

**Outreach in the Academic Community:  
Enhancing the Teaching Role of University Archives**

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## **Abstract**

Public programming is a distinct component of archival professional practice, although it has not always been so. Academic public programming is an even relatively newer phenomenon, but is gaining momentum as university and college archives seek to align themselves with an emerging engagement-based instructional paradigm that now widely informs academia. Postmodern insights have challenged archivists to reconsider the traditional view of records as static objects, frozen in perpetuity, and instead understand them as part of a never ending dynamic process encompassing multiple narratives and meanings. And in doing so, academic archives in particular have begun exploring ways in which they might engage students in a new learning environment -- through a new type of public programming that emphasizes the archivists' unique role in knowledge creation. As such, academic archivists, as one of the few groups who connect with a wide cross section of potential users across campus in many different disciplines, have a unique opportunity to insert archives into the curriculum and facilitate student engagement and inquiry by advocating research-based experiences with primary sources. That is, archivists can help students acquire archival literacy skills that enable them, in their quest for scholarly meaning and understanding, to filter and interpret the multiplicity of meanings that archival materials convey and in doing so, more actively participate in the knowledge creation process. By striving to undertake an enhanced role in the teaching process by inspiring intellectual access to archival materials, archivists can contribute significantly to the educational experience of the student populace, while at the same time support the academic mission of their parent institution. This thesis will explore ways to insert university archives more fully into the teaching function of the

university. The thesis will conceptualize how university archives could be included in an interdisciplinary program offered by such archives, or in conjunction with other departments and faculties, that is designed to enhance student learning through the development of critical thinking skills and knowledge creation.

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## **Introduction**

Archival public programming – the function of educating people about the existence, services, and documentary resources of archival institutions – has become a central archival activity. Most archives undertake some form of outreach and the range of such activities includes publications, exhibitions, tours, and hosting special lectures, among other activities.

The rise of public programming as a core archival activity in Canada dates from the early 1980s, when many Canadian archives felt growing pressure to compete for funding by showing their usefulness to a wide range of users. Since then, Canadian and other archivists have debated the role, merits, and general nature of public programming. One aspect of it that has recently inspired much dialogue concerns outreach by archives to teachers and students in primary and secondary schools. Impressive efforts (often by university archives) have been made to incorporate the use of archival documents into classroom teaching. Oddly, however, the role of university archives in supporting teaching at universities has not received the same attention from archivists and educators.

Although, there have been some recent advances, strong relationships between university archives and academics in these archives own parent institutions have not been fully developed. Furthermore, it does not appear to be as central a part of the outreach work of university archives as it could be. The academic work for their universities that university archives have done has tended to involve class tours of the archives by some classes, which may lead to an assignment based on archival research. Most undergraduate students, however, rarely visit, or use, either a university or other archives. University archives also support research projects undertaken by faculty and students for

theses and publications, but these too do not involve much direct engagement with the teaching mission of the university. University archives, it seems, have thus foregone a key opportunity to expand their academic roles, serve a wider audience, and strengthen their sources of support.

In recent years, however, there has been an awareness of something special going on in archives, an intellectual awakening of sorts. As the concepts of information literacy, knowledge creation and critical thinking continue to provide the foundation for a wide range of innovative scholarly research in a multitude of disciplines, a growing interest in archives and their place in the learning process has also become apparent. As archivist Tom Nesmith notes, a growing number of researchers from diverse academic and professional fields and social groups are using archives to pursue historical information relevant to their interests. Nesmith counts architects, lawyers, journalists, teachers, engineers, climatologists, medical researchers and more among the representative disciplines making their way to archives.<sup>1</sup> Also illustrating the wide variety of new users and uses of archives are the increasing number of academic journals that have dedicated issues to archival matters, specifically, as the framework to all scholarly research.<sup>2</sup> An overarching theme among the journals concerns using archives to enhance the understanding of specific disciplines. They note that archival materials should not be thought of as simply existing in a passive state, as they are always already meaningful by virtue of their dynamic relation with that which has had to be forgotten. ,

