

Syracuse University

**SURFACE**

---

Anthropology - Faculty Publications

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public  
Affairs

---

2000

## Historical Archaeology in America: Implications of the 1998 SHA Membership Survey for Future and Most Recent Generations

Christopher R. DeCorse

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/ant>



Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

DeCorse, Christopher R. 2000 Historical Archaeology in America: Implications of the 1998 SHA Membership Survey for Future and Most Recent Generations. Paper presented at the Society for Historical Archaeology Conference, Quebec City, Canada. January 4-9th

This Conference Document is brought to you for free and open access by the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology - Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact [surface@syr.edu](mailto:surface@syr.edu).

***Historical Archaeology in America:  
Implications of the 1998 SHA Membership Survey for Future  
and Most Recent Generations***

Paper presented at the  
Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology  
January 4-9, 2000, Québec City, Canada

**Christopher R. DeCorse  
Department of Anthropology  
Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs  
Syracuse University**

The 1998 SHA Membership Survey is a comprehensive survey to obtain a general membership profile of the Society, as well as information about member perceptions of the Society's goals and activities. The data provide the SHA leadership with important guidance for planning programs at the start of the new millennium. The survey also offers unique insight into who we are as a professional organization, and hence serves as an important resource for all students and graduate students setting out for careers in archaeology. The intention of this paper is not to present the results of the Survey. These data have been summarized in a full report.<sup>1</sup> Rather, my discussion addresses a subset of the Survey results—particularly those data that have direct and immediate implications for the most recent, as well as future, generations of historical archaeologists. I will begin with a brief overview of the Survey itself and then examine the varying significance of employment in the academe, cultural resource management, and government. These data point to areas of concern for the entire profession; those currently involved in training and employing the present and future generations of archaeologists, as much as the recent initiates in the field.

The 1998 Survey is the second SHA survey to be undertaken. The previous membership survey, completed in 1991, was one of first systematic efforts to profile American archaeology. It was initiated by the SHA Women's Caucus with the objective of evaluating the degree to which women and men in historical archaeology enjoyed equal opportunities.<sup>2</sup> The present Survey was intended to be much broader in scope and, in its final version, reflects input from the SHA Board of Directors and society membership as well as past, present and future SHA presidents Henry Miller, Pam Cressey, Terry Majewski, Sue Henry Renaud and Douglas Armstrong. The final survey was designed by Christopher R. DeCorse. Analysis of the data was completed at Syracuse University by Brian E. DiSanto and Christopher R. DeCorse.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> DeCorse and DiSanto 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Rothschild and Wall 1994; Wall and Rothschild 1992. Also see Spencer-Wood 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Financial support for the distribution, return, and analysis of the survey was provided by research funds provided to DeCorse by the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University and by personal funds from Christopher R. DeCorse

The survey questions were structured around five thematic categories. These include sections on personal data, employment, professional activities, research interests, and the importance and success of SHA activities and goals. Additionally, some data on member professional responsibilities and activities were analyzed according to the respondent's type of employment and by gender.

The Survey was distributed to the entire membership in November 1998 with a requested response date of December 15, 1998. Responses from 804 individuals were received representing a return rate of slightly more than 39 percent. This number compares very favorably with surveys of comparable populations. Mail surveys in general, have response rates of between 10% and 40%.<sup>4</sup> In comparison, the 1994 Society for American Archaeology Membership Survey, mailed to the entire 5000 plus membership and a selection of non-member archaeologists yielded a 28 percent response rate overall and a 31 percent response rate from members.<sup>5</sup> Only three SHA Surveys received long after the deadline and after the analysis was well underway were omitted from these results.

The SHA Survey yielded some interesting, as well as some not particularly surprising, data. A significant portion of the Society, like much of the discipline, consists of aging white males (Figure 1). At 59 percent, men make up more than half of the Society's membership. Male members of SHA publish slightly more and are generally better paid (Figures 2 and 3). Women, on the other hand, do somewhat more peer reviewing of book and journal manuscripts, and slightly more women than men are self-employed. These data are interesting and require more analysis. However, these factors are likely not, as a whole, evidence of inequities in varied opportunities for men compared to those of women, though this may be a contributing factor. Some of this disparity likely represents the career tracks of the generally younger female membership (See figures 4 and 5). Men in SHA currently have more experience and hold a greater proportion of Ph.D.s than do women (38 vs. 31 percent). This, however, will likely change as new generations enter the field: notably, at present 56 percent of women versus 46 percent of men hold MA degrees. This mirrors similar differences in terms of the number of years of experience in archaeology between men and women. These data may indicate a subsequent trend toward more women obtaining Ph.D.s, something that can be assessed in light of future surveys.

