

1973

Conservation: Hearings, Reports, Correspondence (1971-1973): Correspondence 07

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20560

May 29, 1973

Mr. Charles Van Ravenswaay
Director
The Henry Francis du Pont
Winterthur Museum
Winterthur, Delaware 19735

Dear Charles:

Thank you for the invitation to your small conference on training.

I enclose written replies to your agenda questions. They do answer the questions but do so perhaps more from the employer's point of view than from that of the academic.

The list of training-areas given in IV A is not exhaustive but I have not seen such a list anywhere before this. Every one of these three dozen procedures has been applied to objects made of various materials either wood, metal, leather or pottery, in the Smithsonian Conservation-Analytical Laboratory. Taken in their various combinations and permutations we have over one hundred packages of knowledge to be studied in theory and to be practised in order to make a competent object-conservator who could be useful immediately to his employer. Assigning five hours to lectures, experiments and practice in each topic we arrive at a need for some five hundred hours of instruction over three years, each having forty weeks of forty working hours. If less than this instruction is provided then the first employer will need to educate, as well as to familiarise.

Since writing the above, your letter and inclusions dated May 23 arrived. My comments refer to Dick Buck's "practical conservators".

Yours sincerely,



R. M. Organ, Chief
Conservation-Analytical Laboratory

Enclosure.

REPLIES TO AGENDA QUESTIONS

- I A. C.A.L.'s only formal training program is a lecture series for orientation, available on tape. On-the-job learning goes on constantly. We do accept internes from the schools.
- I B. This is a good idea. A survey would be helpful but it should be kept up to date. There is need for a central reference point from which regular checks of local conditions can be made.
- I C. This is for the training program faculty to consider. It would probably be most economical for faculty to remain in their own specialized environment and for students to rotate.
- II A. C.A.L. has more applicants than positions by a factor of two or three but most applicants are not fully trained, if at all.
- B. Students might themselves avoid overcrowded areas if they were told the facts. A survey will be needed to establish the facts. Under-crowded areas, e.g. object-treatment, might offer higher salaries but there are economic difficulties here: the market will now pay high prices for picture-conservation but is less educated to the real cost of conservation in the (probably more difficult) area of object-conservation.
- III A. to D. ?
- E. The expertise is in fact possessed by an individual, not by an Institution, as things are at present organized. That this is so becomes obvious when we consider the effect on an Institution of losing a faculty member. The Institution itself provides space, material for private study, publicity, some clerical service. Therefore cost is measurable as salary \times fraction, f , of class-work devoted to some other Institution's student plus an appropriate proportion of the support-costs of the Institution (namely, all costs less costs of faculty). Let the Institution pay this! It may balance out in the end.

F. If extra financial support can indeed add faculty members then students can be taught by them! Presumably several of the schools might have space for one more faculty-member, or some teaching might be done outside the customary working day. Some of the extra financial support would be used to rotate students between institutions.

G. - H. ?

* IV A. Some idea of this may be gathered from the proposals for apprenticeship of paper conservators formulated with great labor by the (now-named) American Institute for Conservation: copy attached.

For object-conservators I suggest attention to these areas: motivation to be non-profit oriented; ethics; orderly mind; ability to communicate in writing; persistence; patience; understanding of properties, deterioration and reactions of materials that occur in museum objects and in contemporary materials used to repair or support them or to store them; knowledge of sources of factual data to support this understanding; manual dexterity in and theoretical understanding of the safe handling of objects and the various procedures applied to them, namely observation, mechanical-cleaning, wetting and drying, joining, heating and cooling, attaching, supporting, coating, conditioning, consolidation, cleaning, extracting, electrolysis, dialysis, embedding, encapsulating, fumigating, in-painting, laminating, mounting, packing, patination, poulticing, pressing, removing stains or additions, repairing, replacements, stabilizing chemically and physically, unfolding stiffened material, ultra-sonic treatment, vacuum-cleaning, warp-correcting, etc.; practice in making solutions and in using common instruments employed during observation and monitoring (low-power microscopes; illuminants; the measurement of temperature, pH, electrical conductivity; cameras; infra-red and ultra-violet; balances; hydrometers; hygrometers; etc., etc.).

Implementation

IV B. By setting up an independent examining body OR by dividing the examination function for one institution into separate subject areas and allocating these to each of the other

training institutions, so that the examining skills would automatically average out: every candidate would be examined by all of the other institutions, never by his own.

Enforcement

Legal process might not be necessary if the above-described scheme of examination were adopted: it would immediately become obvious to all via the marking if any one institution's standards were slipping.