

Proceedings of the 2017 Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase

Volume 21 | Pages 91–98 | <https://ojs.library.dal.ca/auts/index>

USING ARCHIVES IN UNDERGRADUATE COURSES IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Jane Arnold, Andrew Parnaby and Heather Sparling

*Association of Atlantic Universities/
Association des universités de l'atlantique
Editor-in-Chief: Donovan Plumb
www.atlanticuniversities.ca*

*Volume 21 | Pages 91–98
© Association of Atlantic Universities/
Association des universités de l'atlantique
www.atlanticuniversities.ca*

USING ARCHIVES IN UNDERGRADUATE COURSES IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Jane Arnold

Archivist, Beaton Institute
Cape Breton University

Andrew Parnaby

Assistant Dean and History Professor (SASS)
Cape Breton University

Heather Sparling

Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology
Tier 2 Canada Research Chair (Musical Traditions) (SASS)
Cape Breton University

Abstract

As part of our workshop session, we shared experiences with conference participants related to using archives as a means of enhancing student experience and learning outcomes within undergraduate courses. This report begins with a brief background explaining the history of incorporating primary source materials in humanities and social science courses at Cape Breton University (CBU), and follows with a summary of the session divided into four sections. The first section defines the concept of primary source literacy, and how faculty and archivists/librarians work together to assist students develop these competencies. The second section focuses on model assignments provided by two faculty co-presenters along with an assignment development framework. The third section reflects on the Beaton Institute Internship Program, a capstone course held and supervised in the Archives. The final section

summarizes our discussion with participants who shared their experiences with primary source literacy instruction and questions around integrating archive-based assignments into future courses.

Keywords

primary source literacy; archives; undergraduate; internship; archivist-faculty collaboration; capstone course; active learning

Background

The theme of the 2017 Atlantic Association of Universities Teaching Showcase, *Small Teaching: Exploring the Potential of Easily-Implemented, High-Impact Teaching Practices* offered an opportunity for the authors, two Cape Breton University (CBU) faculty and one archivist, to share experiences of incorporating archives and primary source literacy into course work and internship programming.

In the article "Archival Literacy Competencies for Undergraduate History Majors" (2015), Weiner, Morris, and Mykytiuk explain that "instruction is an important part of the mission of archives and special collections because it inspires learning and fosters research. But instruction usually comprises one-time experiences such as orientations, tours, and showing specific materials from a collection" (p. 156). The authors explain that core competencies are only achieved through sustained and integrated use of archives and primary sources during a student's degree program.

In 2009, the Archive at CBU hosted orientation sessions for students, but did not fully incorporate primary source instruction into course work or assignments. Faculty in the Department of History at CBU (now incorporated into Cultural and Creative Studies) approached staff at the Beaton Institute¹ to work toward integrating archival content throughout the duration of a student's degree program, with a capstone course providing a comprehensive internship experience.

With support from the Archives' staff, and working in tandem with faculty, the Archive shifted from a point of access and passive repository to an active "laboratory" of inquiry and discovery within an academic framework. Eventually, a range of humanities and social science disciplines, including Ethno-Musicology, Folklore, and Political Science began leveraging the archive and its resources.

1 The Beaton Institute is the official repository for historically significant records of Cape Breton University. Additionally, the Institute is a cultural heritage archive mandated to preserve the social, economic, political, and cultural history of Cape Breton Island.

Primary Source Literacy – Competency Framework and Metrics

The body of literature and professional practice concerning libraries (including special collections within libraries) and information literacy is robust and well documented. However, within a Canadian archival-context, there has not been a significant amount of research or literature published recognizing archives-based work happening in undergraduate settings. Recently, in the United States, a draft of *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* (2017) has been developed by the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the Association of Research and College Libraries (ACRL) and the Society of American Archivists (SAA).