The regional focus of the Society membership is somewhat restricted. Some of you will have noted the narrow focus of this paper suggested by the title "Historical Archaeology in America." While this may seem myopic for a Society that purports to be global in scope, in fact, the vast majority of the Society's membership—91 percent—work in the United States and 90 percent are US citizens (Figure 6). Over three quarters of the membership concentrates on the archaeology of the eastern United States and 67 percent concentrate on the nineteenth century (Figure 7 and 8).

---

<sup>4</sup> Coplin and O'Leary 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Zeder 1997:4.

SHA's main competition for membership and meeting times collectively comes from a wide range of regional organizations, not larger professional organizations such as the American Anthropological Association or the Society for American Archaeology. Of the larger national professional associations, the Society for American Archaeology is the more significant with 53 percent of SHA members holding memberships in contrast to 20 percent in the American Anthropological Association (Figure 9). Not surprisingly, the least successful aspect of the SHAs annual conference was the time of year it is held.

## **The Profession of Archaeology**

As someone involved in training the most recent generation of historical archaeologists I found the information on employment and professional activity most interesting. The majority of SHA members are employed in government agencies and in cultural resource management work. In fact, self employed or corporate CRM work alone accounts for 50 percent of SHA member employment (Figures 10 and 11). In the Survey analysis the job categories used were: CRM, Government, and Education/Teaching

**CRM** employment is an aggregation of corporate employment (represented by 31% of the respondents) and self-employed (23%).

**Government** employment, combines federal, state, and local government agencies and includes 31 percent of the membership

**Teaching and Education**, including full-time college/university, joint-appointments, adjunct teaching at colleges and universities, and primary and secondary school employees, was reported by 29% of the membership.

These categories were selected for reporting the data because they represent the greatest proportion of the respondents (538 out of 759 respondents). Women and men are relatively evenly distributed in these areas, though women are somewhat less well represented in academic positions and more women are self-employed (Figure 11). There was also virtually no statistical distinction within the combined groups—For example State vs. Federal employment generally yielded similar profiles in professional activity and salary. The most striking exception is in the benefits available to private vs. corporate employment in cultural resource management; privately employed individuals enjoying far fewer health and retirement benefits (Figure 12). This raises important concerns in terms of long term career choices with regard to family planning and healthcare. The percentages shown on this graph are percentages of respondents from individual job categories, not percentages of the Survey sample as a whole.

It is of little surprise that the majority of careers in historical archaeology, as well as the field anthropology in general, do not lie in the academe. Yet there is no question that for many individuals, university employment remains the ideal—the objective of pursuing graduate education and its reward. It is, however, worth underscoring that the lingering notion that employment outside of the academe is somehow less important or less viable

as a career alternative is neither realistic nor feasible. The fact is that at present the majority of the archaeology undertaken, the funding provided, the money earned, and the publishing done is outside of university employment and settings. Jobs in business and government are by no means second-rate. Indeed, salaries and benefits, at least for corporate CRM archaeologists and federal and state workers are in many instances comparable to or better than in University employment.

### **The Poor Academic**

Apropos of the preceding comments, I can only concur with the observations of Brian Fagan who characterized academic programs as caught in an “Academic Time Warp” and poorly structured to train future archaeologists for the job market.<sup>6</sup> The training of American archaeologists—both historic and prehistoric—still primarily rests with graduate programs in anthropology, and to a lesser extent in such programs as Near Eastern Languages and Classics. Regrettably, as James Wiseman observed, “Few academic programs in the United States have a curriculum designed by archaeologists to educate archaeologists...the archaeological curriculum can only develop only so far as its requirements do not intrude on the number of courses required for ... anthropological linguistics or Greek prose composition.”<sup>7</sup> Notably absent in most training is formal coursework of any kind in historiography, archival research, or the use of oral historical sources—areas of expertise one would expect in individuals focusing on *historical* archaeology. These tensions have also been brought home in a number of papers and symposia such as the 1995 Chacmool Conference, the Society for American Archaeology Wakulla Springs conference in 1998, and the Open Forum on Academic Standards in the 1995 SHA Conference.

The academe must meet this challenge by tailoring our programs to better reflect the diverse sectors in which our graduates will be employed. At Syracuse University, as part of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, we are working to balance the requirements of an anthropology degree within the broader context of opportunities and future employment. Our primary disciplinary focus with the Department of Anthropology is in historical archaeology. We also have sought partnerships with other programs and departments, taking advantage of the technological equipment in Geology and the specialist training provided by Museum Studies. Douglas Armstrong, currently chair of the department, initiated an upper division-graduate level *Public Policy in Archaeology* course in 1990. We continue to reassess our graduate requirements to provide more archaeology coursework, yet maintaining a commitment to a holistic view of anthropology. Above all we must be cognizant of conveying to our students the realities of future employment.

