and past students. The panel recommended that the ASA accredit the Graduate Diploma in Information Management (Archives Administration) offered by UNSW for six years. However, the panel also recommended that the content and techniques covered the core courses – those shared with the librarianship stream – be reviewed. The course was reviewed in 1995 and the Master of Information Management–Archives and Records Management was added to the Graduate Diploma as an initial professional qualification for intending archivists and records managers who held bachelor’s degrees.

By this time, four other Australian universities – the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Monash University, Edith Cowan University and Curtin University – offered comparable courses in the field. This was a time of great innovation in the archives profession in Australia, when collective minds were engaged in addressing the challenges associated with electronic records. Academics at Monash, notably Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, were articulating the records continuum theory. The collaborative work that culminated in the Australian standard for records management (AS4390), later to be the foundation of the international standard (ISO 15489), was underway. Edith Cowan University was pioneering distance education in archives in Australia. Educators from several universities and from the vocational sector were involved with practitioners in developing Competency Standards for Records and Archives.

In 1998 the ASA began a new round of accreditations of all relevant university courses, using the new competency standards. The accreditation panel for the UNSW courses recommended that the UNSW graduate diploma and masters courses be provisionally accredited. This recommendation, accepted by the ASA Council in May 1999, allowed three years for the University ‘to redevelop its courses so that graduating students meet the competencies as set out in the ASA accreditation criteria.’

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16 NBAC, N187/937 Education Committee – Course Accreditation University of New South Wales (Part 4).
17 NBAC, N187/868 Accreditation – UNSW.
would still be eligible for ASA membership during the period of provisional accreditation. The ASA panel had concluded that there was insufficient space allowed in the restructured curriculum in the new home of the course, the Faculty of Commerce, for students to develop the specific knowledge and skills in archives and records that would enable them to meet the ASA criteria.

At the end of the 1990s, it was unfortunate that there was no longer a place for the pioneering archives course in Australia in UNSW’s plans for its future as a leading research-intensive university. The reasons for the demise of the archives course were complex, some relating to the particular circumstances at UNSW, notably the move to the Faculty of Commerce and its impact on the curriculum and also new requirements for minimum class sizes. Falling student numbers, a result of the user-pays regime in place in Australian higher education, were another factor in the decline of the course. There were other less tangible factors, one being that the course was not associated with the 1990s innovations in Australian archival practice and research. Peter Orlovich had always had difficulty with the core information studies approach to the curriculum and remained true to his original vision for the course. Ann Pederson expanded her collaborative relationships with fellow educators in Australia and overseas. However, the times were not favourable to a course that privileged teaching and close local connections with the archives (rather than the broader recordkeeping) profession. Both Peter and Ann continued to teach and support their students for as long as they could before leaving their long-time positions, Orlovich in 1999 and Pederson in 2000.

Assessing the legacy of the UNSW course

The influence of the UNSW course over the long term can be traced, rather than directly measured. While it is now over a decade since the demise of the course, it is not too much to claim that a whole generation of archivists in Sydney and beyond were given an opportunity to have fulfilling careers, based on the solid grounding provided by their studies at UNSW. Some came completely new to the field, while others built on the knowledge and skills they had begun to develop in their employment in particular institutional contexts. They benefited from the experience of learning from their teachers and from their fellow students. Indeed the diversity of the student population was a strength of the course: through it students were introduced to different cultures and to different approaches to professional practice. They were also inculcated into a developing and exciting professional community. Professional and personal networks developed; lifelong friendships were formed through the course and some cohorts have stayed in touch over the decades. Professional networks also proved robust. Where UNSW graduates had the opportunity once they became employers, they were likely to stipulate that staff should possess a professional qualification and in many cases their fellow alumni were employed. Some UNSW graduates became activists and leaders of the profession, others were less engaged and some went on to work outside the archives and records arena. It is not possible to reach a definitive conclusion about the impact of the course, but it is possible to say that it enriched the life of the archives profession in Australia and beyond in countless ways. It is impossible to imagine where we would be today without it.