The ACRL RBMS-SAA Joint Task Force provides the following definition of primary source literacy:

Primary sources are materials in a variety of formats that serve as original evidence documenting a time period, an event, a work, people, or ideas. Primary source literacy is the combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, and ethically use primary sources within specific disciplinary contexts, in order to create new knowledge or to revise existing understandings. (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017, p. 1)

The guidelines address why clearly defining “primary sources” and “primary source literacy” can be problematic, and the authors note “primary source literacy intersects with other ‘literacies,’ including information literacy, visual literacy, and digital literacy, and concepts like collective memory, cultural heritage, and individual/cultural perspectives” (p. 1). However, keeping these intersections in mind, core competencies can be developed and measured to prepare students for further study, for future employment, or as engaged citizens and lifelong learners. The list below is an edited summary of the ACRL RBMS-SAA core competencies students should possess after participating in a formalized program incorporating primary source literacy:

- **Conceptualize** – distinguish, identify and articulate relevant primary sources
- **Find and Access** – using a range of finding aids and databases
- **Read, Understand, and Summarize** – read and comprehend various methods of communication and documentation over time
- **Interpret, Analyze, and Evaluate** – critically assess and examine primary sources for silences or gaps, as well as what is visible and evident
- **Use and Incorporate** – incorporate primary sources in order to support a research question or argument and cite accordingly

(Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017, p. 3)

Morgan Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel, in their article "Uncovering Impact: The Influence of Archives on Student Learning" (2013), surveyed 452 students in various disciplines, including history, music, and sociology, about how exposure to archives impacted their confidence, future use, and perception of archives and primary sources. The findings of the study certainly identified where exposure to archives is beneficial for developing primary source literacy competencies, but also noted other useful learning outcomes. Daniels and Yakel wrote, "In terms of value, we found that while learning how to use archives was the most valued attribute, some students also valued other more general and transferrable skills, such as study skills, time management, and skills related to the research project and preparation for it"(p. 9).

With the benefits of incorporating primary sources into academic assignments clearly documented, the following section explores the logistics of integrating archives into course modules.

Primary Source Assignments – Design and Delivery

During this portion of the workshop, the faculty co-presenters discussed the impetus for integrating archives into their undergraduate courses (History and Music). Some of their reasons for working with primary sources mirror the competencies mentioned above, as well as address wider pedagogical issues such as student apathy and agency, diversity in the classroom, and experiential learning.

The co-presenters explained to participants through example assignments how primary documents and archival collections can ignite students' curiosity, raise questions encouraging further research and investigation, while also developing critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate documents and their significance or meaning.

The co-presenters demonstrated the type of planning involved when designing archival assignments, and shared questions with participants to encourage evaluation of their own institution and opportunities for primary source literacy integration:

- Will the assignment enrich a course unit with additional resources?
- Will the assignment model and/or teach a research methodology?
- Will the assignment introduce students to topics covered later in the course?
- What is the primary source literacy level of my students and do they need skills development prior to the assignment?
- How do the limitations of the archive and records factor into the assignment design?

Once the goals and purpose of the assignment is determined, the participants need to consider the following when collaborating with an archive or special collections librarian:

Contact archives or special collections staff to collaborate on the assignment: discover what materials are available and how records are accessed or copied; assess whether students require an orientation to primary research before the assignment, etc.

Provide secondary sources: to provide context and background and differentiate primary sources from secondary.

Complete the draft assignment: review available physical and online resources relevant to the course and assignment. Practice the assignment to identify barriers students may encounter. Make adjustments to the activities as necessary.

Provide clear directions: provide students with context and introduction of the records, model process of document analysis, demonstrate how to cite the archival materials, and provide clear learning objectives for the assignment.

The following section discusses the Beaton Institute Internship, which provides students an opportunity to refine skills and cement primary source competencies learned earlier in their degree program.

Capstone Project / Beaton Institute Internship

This portion of the workshop consisted of a description and discussion around the capstone course offered jointly by the Beaton Institute and Department of Cultural and Creative Studies. The following is a summary of the internship structure, project work, as well the evolution of program delivery and anticipated next steps for the program.

Structure

The Beaton Institute Internship began in 2010 and counts as a 6-credit course running from September to April, with internship hours mirroring those of class time. For approximately nine hours per week, the intern works with staff at the Archive to develop and execute a project plan aligning with the student's research or personal interests. The work plan and syllabus operate in tandem to provide theoretical background for the core archival functions underpinning each project. An example syllabus is found online here: <http://beatoninstitute.com/internship>. Each year, the Archives' staff and faculty edit the syllabus to update content, as well as provide specific readings connected to each intern's project and collection.