---

<sup>6</sup> Fagan 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Wiseman 1998:28.

## Concluding Observations

The academe does need revision and courses do need up-dating. Yet I am unwilling to lay all the problems and responsibilities of training the future generations solely at the feet of the academe. Calls for change in university curricula in a variety of settings include suggestions for required training in archaeometry, artifact conservation, cultural resource management field strategies, historic and industrial archaeology, historic preservation, applied archaeology, ethics and values, business and personnel management. To these topical areas can be added additional layers of courses in specific geographical areas, time periods, and theoretical perspectives. The ability of any academic program to incorporate all of these subjects is unrealistic. Concerns raised about the costs and equipment requirements *are* realistic and require careful assessment. More to the point, however, will adding all of these requirements be in the best interest of *all* students? Are current curricula without redemption?

I answer “No” to each of these questions. While much of the archaeology curricula taught may have remained unchanged it is not irrelevant. I confess that even looking at university training solely in terms of an academic career our institutions could do a far better job, particularly with regard to teaching. But gone are the days (at least at most academic institutions) when the abysmal teacher would receive tenure and promotion without second thought as long as his or her academic publications are in order. Programs, like the individual, must be cognizant of the professions needs.

The methods course that surveys sampling strategies and typology remains useful regardless if one is using aerial photography, satellite imagery, or ground penetrating radar. Similarly, young theorists of various ilk could usefully read Franz Boas, V. Gordon Childe, or Marx in the original rather than third or fourth generation distillations. I think that the interdisciplinary, holistic training that distinguishes anthropology will continue to be an asset. While some may roll their eyes at the irrelevancy of commitment to four field approach to anthropology, the fact remains that a holistic, general anthropology background remains useful. In contrast to some fields, academic positions in archaeology still cast wide nets and look for individuals with diverse skills. We do not see narrowly defined job advertisements soliciting applications from specialists in the archaeology of the Erie Canal of central New York or mid-eighteenth century New England. In fact, we often see just the opposite. The successful candidate more often than not must have both teaching and research experience; perhaps focusing on North American archaeology but with the ability to teach Old World archaeology, human osteology, and introductory cultural anthropology courses—and also leap tall buildings in a single bound—all being considered a plus. A varied suite of abilities is equally desirable in government and corporate employment. Such holistic perspective has long been central to American anthropology and it is, perhaps, even more central to an interdisciplinary field such as historical archaeology, whose practitioners must be equally grounded in history, archival research, and the use of oral historical data.

The heart of academic training—of Ph.D. research—will always be the ability to identify a research question, frame a project, and examine the data recovered in a systematic and

critical fashion. To question and to synthesize are abilities that will be ever in fashion regardless of the field of employment. The layers of unoriginal, cultural historical boiler plate that permeates some CRM reports and the lack of syntheses of the vast mountain of CRM data that has accumulated are testament to the continued need of such skills.

If the University is not going to train each Ph.D. as a historic preservationist, archaeometrist, and business manager who will? The answer, I think, lies with the profession as a whole and with each individual entering the field. The future must include increased partnerships with business and government to provide training and course work. If you require specialized skills in your prospective employees, develop training programs and cultivate future applicants. Businesses do not expect their new MBAs to be fully trained. Newly trained doctors can't practice until completing internships of two or more years. Continuing education requirements are the norm, not the exception, in most professions. Why should we expect our discipline to be any different?