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Nesmith, "What's History Got to Do With It? Reconsidering the Place of Historical Knowledge in Archival Work," *Archivaria* 57 (Spring 2004), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Most recently, several academic journals have published issues that deal with various theoretical and practical archival matters relating to the discipline of concern. Some of these journals include: *The History of Human Sciences* (1998-1999), *Studies in Literacy Imagination* (1999), *Historical Geography* (2001), *The Canadian Journal of Communication* (2001), *Canadian Literature* (2003), *Journal of Canadian Studies* (2006), and most recently, *Queen's Quarterly* (2007).

in the act of activating meanings from archives, researchers, including students, become interpreters and ultimately, knowledge creators. And arguably, this is the true measure of success of any archives, not necessarily the size and extent of its holdings, or the number of users, but the extent to which they support the university's mission and enable and encourage learning and discovery. And it is in this capacity that archivists as educators can play a significant role through their involvement in innovative outreach activities including, most notably, offering instruction on how to become archival literate.

Thus, recognizing the opportunity that academic archives have to enhance the learning experience by aligning themselves with an emerging engagement-based instructional paradigm that now widely informs academia, this thesis will explore ways to insert university archives more fully into the teaching function of the university. The thesis will conceptualize how university archives could be included in an interdisciplinary program offered by university archives, or in conjunction with other departments and faculties, that is designed to enhance student learning through the development of critical thinking skills and knowledge creation. One key component of such a program, its intellectual foundation, is a half course at the undergraduate level, taught by the university's archivists, that informs students about what might be called "archival literacy", or knowledge of how to locate information among the mountains of it in archives, how to assess it (based on an understanding of its own historicity), the roles archives have played and now play in society, and the impact on knowledge creation of their decisions to select for acquisition certain materials and not others, and to interpret and highlight certain records in certain ways in their description, reference, and public programming activities. A course like this might be welcome in many parts of the

university, including, for example, a Faculty of Education, where a university's archivists could help teach student-teachers to use archives in the classroom to expand the new role archives are now playing in the schools.

Other potential methods of enhancing the teaching role of university archives will also be briefly discussed. Each involves fostering closer relationships with a range of academic disciplines in order to facilitate a deeper understanding and awareness of archival materials. Other features of the program could include: staff of the university archives offering lectures and seminars within existing courses; fostering development of courses built entirely around archival materials and even convened in the university archives (the recently renovated University of Manitoba Department of Archives and Special Collections now contains a seminar room and forty-seat classroom for such purposes); providing the university archives with opportunities to comment on new courses being designed, perhaps especially by new faculty members who are still developing their first courses, to see whether the archives might be able to offer ideas and resources; offering a 'professor-in-residence' program for professors who might like to locate their office to and teach a course in the archives for a term; digitization and other new media-based projects that support innovative use of archival materials in teaching; redesigned acquisition programs to improve support for course development; and assistance in finding information in archives other than the university archives.

As a preface to discussion of an advanced teaching role for academic archivists and the opportunity to insert archives into the university curriculum, I will first briefly outline the development and early role of university archives, using the university of Manitoba's Department of Archives and Special Collections as a case study. Next, I will

examine the emergence of an enhanced public programming role over the past three decades leading to a discussion of the recent notion of archivists as educators and archives as centres of learning. Finally, I will provide some recent academic outreach initiatives that stem from this relatively recent development, followed by a general conception of what academic archivists might do to integrate their archives more fully into the curriculum and become a key component in the teaching of critical thinking and inquiry. The thesis is based on a comprehensive literature review, communications with selected academic archivists, an examination of relevant academic Web sites, and on my own personal academic and professional experience.

My research has illustrated that, undoubtedly, there are many strategies that a university archives can use to integrate itself more fully into the academic curriculum. These strategies will not only enhance the academic community's learning experience and awareness of the archives' role in creating society's collective memory, but will also help move the archives toward much more active involvement in the primary academic mission of the university. This would tap the enormous but still largely underdeveloped intellectual potential of university archives.

