

# ARLIS/NA Core Competencies for Art Information Professionals

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**Objective** The Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) is committed to increasing the effectiveness of art librarians and visual resources curators by focusing its efforts on professional and continuing education, as well as professional development activities. (1) In response to this goal, the Executive Board of ARLIS/NA appointed a Core Competencies sub-committee of the ARLIS/NA Professional Development Committee in 2003. The charge of the subcommittee was to create core competency standards for the art library and visual resources professions. The resulting document identifies the fundamental knowledge, behaviors, and skills currently essential to most professional positions within the art information field. It is intended to be a flexible document that can be revised as the field evolves and changes.

**Methodology** The standards contained within this document are based on information and data collected from a variety of sources, including: an analysis of 111 position descriptions in the art library and visual resources fields (2); a perception survey of ARLIS/NA, Visual Resources Association (VRA), and Association of Architecture School Libraries (AASL) members; and a thorough review of relevant core competency literature, including the competency documents of other professional library organizations (3).

**What is an Art Information Professional?** For the purposes of this document, an art information professional is a librarian or visual resources curator who is a specialist skilled in organizing and providing access to information on the visual arts, architecture, design and related subjects.(4) Art information professionals work in a variety of settings, including but not limited to: college and university libraries, public libraries, art and architecture departments, architecture and design firms, art museums and research institutes, and art and design schools. The competencies in this document apply to professional positions, generally requiring an American Library Association (ALA) accredited master's degree in the field of library and information science.(5) Certain competencies may also apply to staff who work in the art library or visual resources fields.

**What are Core Competencies?** The competencies identified in this document represent the fundamental knowledge, behaviors, and skills currently essential to most professional positions within the art information field.(6) The focus of this document is on competencies that are specific to art information professionals. General competencies are also listed.

**Do I Need to Acquire All of the Competencies Listed?** Each individual's competencies will develop within the context of one's own position. What competencies are necessary for an individual will

also depend on one's specific career focus. Many of the competencies listed will apply to most individuals working in the art information field, while other competencies will not hold the same relevance. Some competencies listed in one area of this document will naturally apply to competencies listed in other areas of the document. For instance, foreign language skills are broadly applicable and may apply to competencies in the areas of Reference & Information Access, Collection Management, Development & Organization, as well as other areas.

**How Can I Use This Document?** There are many practical applications for core competency guidelines. These guidelines will be useful to anyone planning a career in art information, and to anyone who wants to further develop a career already underway. The guidelines can also be used to develop employee performance plans,(7) position descriptions, and interview questions for job candidates (8). Core competencies can be used as a starting point to design mentoring and recruitment programs, and to develop library and information science curricula.(9) Employers can design employee training programs and continuing education curricula can be written, based on core competency guidelines. Members of ARLIS/NA committees, divisions, sections, round tables, regions, and chapters are encouraged to build on this document and create related competency guidelines, work with other professional organizations on competency initiatives, and assist the ARLIS/NA Professional Development Committee with the amendment of this document as needed. ARLIS/NA members may also consider using this document to help prepare professional development workshops and for conference planning.

## **SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE & EXPERTISE**

### **1. Art Information Professionals have broad and specialized subject knowledge in the fields of art, architecture, design and related fields. (10)**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. the ability to identify major movements, periods, exemplary works, and "masters" in the fields of art, architecture, and design. This knowledge includes familiarity with the work of artists, architects, and designers of non-western societies and traditionally under-represented groups
- b. the ability to identify current trends, emerging media, artists, architects and designers
- c. a familiarity with the creative inquiry and "discovery-led" (11) research methodologies employed in the fields of art, architecture, and design that include but are not limited to: critique, empirical inquiry, precedent studies, comparative analysis of works, case study analysis, user-behavior research, image/work and building identification, building and site program analysis, drawing as a form of inquiry, etc.
- d. a familiarity with historical and social research and critical methodology employed in art, architecture, and design research including, but not limited to: formal analysis and description of visual forms, critical review, biographical study, iconography and iconology, precedent studies, social context analysis, case-studies, etc.