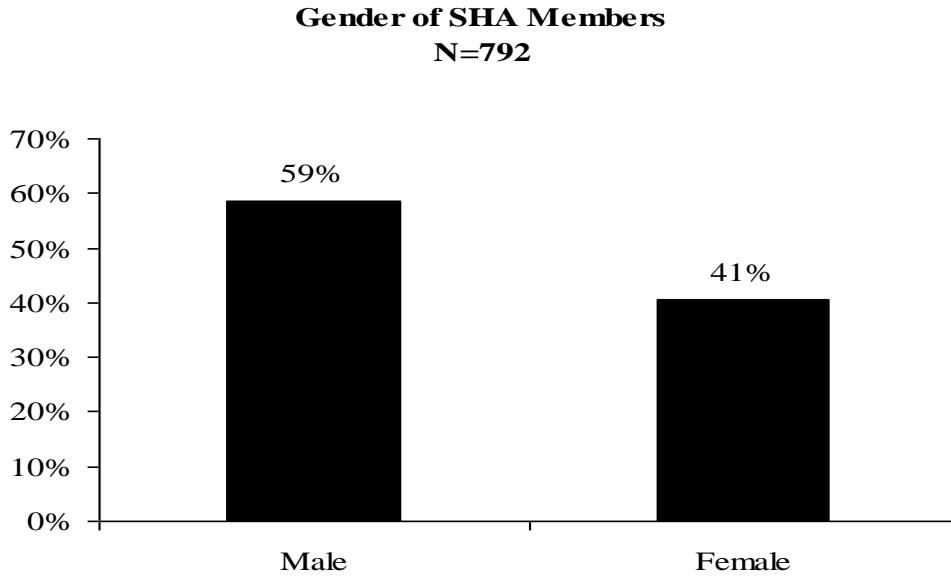
Individuals, for their part, should not set out to be archaeologist clueless of what type of employment might be available when they complete their degree. University training should be used to explore career opportunities and cultivate the skills necessary. Expecting coursework to provide background in every topic or every skill is an unrealistic view of what it takes to be a professional archaeologist. Tempting though it may be, course requirements cannot be a substitute for individual initiative and good advising. Coursework is, at best, a starting point. As we stand at the beginning of a new millennium our collective resolution should be to do better at defining the varied career trajectories open to new archaeologists.

## References

- Coplin, William D., and Michael K. O'Leary  
1992 *Public Policy Skills*. Policy Studies Associates, Croton-on-Hudson.
- DeCorse, Christopher R. and Brian E. DiSanto  
1999 Society for Historical Archaeology 1998 Membership Survey. Unpublished report, Society for Historical Archaeology.
- Fagan, Brian  
1999 An Academic Time Warp. *Discovering Archaeology* 1(4):8-11.
- Rothschild, Nan A., and Diana Wall  
1994 "Report on the Membership Questionnaire: Society for Historical Archaeology." Report submitted to the Executive Board of the Society for Historical Archaeology.
- Spencer-Wood, Suzanne M.  
1993 Report on the Historical Archaeology Women's Caucus and The Society for Historical Archaeology Committee on Gender Issues. Unpublished paper. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge Massachusetts.
- Wall, Diana, and Nan A. Rothschild  
1992 Getting at the Facts: Equity for Women and the SHA Membership Survey. Paper presented at the symposium "Equity Issues for Women in Archaeology," American Anthropological Association, San Francisco.
- Wiseman, James  
1998 Reforming Academia. *Archaeology* 51(5):27-30.
- Zeder, Melinda A.  
1997 *The American Archaeologist: A Profile*. Altamira Press, Walnut Creek.