Each student is assigned a faculty supervisor from a discipline related to the collection's or fonds' main subject content or format. The faculty supervisors and students meet regularly to

discuss their project one on one. As well, three to four seminar sessions join Archives staff, faculty, and students to review readings and hear project updates.

Students are encouraged to apply to the program by Archives staff and their professors. As well, placements are advertised on the CBU website, through social media, and on campus posters. Initially, History students were the sole participants, but students studying Ethno-Musicology and Folklore are now regular applicants, with growing opportunities to extend the reach of the program into other disciplines.

Project Work

The main project activities revolve around core archival functions, with associated readings to support the activities and theory, including topics such as appraisal, arrangement, description, preservation, outreach and access. Beyond simply managing archival materials, students gain insight into why archives exist and operate, how their holdings develop, and the challenges facing archives in a web-dominated information age.

Depending on the project, the intern may create a finding aid to a collection or fonds, create descriptive records in the Digital Archives, or complete a combination of various processing tasks. As a team, the supervisors and archives staff have become better at connecting projects, not only with the Archives' needs, but with broader societal shifts and trends, providing a more thoughtful approach beyond the rote work of filing and cataloguing.

For example, one of the 2017/2018 internships will focus on "performing the archives," with the intern aligning the project with the anniversary of the end of World War I, and a related "Virtual Museums of Canada" project being completed at the Archive. One aspect of the project will have the student transcribe war correspondence into a script, and record audio to be included in the future online exhibition.

In addition to project work, the interns may conduct radio or newspaper interviews about their projects and participate in conferences and student research events. The students also gain valuable experience working in a professional environment as colleagues, which provides valuable preparatory skills for post-graduation studies or employment.

Next Steps: Evaluation and Metrics

As noted by Daniels and Yakel (2013), evaluating primary source literacy programs is essential to their continued success and development. With twenty graduates from the program, an evaluation is overdue. While we do have informal feedback from participants and track their

careers post-internship, a formal evaluation would help to inform future changes to our archival programming. We can confirm that at least 50% of the internship participants have continued with graduate studies, including doctoral programs, and many interns have secured full-time work. These successes are important to track and promote.

From an internal perspective, the internship and archive-based assignments have elevated the work and raised the visibility of the Archive, created a stronger connection between the Beaton Institute and the School of Arts and Social Sciences, and provided unique opportunities for students to perfect primary source competencies while gaining practical professional experience.

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of our workshop was to share with participants our experiences with faculty-archive collaborations and a framework to develop primary source literacy competencies. At the end of the session, participants were encouraged to ask questions and share their comments about this type of collaboration.

Participants inquired about the logistics of the Beaton Institute Internship Program related to registration and course description. Currently, the student registers for an additional directed study option and must eventually choose to replace one of their courses with the Internship course. From the participants' questions and comments, the session content around assignment development resonated strongly. As well, sharing the recently released ACRL RBMS-SAA *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* document was appreciated by participants who may not have been aware that the final draft is now available. Overall, it was a welcome opportunity to share the history and success of archives-faculty collaborations at Cape Breton University, and learn from others' experiences with primary source literacy initiatives.

References

- ACRL RBMS-SAA Joint Task Force on the Development of Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy (April 24, 2017) GUIDELINES FOR PRIMARY SOURCE LITERACY – DRAFT FOR FEEDBACK: <http://rbms.info/digress/primarysourceliteracy/draft-guidelines-2/>
- Daniels, M., & Yakel, E. (2013). Uncovering impact: The influence of archives on student learning. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 39(5), 414–422.
- Weiner, S. A., Morris, S., & Mykytiuk, L. J. (2015). Archival literacy competencies for undergraduate history majors. *The American Archivist*, 78(1), 154–180.

Authors

Jane Arnold. Jane Arnold is Archivist at the Beaton Institute with the Department of Cultural & Creative Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences. jane_arnold@cbu.ca

Andrew Parnaby. Dr. Andrew Parnaby is the Associate Dean of the School of Arts & Social Sciences. As well, he is an Associate Professor with the Department of Cultural & Creative Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences.andy_parnaby@cbu.ca

Heather Sparling. Dr. Heather Sparling is Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology and Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Musical Traditions with the Department of Cultural & Creative Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences. heather_sparling@cbu.ca