- e. a basic knowledge of the materials and techniques employed in the fields of art, architecture, and design
- f. a working knowledge of the terminology of artists, architects, and designers
- g. a working knowledge of the terminology of art, architecture, and design theorists and historians
- h. a working knowledge of the languages used in these field(s)
- i. continuous and proactive learning in these areas

**2. Art Information Professionals have broad and specialized knowledge in the fields of library & information science and/or visual resources.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. general and specialized knowledge of the fundamental theories of library and information science
- b. general and specialized knowledge of current best practices and standards in the field of library and information science, with particular emphasis on the best practices and standards created by art information professionals
- c. general knowledge of the history of information management and librarianship, particularly the history of the art library and visual resources professions
- d. continuous and proactive learning in these areas

**REFERENCE & INFORMATION ACCESS**

**3. Art Information Professionals are astute at recognizing “when and what information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, access and deliver the information users need.” (12)**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. an understanding of the different kinds of information-seeking behaviors of users in general, and particularly the behaviors of artists, architects, designers, historians, museum professionals, and other users of art, architecture, and design information
- b. the application of effective research interviewing skills including active listening and the ability to match or assist in matching the most relevant, reliable, accurate, and useful information resources available, that relate to users’ information needs
- c. the ability to conduct basic and advanced analysis of the “reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias of information” (13)

- d. a command of information retrieval techniques and their appropriate use, with particular emphasis on the challenges presented by the retrieval of visual information within text-based systems
  - e. a working knowledge of general research methods and skills, including the methods and skills that are specific to art, architecture, and design, including but not limited to: biographical research, auction and sales information research, case study analysis, literature review, etc.
  - f. a working knowledge of specialized sources and types of information in art, architecture, and design, including but not limited to: auction and sales catalogs, exhibition and collections catalogs (from museums, galleries and private collections), core journal and serial publications, image collections (digital and analog), historical surveys and chronologies, catalogues raisonnés, visual dictionaries, art films, sources of electronic art, artists books, working drawings (plans) for buildings, auction and sales catalogs, collector's price guides, archival materials, product reviews, patents, product catalogs, exhibition and show reviews, museum and gallery directories and calendars, building codes and standards, building cost estimate guides, etc.
  - g. a working knowledge of general reference and research tools in the social sciences, humanities, engineering, and other areas as they relate to art, architecture, and design research
4. **Art Information Professionals access, use, and distribute information ethically and legally.**  
Evidenced by a combination of the following:
- a. specialized knowledge of the current economic, legal, and social issues that shape the production, access, dissemination, preservation, and ownership of visual material
  - b. a broad understanding of the current economic, legal, and social issues that shape the production, access, dissemination, preservation, and ownership of information, including but not limited to: intellectual freedom, intellectual property, copyright, privacy, etc.(14)
  - c. ethical and legally sound decisions that are made regarding the:
    - o ownership of information
    - o access to information
    - o use and application of information
    - o duplication of information
  - d. "the protection of each user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted" (15)

## **INSTRUCTION**

**5. Art Information Professionals are effective instructors.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. the ability to teach library research, information literacy, and information technology skills by developing and utilizing effective instructional tools, methods, and services that are oriented to the art, architecture, and design fields
- b. a working knowledge of the fundamental and established theories of learning and the ability to apply those theories effectively in instructional and training situations
- c. an understanding of different learning styles and the ability to apply the appropriate instructional techniques necessary for reaching different types of learners
- d. clear articulation of instructional goals, activities, and expected outcomes
- e. instructional behaviors that engage students/users (16)
- f. continuous learning about users, their research goals, and the educational or research environment in which they work

