
Teaching Undergraduates with Archives

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In November 2018, archivists, departmental faculty, and students gathered at the Bentley Historical Library for a national symposium focused on incorporating archival materials into undergraduate instruction. Interest in the symposium far exceeded the expectations of organizers, who were determined to quickly and broadly disseminate some of the content covered over the three-day event. *Teaching Undergraduates with Archives* is the result of their ambitious efforts. Editors Nancy Bartlett, Elizabeth Gadelha, and Cinda Nofziger, all of the Bentley Historical Library, partnered with Michigan Publishing to harness the energy of the symposium with this swiftly produced collection. To maximize access, it has been made available both in print and as an open-access digital download. Readers will appreciate the flexibility of having multiple formats available for easy access and reference. The quick turnaround of less than one year between the symposium and publication is all the more impressive considering the breadth of topics and perspectives covered. The book's forty-three authors include veteran archivists and librarians, newer professionals, faculty from several disciplines, and current or recent students.

According to a 2018 article¹ referenced by several contributors, the recent increase of archival positions with teaching responsibilities has not translated into expanded pedagogical training and development in archives-focused graduate programs. In this absence, archivists have sought ways to mitigate this educational gap. Both the symposium and publication advance efforts to strengthen the emerging community of practice for archives professionals engaged in teaching with primary sources. The editors introduce the book with a call for readers to join in these developing conversations.

In their introduction, Bartlett and Nofziger observe the major themes that emerge across the chapters. Many contributors comment on the lack of necessary training and professional development for archivists who teach, while also discussing new and emerging opportunities in this area. Other chapters reflect on the transition from the “show-and-tell” model to instruction centered on active and experiential learning. Nearly every chapter emphasizes the necessity of different forms of collaboration—between archivists and faculty, faculty and

students, and among archivists and librarians whose work intersects with the student learning experience.

The book's first section is devoted to a series of case studies, providing readers with several detailed accounts of assignments and approaches employed in the classroom. University of Michigan students Meghan Clark and Hannah Thoms join history professor Matthew D. Lassiter in describing an assignment to develop online multimedia exhibits that highlight environmental activism as part of an upper-level history course. Holly Luetkenhaus, David Peters, and Matt Upson of Oklahoma State University detail a successful collaboration between archivists and librarians to create an information literacy assignment using content from the University Archives related to topics of race, gender, and free speech in the 1960s. English professor Naomi J. Stubbs of LaGuardia Community College discusses involving students in a collaborative humanities research project. Wentworth Institute of Technology history professor Ella Howard and Florida State University librarians Rachel C. S. Duke and Sarah Stanley join special collections with digital tools to develop innovative learning experiences. The case studies effectively ground the following chapters by illustrating successful collaborations and new pedagogical approaches.

In the next section, "Sustainable Roles and Programs," authors propose methods for overcoming the significant challenges that archivists face when approaching instruction. Coeditor Nofziger shares insightful findings from several sessions of a semester-long seminar held at the University of Michigan designed to bring together archivists and departmental faculty working to connect archival holdings and student learning. Ashleigh D. Coren reflects on challenges she has faced in her teaching position with the University of Maryland Special Collections and offers advice to administrators interested in developing similar roles at their institutions. The University of Arkansas's strategic approach for sustainably expanding a special collections instruction program is described by Joshua Youngblood. George Washington University's Shira Loev Eller and Leah Richardson close this section by addressing the significant invisible labor involved in teaching with archives and the importance of centering this labor in discussions around growth of instruction programs. The authors are frank in their acknowledgment that instruction is a time-consuming process that requires adequate resources. As emerging financial pressures and austerity measures encourage a dangerous "do more with less" mentality, these examples of realistic approaches to building and maintaining instruction programs are particularly valuable.