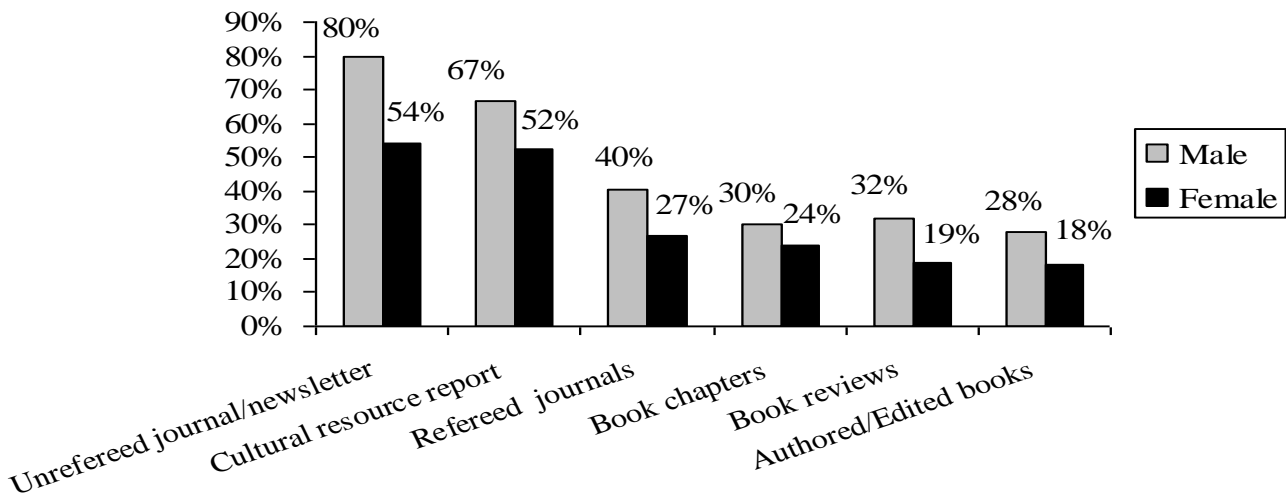


**Figure 1: 59% of SHA members are male**

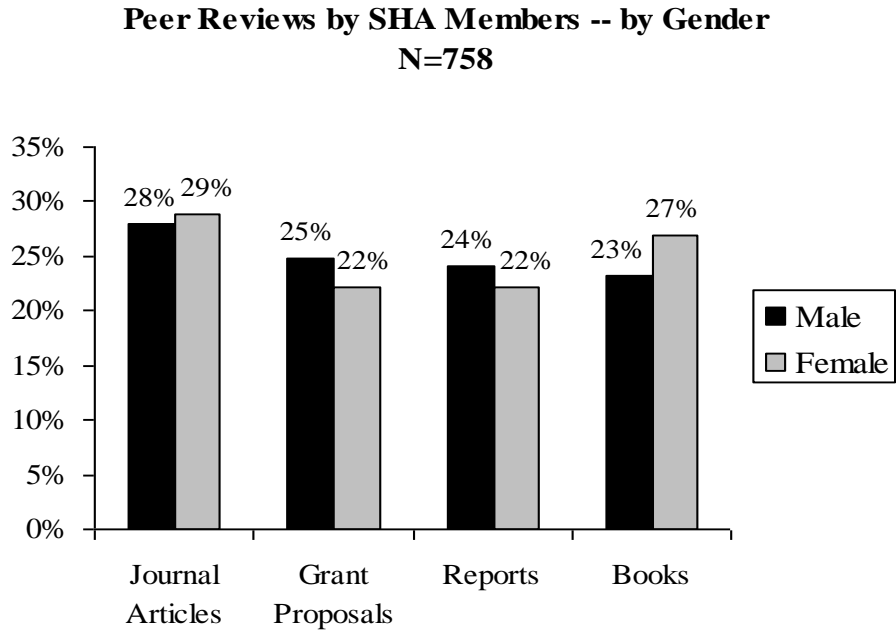


**Figure 2:**

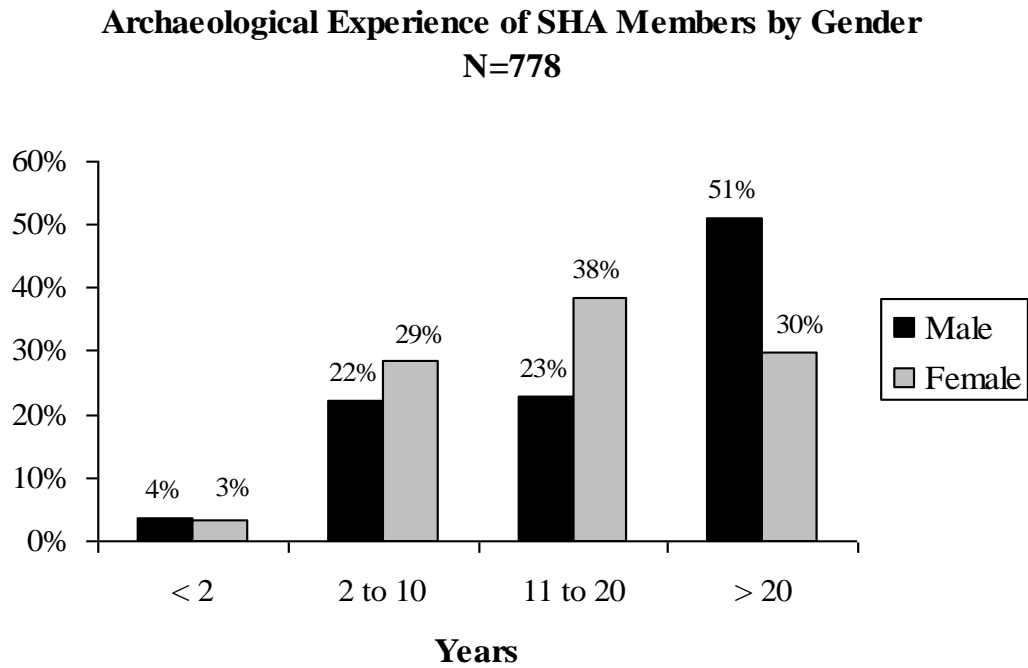
**Manuscripts Published by SHA Members -- by Gender**  
N = 771



