

2020 MARGARET JENNINGS AWARD PROFILE

JENNIFER LUETHI- CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

Tell us how you first got involved in the archival profession?



To be honest, I don't feel very involved in the profession at this stage, even though I have completed a degree specialising in Records and Archives Management. Before the study visit, which was part of the degree, I had never even set foot in an archive! But, when I finally did, I was fascinated. Of course, it helped that the visit was at the National Archives of Australia. Not a bad place to start with!

Another strong influence was Jessie Lymn, one of the course lecturers and now course director of the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University. I attended one of her info sessions about the RAM specialisation and became hooked. Her enthusiasm and knowledge in the field make her a great advocate for the profession.

What has surprised you most about the profession?

Two years ago, my answer to this question would have been: "I can't understand why so much material has not been digitised yet." However, during the course, we learnt a lot about different topics such as staffing and resourcing, privacy legislation, digital preservation and so on.

Therefore, I now better understand the challenges and benefits presented to the archival profession by electronic records in general and am not surprised anymore.

If you could change one thing about archival practice, what would it be?

Throughout the course, we came across podcasts, conference recordings and literature highlighting the emotional impact of archival work and the effects on the mental wellbeing of archivists. Subjectivity, emotions and even trauma contradict the traditional expectations of a distanced and objective archivist. I am hopeful, that this is seen as an opportunity rather than a deviation. I believe, the emotional archivist and their archives have a strong appeal to the broader society, which leads to increased awareness and appreciation of what the profession has to offer.

What would you like to be doing in five years' time?

I would love to be working in the RAM or library sector to experience theory in practice. Many aspects of archival concepts and practice still feel very abstract to me and I would love to have a chance to see how they work in 'real life' which would help me feel more involved in the profession. I further hope this degree will make me more employable here in Australia and help me find an opportunity for a future in a profession I feel passionate about.

I would like to thank the Australian Society of Archivists for this award with its generous prize. And, I would also like to thank Margaret Jennings who made graduating in Records and Archives Management possible in the first place.