### **The Evolution and Role of University Archives**

“The number of Canadian university archives has expanded rapidly in the past fifteen years [and] university archivists are becoming more numerous and more visible on and off campus.”<sup>3</sup> Such was the conclusion of archivist Ian Wilson's 1979 review of the status of Canadian university archives. But this was not always the case and was, in fact,

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<sup>3</sup> Ian E. Wilson, “Canadian University Archives,” in *College and University Archives*, ed. Society of American Archivists (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1979), 174.

a relatively recent phenomenon. A mid-1960s survey of archives at colleges and universities in the United States and Canada paints an entirely different picture. Indeed, as archivist Robert M. Warner related, just over half of the academic institutions in Canada had archives. Yet only nine percent employed a full-time archivist.<sup>4</sup> Providing a snapshot of the status of academic archival profession during that period, the survey provides concrete evidence that university and college archives were still in a developmental state and that their management was primarily undertaken by librarians.<sup>5</sup> Despite this rather sad state of affairs, Warner was quick to point out that it would not be unreasonable to expect rapid expansion of academic archives in the approaching decade.

And this was certainly the case. In response to a surge in growth of archival institutions in the 1970s, archivists Nicholas C. Burckel and J. Frank Cook undertook a wide-ranging survey of American and Canadian university archives that revealed a number of startling discoveries concerning their role and use on campus. Despite the ever-growing number of archival repositories at academic institutions, over a third of the responding institutions reported no full-time professional staff and, accordingly, overall use of archival materials was quite low.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, a major concern in both American and Canadian repositories was that archives did not appear to rank highly in the priorities of their sponsoring bodies and few "...realized the significant cultural and administrative advantages of a fully functioning archival program."<sup>7</sup> Most telling in this regard was that respondents felt that archives were marginal on campus and seldom

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<sup>4</sup> Robert M. Warner, "The Status of College and University Archives." *American Archivist* Vol. 31, no. 3 (July 1968): 236.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Burckel and J. Frank Cook, "A Profile of College and University Archives in the United States." *American Archivist* Vol. 45, no. 4 (Fall 1982), 415, 422.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 428.

viewed as central to the operating objectives of the parent institution, or to their efficient management and were vulnerable to budget cuts.<sup>8</sup>

If overall use was low, due largely to the particular circumstances academic archives found themselves in the early 1980s, it follows that outreach, too, was limited. After noting what their primary responsibilities were, only a select number of respondents mentioned responsibility for exhibitions, displays, oral history, fundraising, and sometimes teaching. These respondents were the minority, however, as most of the archives surveyed presented a significantly different perspective. Indeed, the primary message conveyed by the respondents, as noted by Burckel and Cook, was that encouraging greater use of the collections was of limited concern to archivists, especially in public or small colleges and universities. Moreover, the authors, citing a similar survey of Canadian archives, suggest that "...some archives deliberately avoid giving their services wide publicity for fear the public demand would overwhelm their limited resources."<sup>9</sup>

In light of Burckel and Cook's and Wilson's findings, it is not surprising, then, to discover that the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collection was established in 1978, in the midst of this institutional boom. As archivist William Maher advances, postwar expansion and diversity of colleges and universities peaked in the early 1970s and these institutions became significantly more relevant to a broader segment of society.<sup>10</sup> It became increasingly apparent that the establishment of academic archives was crucial in order to properly document and manage an institution's records.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>10</sup> William Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992), 7,8.

Moreover, establishing a university archives was, at the time, commonly considered to be “a symbolic and practical expression of the institution’s concern for its past while it faced rapid growth and change” especially as it “approached key anniversaries.”<sup>11</sup> While this may have been a prime motivating factor for the formation of the University of Manitoba Archives as the university’s own centennial drew near in 1977, the archives’ collection actually preceded this date by some thirty years. Although as a discrete repository within the university the archives was relatively late in forming, it is readily apparent that the institution’s inaugural archival acquisitions – random as they were - set the tone and ultimately provided the cornerstone for future acquisitions. Thus, it is possible to say that from its humble beginnings in the mid-twentieth century as a small, administrative unit in the university’s Libraries, through its emergence as a full-fledged archives in 1978 and after, the archives has succeeded in stimulating archival awareness of the university’s and province’s rich heritage.

The archives, too, however, experienced its share of growing pains. Like other similar institutions, academic research, mainly conducted by the history department, provided the impetus for the development of the archives. Similar to other Canadian universities in the 1960s, a professionally staffed and recognized academic archives at the university of Manitoba was non-existent.<sup>12</sup> However, with the acquisition of several major manuscript collections providing the impetus, the establishment of a formal university archives took the next critical step when, in late 1967, a new administrative unit – under the auspices of the university’s Libraries – was organized with the title:

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, "Canadian University Archives," 167.