**Figure 3:**

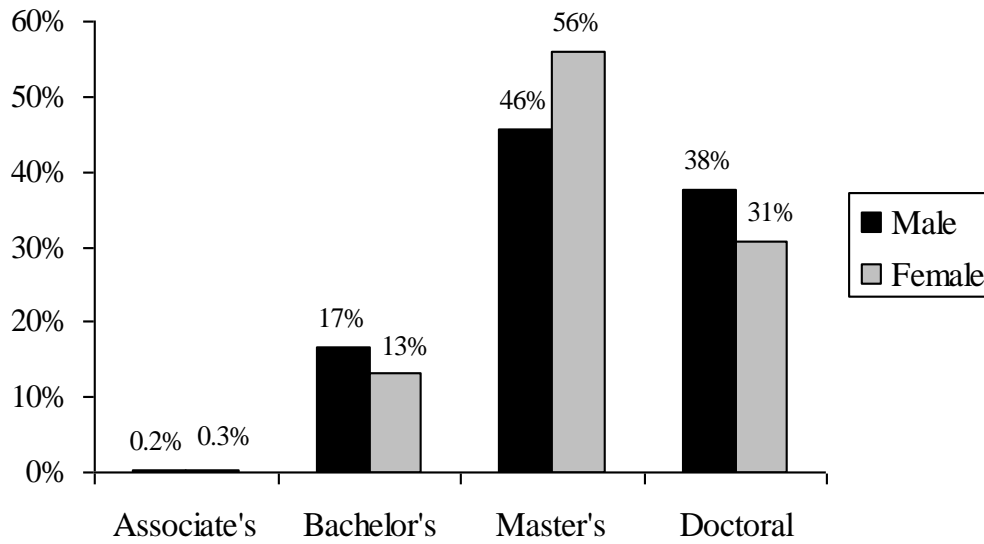


**Figure 4:**



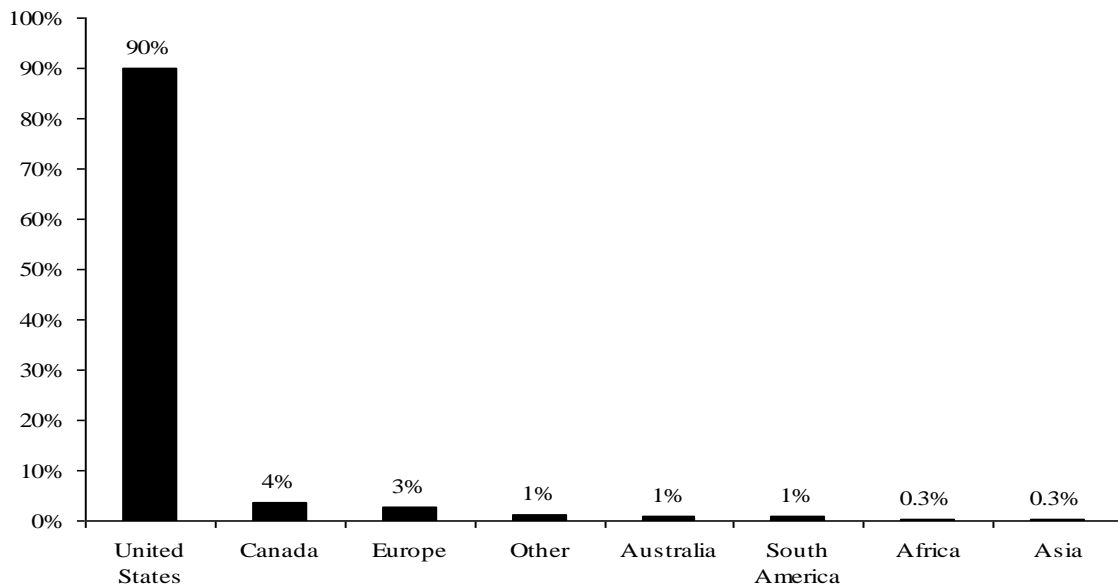
**Figure 5:**

**Educational Attainment of SHA Members by Gender**  
N=787



**Figure 6: 90% of SHA members are United States citizens.**

**Nationality of SHA Members**  
N=737



**Figure 7:**

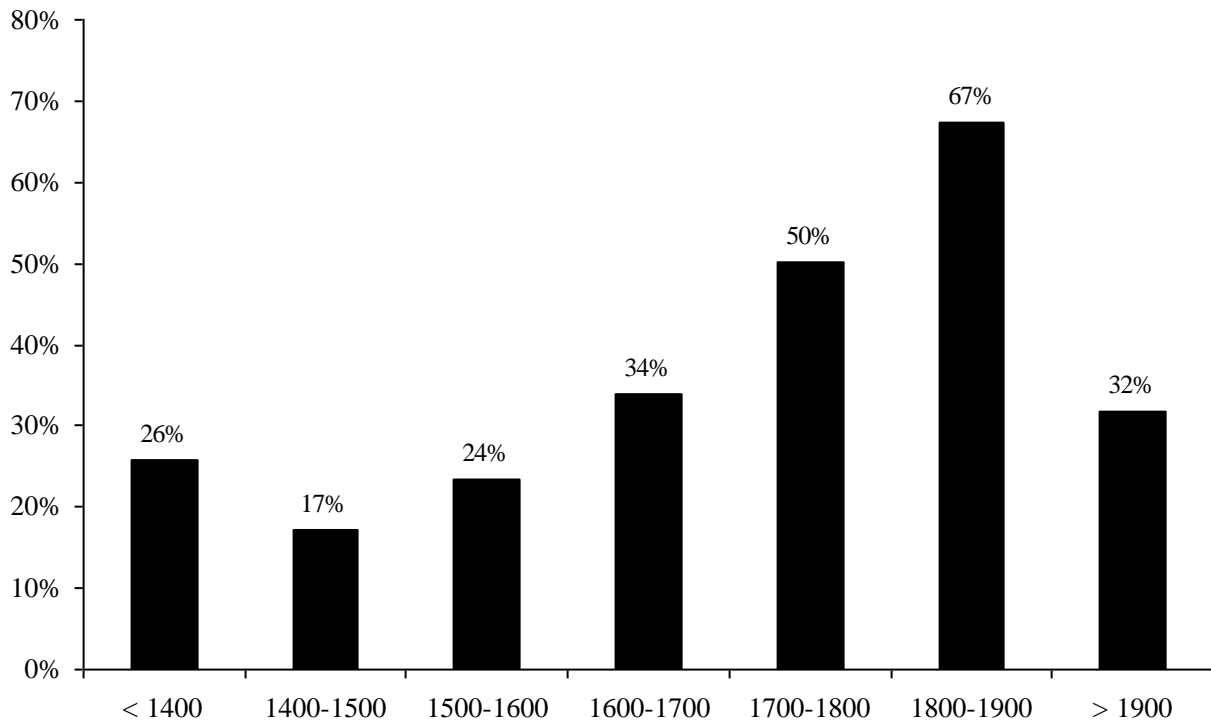
**Primary Geographic Research Interests of SHA Members\***  
**N=764**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Percent indicating high degree of interest</b>
US-Southeast	30%
US-Northeast	25%
US-Mid-Atlantic	23%
US-Mid-West	19%
US-Southwest	15%
US-Pacific	15%
US-Gulf States	14%
US-Pacific Northwest	13%
US Northern Plains	13%
Caribbean	10%
US-Central Plains	9%
Europe	9%
Mexico	8%
US-Alaska	8%
Other	8%
Canada-West	5%
Africa	5%
Canada-Atlantic	4%
Canada-Quebec	4%
Canada-Ontario	4%
Australia	3%
