

This paper was a response to a sociologist's article on the professionalization of careers. It was an attempt to choose the three most important elements out of five mentioned in the article that would be integral to the professionalization of a field of work—in this particular case, the museum field.

### Greenwood's Elements of Professionalization

The three most important elements of professionalization are a body of knowledge, professional authority and a professional culture. Not to have these elements is to have no basis of professional practice of any kind. Without the first three, the other two elements—ethical codes and community sanction—would never be created. No basis of professional identification would even exist.

No profession can carry on without a systematic body of knowledge. A professional, in order to have clients instead of customers, must offer not merely a service, but knowledge and skills far in excess of what the average person has. A professional must have a distinguished command of the body of theory and possess sufficient critical thinking skills for making judgments independent of what has been embraced before. The abundance of that profession's esoteric theory must be sufficient to invite investigation and the writing of research papers in order to create a systematized body of knowledge worthy of university study, accreditation or licensing. Without a systematized body of knowledge, there is no way to establish professional authority.

The authority given to a profession always follows the development of knowledge and skills unavailable to the average layman. Superior insights give the professional the right to make recommendations and decisions on behalf of the client. If such service and knowledge are deemed integral to the public trust, authority will follow. Individuals in the community will eventually seek such specialized help either openly or surreptitiously, officially or unofficially.

One example is midwifery. For years, midwives and others who practiced folk medicine were often found among those believed to practice the “black arts.” Midwives, regardless of how they were regarded, were the first to be consulted by women about to deliver. Today, many midwives are trained as professional nurses, and many mothers-to-be far prefer them to obstetricians.

After the establishment of superior knowledge and authority comes the culture of a profession. The culture is integral to the acquisition of knowledge and authority and consists of the networking and mentoring process by which a professional practice is perfected. It also defines the proper way of dealing with clients and administering services. If the professional group provides something the community needs, the community will find a way to identify that group with symbols and “bookmark” it for future reference. The norms and values of a profession become the guides to social behavior and precede codes of ethics and standards of practice.

Codes of ethics are not named here among the top three elements of professionalization because any vocation as well as a profession can create a code of ethics. Such a code cannot make a service more professional because it cannot make a practitioner ethical, nor does the omission of such a code render a practitioner unethical. Codification is simply the formal adoption of something already agreed upon tacitly within the culture. Community sanction is also not counted among the top three elements. Without credentials, the community will not accredit or license a professional group or an individual; however, the lack of credentials does not necessarily put an end to the profession.

The body of knowledge is the jumping-off place for any profession. Without knowledge, theory and skills there is not even a place to begin. Recognition of authority in a field gives way to community agreement that only certain individuals shall, through the process of accreditation

or licensing, be allowed to practice as a professional. Cultural norms and values solidify the ethics and standards that a profession will later codify and enforce. The cultural symbols enable insiders and outsiders to identify those of a certain expertise and to feel they are in the presence of someone who can be trusted to do for them what they cannot do for themselves. These three elements—knowledge, authority and culture—comprise the cornerstone of any profession.