**COLLECTION MANAGEMENT, DEVELOPMENT & ORGANIZATION**

**6. Art Information Professionals develop, organize, and manage collections responsive to the mission of their organizations and the needs of their users in support of research, teaching and learning.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. the critical evaluation of the textual and visual quality, content, currency, and relevance of both contemporary and historical materials in all formats. Such evaluation necessitates knowledge of a wide variety of sources for effective collection development, including but not limited to: publishers' catalogs, small press catalogs, approval plans, specific art publishers, book reviews, etc.
- b. the creation and application of guidelines for the use of collections with attention to specialized publication formats and materials in the arts, and recognition of the preservation requirements of art-related collections, whose value often increases over time
- c. the analysis and evaluation of collections according to the standard tools and best practices of the profession, particularly those developed by and for art information professionals
- d. an understanding of relevant professional organization guidelines regarding collection development (17)
- e. the knowledge and application of approved standards for descriptive cataloging, classification, other methods of subject access, and metadata standards, with special

attention to the specialized characteristics of art-related publications, image collections, and resources

- f. the creation and implementation of appropriate thesauri and vocabulary for consistent data description, with special attention to the application of approved standards developed by art librarians
- g. the ability to forecast areas of growth and development in the art field, and trends in art historical scholarship, including but not limited to: areas of study in non-western art, the art of traditionally under-represented groups, emerging media such as internet-based and performance art, and multi- and interdisciplinary resources that examine the history of art from a variety of perspectives

## **RESEARCH & ASSESSMENT**

### **7. Art Information Professionals are skilled in qualitative and quantitative research methodology and techniques (e.g., survey, focus group and statistical research, case study analysis, etc.)**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. the application of appropriate research methods in order to report on and improve locally-based resources and services. For example, in conducting needs assessments, analysis of information-seeking behavior, in identifying trends, assessing the success of instructional programs, producing annual reports, etc.
- b. the application of appropriate research methods in order to support the gathering, processing, and dissemination of information towards the advancement of the profession
- c. the ability to recognize what research methods are appropriate to a given scenario
- d. the ability to assess the validity, currency, and relevance of research conducted by others

## **PUBLIC SERVICE**

### **8. Art Information Professionals provide exemplary public service. (18)**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. behaviors that create an environment conducive to research and learning
- b. respectful and equitable treatment of all users
- c. empathy and the interviewing skills necessary in order to help users determine and fulfill their individual needs
- d. the ability to elicit, understand, and react accordingly to feedback from users

- e. reliable and accurate communication of information (e.g., use policies and procedures, copyright laws, etc.) to users and staff
- f. sensitivity to the public service needs specific to the visual arts and design community

## **MANAGERIAL & SUPERVISORY**

### **9. Art Information Professionals effectively represent themselves, their organizations, and their profession.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. well-developed communication skills necessary for a variety of responsibilities and activities, such as the supervision of employees, the training of employees and co-workers, public relations, negotiating, teamwork, conflict resolution, public speaking, etc.
- b. well-developed interpersonal skills that promote collegiality and mutually respectful relationships with others
- c. the ability to educate local constituents and colleagues about the needs and approaches to library use specific to the visual arts, architecture, and design fields
- d. diplomacy in resolving conflicts

### **10. Art Information Professionals are capable self-managers and managers of others.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. behaviors that are necessary for a variety of responsibilities and activities (such as leadership activities, interdepartmental initiatives, and team-based projects). Behaviors include but are not limited to the demonstration of: a cooperative attitude, initiative, self-motivation and the ability to motivate others
- b. organizational and time-management skills necessary for a variety of responsibilities and activities, including but not limited to: priority setting, setting and meeting deadlines, project planning and management, setting and attaining goals, establishing workflows, delegation of tasks, etc.
- c. critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that involve creativity, the ability to anticipate problems, balanced decision-making, and analytical thinking
- d. evaluative skills that are necessary in order to promote the professional development and continuing education of staff or colleagues
- e. the ability to accurately self-evaluate in order to support one's own professional development

### **11. Art Information Professionals help to ensure the financial well-being of their places of work.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. financial management skills, including but not limited to: basic accounting, record-keeping, and reporting skills
- b. basic grant-writing and fundraising skills
- c. successful management of different types of revenue sources (e.g., endowed, annual operating, project funds, grant funds) and expenditure streams (e.g., standing orders, firm orders, hourly wages)
- d. ethical handling of funds