Canada-Prairie	3%
Asia	3%

**\*Figures do not total 100% due to multiple responses by individual respondents. The geographic categories given are those used in the *SHA Newsletter*.**

**Figure 8:**

**Historical Period of Interest for SHA Members \***  
**N=713**



**\*Figures do not total 100% due to multiple responses by individual respondents.**

**Figure 9:**

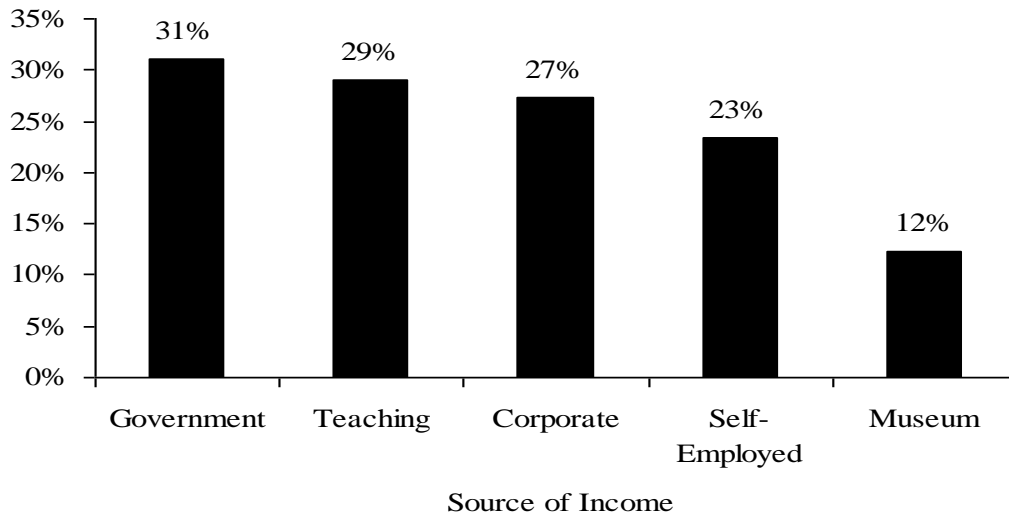
**Full Listing of SHA Member Affiliation with Other Organizations \***  
**N=788**

State, Provincial, or Regional	63%
Society for American Archaeology	53%
Other	42%
American Anthropological Association	20%
Archaeological Institute of America	14%
Society for Industrial Archaeology	13%
Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology	6%
World Archaeological Congress	5%

\* Figures total more than 100% due to multiple responses by individual respondents.