The "Experiments in Collaboration" section highlights examples of instructional partnerships with stakeholders outside of archives and special collections units. In conjunction with the University of Michigan's 2017 bicentennial, a team led by Brian A. Williams of the Bentley Historical Library launched an ambitious

project to identify every African American student who attended the university between 1817 and 1970, leading to unexpected instructional opportunities and partnerships with collaborators from across campus. Chapters by Elizabeth Call, Kimberly Davies Hoffman, and Kristen Toleben of the University of Rochester, and Chloe Morse-Harding and Laura Hibbler of Brandeis University discuss collaborative teaching across library departments, bringing together archivists and librarians to further student learning. Christine Weideman and Camila Zorrilla Tessler of Yale University join student participant Shelby Daniels-Young in describing the History Keepers program, a partnership between Manuscripts and Archives of Yale University Library and the Yale Afro-American Cultural Center. Princeton University professor of history Martha A. Sandweiss and university archivist and curator of public policy papers Daniel J. Linke recount the evolution of the Princeton and Slavery Project from initial questions to hands-on “history lab” sessions built into a history course. While chapters across the book’s sections describe successful teaching collaborations, these examples walk readers through partnerships that develop over time and respond to the changing needs and interests of students.

The following section, “Pedagogical Approaches,” discusses new and emerging instructional methods and illustrates their usefulness in reimagining archives instruction. History professors Caroline S. Boswell of the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay and Jonathan C. Hagel of the University of Kansas discuss recent shifts in history instruction and their experiences using archival materials to demonstrate for students how historians make sense of the past. Andi Gustavson (University of Texas at Austin), Analú María López (Newberry Library), Lae’l Hughes-Watkins (University of Maryland), and Elizabeth Smith-Pryor (Kent State University) illustrate with case studies an ethical approach to teaching histories of violence, racism, and oppression as revealed through archival holdings. Peter Carini and Morgan Swan of Dartmouth College discuss lessons from the LALI (Librarian’s Active Learning Institute) program and strategies for incorporating active learning into the special collections classroom. The approaches described in this section offer new frames for considering our teaching practices that can be applied across instructional contexts.

The book concludes with a “Reflections and Forecasts” section that surveys the past and present of the primary source instruction landscape and envisions possible futures. University of Michigan School of Information professor Elizabeth Yakel acknowledges the great progress she has observed since she began writing and thinking about teaching with archives approximately fifteen years ago. Simmons University PhD candidate Sean Noel analyzes findings from a survey of faculty from Association of Research Libraries member institutions on their perceptions of their role in primary source instruction. Bentley Historical Library director Terrence J. McDonald suggests possible paths forward

for archival instruction at a moment of significant change in higher education. Several members of the teaching with primary sources (TPS) community provide an overview of recent initiatives and successes of the group and areas for future growth and development. Robin M. Katz, who holds a unique role as the primary source literacy librarian within the library's Teaching and Learning Department at the University of California, Riverside, closes the book with a warning to the growing community of archivists engaged in undergraduate instruction: "If we do not come together as a cohesive discipline, we face the twin risks of inaction—stagnation or irrelevance" (pp. 337–38). Before going on to lay out five areas for future development, she describes the energy and enthusiasm emanating from this subfield as being in danger of becoming "bogged down in minutiae" when members should be addressing "more challenging but meaningful questions" (p. 338). One example she cites is the proliferation of case studies in this area of archival scholarship that focus on specific experiences and institutional contexts rather than on tackling these broader challenges shared across the field.

Katz's critique comes at the conclusion of a volume almost exclusively comprising case studies. I found myself wondering if the "momentum that was palpable at the Michigan symposium" (p. 339) she describes may have been better directed toward a series of contributions that take a more holistic approach aimed at moving us as a field closer to our shared goal of creating transformative and consequential student learning experiences. However, the value of the existing volume is not to be discounted. Readers who work with students at all levels will find ideas and inspiration to inform their pedagogy. Filled as it is with practical tips, lessons learned, detailed examples, and helpful illustrations, I foresee using *Teaching Undergraduates with Archives* as a resource I will revisit when developing lesson plans or thinking through assessment and scalability strategies.

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NOTE

- ¹ Lindsay Anderberg, Robin M. Katz, Shaun Hayes, Alison Stankrauff, Morgen MacIntosh Hodgetts, Josué Hurtado, Abigail Nye, and Ashley Todd-Diaz, "Teaching the Teacher: Primary Source Instruction in American and Canadian Archives Graduate Programs," *American Archivist* 81, no. 1 (2018): 188–215, <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-81.1.188>.