**12. Art Information Professionals help shape the future of their institution, company, or organization, and their profession.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. the ability to understand and assess user needs and incorporate these needs into problem-solving, planning, and outreach activities
- b. the ability to foresee user needs, based on empirical information and data collection/evaluation, and incorporate these needs into problem-solving, planning, and outreach activities
- c. the ability to employ internal and external benchmarking practices with the goal of continuously improving local operations, services, and collections
- d. activities that ensure relevant and balanced representation of both users and staff, in regards to services and collections
- e. an awareness of current trends and changes in the areas of policy, budgeting, technology, and legislation and the ability to analyze how these trends and changes affect local operations, services, and collections

**TECHNOLOGY**

**13. Art Information Professionals have a broad understanding of information technology and are skilled in the implementation and utilization of technological tools, regardless of specific format, medium, or method of delivery. (19)**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. a general understanding of computer and network operations and interface design principles
- b. current knowledge of information technology trends and the ability to recognize the effect of these trends on local activities

- c. flexibility in adapting to frequent changes in information technology formats and methods of delivery
- d. the ability to select appropriate technological tools and apply them effectively, particularly those tools that are vital to the visual art, architecture, and design fields, such as: digital image management systems, scanners, digital projectors, presentation technology, etc.
- e. the skills necessary to ensure quality access, presentation, and preservation of digital image collections

**14. Art Information Professionals help shape information technology products.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. a working knowledge of best practices in the areas of usability, interoperability, and digital preservation
- b. the ability to accurately determine the technology needs of users through a variety of qualitative and quantitative assessment techniques
- c. the representation of user needs when making decisions regarding the purchase or design of information technology products
- d. the ability to identify problems with technology products and provide feedback on these problems to local personnel and/or vendors
- e. the ability to recognize and participate in collaborative opportunities with local constituents, peers, and with vendors in order to create new or enhance existing technology products and services

**PROFESSIONAL ADVOCACY**

**15. Art Information Professionals contribute to the advancement of the art library and visual resources professions.**

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. knowledge sharing that includes publication and presentation of research findings as well as professional networking activities
- b. participation in life-long learning and professional development activities that build on existing knowledge and experience
- c. creation of life-long learning and professional development activities for colleagues and staff that build on existing knowledge and experience and contribute to overall professional capital within the art information field

## 16. Art Information Professionals contribute to the advancement of the Arts.

Evidenced by a combination of the following:

- a. services, products, and resources that directly and indirectly advance knowledge in the arts, the creation of works of art, and help to create a broad understanding and appreciation of the arts.
- b. activities that directly and indirectly support the preservation of cultural heritage that includes art, architecture, design, and related fields

### **Notes**

1. Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA). "Strategic Plan, 2000-2005: Goals and Objectives." <http://www.arlisna.org/arlismembers/spgoals.htm>. July 2000.
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5. Policy statements and standards outlining the education requirements for librarians and visual resources professionals are included in: American Library Association. *ALA Policy Manual. Librarians: Appropriate Degrees*. Section 2, policy 54.3. <http://www.ala.org/ala/ourassociation/governingdocs/policymanual/policymanual.htm>. 2005; ARLIS/NA and VRA Taskforce on Visual Resources Professional Issues. "The Criteria for Hiring and Retention of Visual Resources Professionals." In *Guidelines for the Visual Resources Profession*, edited by Kim Kopatz. Laguna Beach, CA.: Joint publication of the Art Libraries Society of North American and the Visual Resources Association. 2000: 1-5.
6. A plethora of literature exists on core competencies in the library profession. For more definitions of core competencies in the available literature, see the bibliography: Ball, Heather. "Core Competencies in the Library Profession: Selected Writings." ARLIS/NA Professional Development Committee website. [http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/afa/pdc/BIBLIOGRAPHY\\_CORECOMPS.pdf](http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/afa/pdc/BIBLIOGRAPHY_CORECOMPS.pdf). February 17, 2004.
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11. This term is used to describe a type of design research methodology in: Laurel, Brenda, ed. *Design Research: Methods and Perspectives*. MIT Press: Mass. 2003. p.8
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13. *ibid*, partially quoted from Standard Three, Performance Indicator 2a.
14. Adapted from: Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education." Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000. <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm>.
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