Special Collections Library.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the growing manuscript collections, the Special Collections Library, beginning in 1968, amalgamated the Slavic, Icelandic, and rare books collections, which numbered in the vicinity of twenty thousand volumes. As encouraging as this development was, the university was still a long way from appointing a ‘proper’, or full-time, archivist to manage the accumulating mass of documents. The university of Manitoba was not an aberration with respect to its lack of a formal archival programme. In a 1966 survey involving forty-five academic institutions in Canada, only twenty-seven claimed to have maintained some form of archival programme, and of this figure, only seven had a full-time archivist who dealt with manuscripts and university records.<sup>14</sup> The Special Collections Library held records, papers, and other significant documents from individuals and organizations only marginally affiliated with the university – or with no connection at all to it. The unit acted like most academic archives of the period. There was still no plan in place to incorporate the records of the institution within its mandate.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps in response to a national trend that saw the number of Canadian universities employing full-time archivists rise to fifteen by 1971, in that same year, much debate was generated among university officials and faculty concerning the need to establish an official archives. Reflecting this trend, the debate centred on the desire to create an archives that moved beyond simply the development of its manuscript collection. As the minutes of the university of Manitoba's 1971 Senate meetings indicate, certain individuals were in favour of buttressing a rather passive archival program with a

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<sup>13</sup> John Muchin, “Special Collections Library,” *University of Manitoba Libraries News Notes*, vol. 1, no. 5 (1967): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, “Canadian University Archives,” 167.

<sup>15</sup> Maher, “The Management of University and College Archives,” 10.

records management program and to develop a collection of resource materials related to Manitoba and western Canada.<sup>16</sup> Others, though, preferred maintaining those archival functions that had developed in the Library, but combining them with the functions of a proposed Museum and Art Gallery.<sup>17</sup> Against this background, the Senate Planning and Priorities Committee recommended that the development of the university archives be undertaken as quickly as possible.<sup>18</sup>

By the early 1970s, the evolution of the university archives progressed slowly, if not steadily. A pivotal development occurred in 1976 when the Secretary of Senate informed the Library of its plan to transfer records it had possessed since the university's inception, thereby setting the precedent for preserving important administrative and historical records that continues to the present.<sup>19</sup> At last, the university of Manitoba was able to join other academic institutions in establishing an archival programme – albeit one that was still technically informal and unofficial – that was responsible for both university records and manuscript collections. In light of this development, the Senate Library Committee recommended, in 1977, that “an effective archival collection ... be developed and that a consistent line of communication be established to ensure regular input of archival material.”<sup>20</sup> Less than a year later, the university of Manitoba Department of Archives and Special Collections was founded and a full-time archivist (Dr. Richard Bennett) finally employed.

As part of this new-found status, two primary roles were identified for the archives: to seek out, retrieve and preserve the papers of departments and faculty of the

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<sup>16</sup> The University of Manitoba, Minutes of Senate, 1971, 4, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, “The Department of Archives and Special Collections,” 2.

<sup>20</sup> University of Manitoba Senate Library Committee Meeting Minutes, 1977, 2.

university, and to establish a Manitoba manuscript collection.<sup>21</sup> In effect, these goals amounted to an unofficial collecting policy for the archives that remain so till this day. In keeping with these goals, the university archivist, early on, made it clear that one of the first priorities and challenges was to learn the nature and extent of the university's records and, consequently, make arrangements to have those deemed historically valuable – and non-current – transferred immediately to the archives.<sup>22</sup> Mindful of this objective, the archivist met regularly with department heads and actively solicited significant documents, beginning with a large number of presidential papers, comptroller records, and material from the university Relations office.<sup>23</sup> The previously haphazard manner in which university papers were acquired began to be replaced by a more orderly system. And as Wilson suggests, combining the official records of a university and general manuscripts – or the 'total archives' concept – is undoubtedly the best basis for an academic archives.<sup>24</sup>

In what ways, then, if at all, has the university of Manitoba Archives evolved from those first few critical years, supported as it was by the tireless efforts of its staff? It is useful, perhaps, before attempting to answer this question to briefly examine the period between 1987 and 1992 and some of the significant events that would ultimately shape the future direction of the archives.