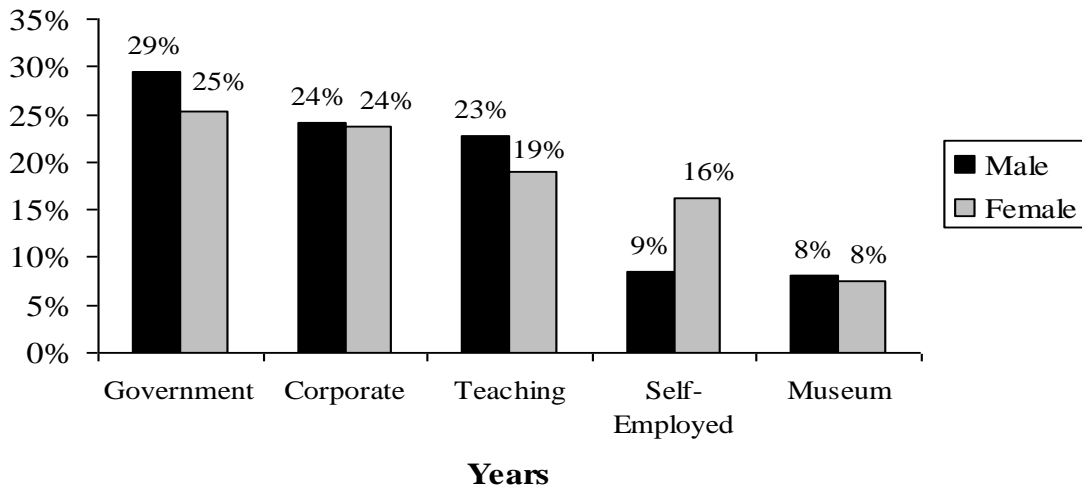
**Figure 10:**

**Most Common Sources of Income for SHA Members**  
**N=759**



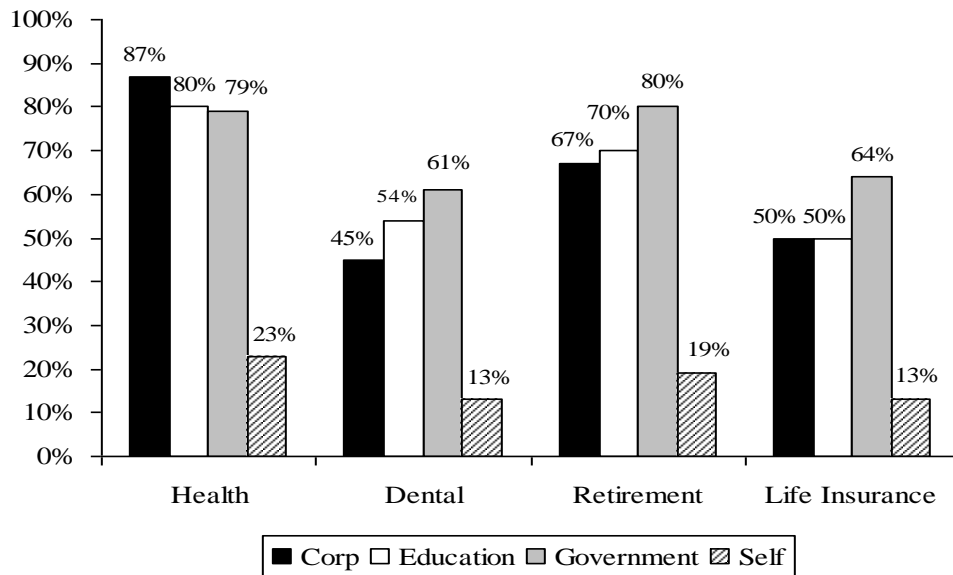
**Figure 11:**

**Most Common Sources of Income for SHA Members by Gender**  
**N=759**



**Figure 12:**

**Job Benefits Received SHA Members -- by job category**  
N=538



“Corporate” and “Self-Employed” categories are displayed separately, rather than grouped under “CRM” as in most other charts, because of substantial differences in the benefits received. See the methods section in DeCorse and DiSanto 1999 for a detailed explanation of the sub-categories encapsulated within the CRM, Education, and Government categories.