In 1987, University of Manitoba By-Law 7.00, "Archives and Preservation and Destruction of Records", made official the establishment of the university Archives under

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<sup>21</sup> Ed Unrau, "Archives: The Need to Preserve," *University of Manitoba Bulletin* vol.13, no. 6 (1978): 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, "Canadian University Archives," 171, 172.

a University Archivist reporting to the Director of Libraries.<sup>25</sup> What this meant was that the archives were now responsible for appraising and preserving a wide range of University records. While the archives had been steadily collecting and organizing University records from various faculties and administrative offices since 1976, a 1988 review of the archives by the Library Review Committee concluded that, despite the recent adoption of the new by-law, “the university in general has been slow, even remiss, in establishing an adequate program to protect its historical records.”<sup>26</sup> This stern warning was prompted in part by the overarching concern that as the university became more dependent on electronic records, benign neglect of them would likely result in their location and content being unknown and, moreover, their long-term survival would also be at risk. Hence, in 1992, the archives Review Committee recommended that the university implement a records management and archives programme that would entail “proper description of University records, appraisal and scheduling of them for archival retention, and physical protection of them, both until the appraisal can be made and after it for archival records.”<sup>27</sup>

The committee’s concern over university records stemmed mainly from its belief that the archives’ mandate for collecting had been interpreted too loosely. To be sure, the archives had been prudent in acquiring a wide range of private manuscripts and records, rare books, and even university records, however, the committee held that the university records in particular had not received due attention as intended by the 1987 by-law.<sup>28</sup> In principle, what the committee suggested was that the collection, preservation, and

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<sup>25</sup> Report of the Review Committee for the Department of Archives and Special Collections, University of Manitoba, June 30, 1992, 3, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

administration of non-current university records be considered the archives' highest priority.<sup>29</sup> As William Maher asserts in his discourse involving the management of academic archives, "the most important prerequisite for acquisitions work is to possess authority to accession all records of the parent institution."<sup>30</sup> While the archives had essentially been doing this, it was apparently not to the extent that the committee felt was necessary to document the university. Equally revealing, was the recommendation that archival material created by faculty, students, and alumni in their private capacities also be considered the archives' second highest collecting priority. Not that private manuscripts were to be ignored, only that the collecting focus should be reoriented and refined to reflect Manitoba's rich literary and agricultural history.<sup>31</sup> Finally, as Ian Wilson has maintained, financial constraints experienced by universities has often resulted in libraries clarifying their objectives and priorities and taking steps to recognize differences inherent between archives and libraries.<sup>32</sup> Hence, it should have come as no surprise that the committee's final recommendation involved transferring responsibility for the rare book collection to another, more appropriate department of the Libraries in order facilitate the refinement of the archives' collection policy.<sup>33</sup>

What, then, have been the predominant implications of these recommendations in the past few years? Although university records had been acquired in varying degrees for nearly thirty years, it has not been until quite recently that they have become subject to increased attention. While it is difficult to precisely identify the source of this trend, as University Archivist Shelley Sweeney posits, the increased acquisition of university

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>30</sup> Maher, "The Management of College and University Archives," 59.

<sup>31</sup> "Report of the Review Committee," 7.

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, "Canadian University Archives," 174.

<sup>33</sup> "Report of the Review Committee," 7.

records is likely the result of the expansion of the university's mandate "to include the implementation on campus of, in 1998, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and in 2000, the Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)."<sup>34</sup> If the acquisition of university records was increasing regardless, then certainly the addition of both these acts has aided in promoting the adoption of records management on campus.

Another significant development in the archives' evolution as an academic institution has been its embrace of a formal Archives Acquisitions Policy in 2004. Undoubtedly, as some of the earlier arguments referred to earlier attest, collecting policies are highly susceptible to broad, sweeping guidelines with little, or no, specific goals. Nevertheless, collecting policies can prove highly beneficial simply by providing a conceptual framework for decision-making. For example, the university archives' policy explicitly outlines its ten most salient areas of acquisition. Most interestingly, the top five all coincide specifically with the recommendations proposed by the Archives Review Committee over a decade earlier. Now, however, the collecting focus – while still specific in its aims – has expanded to include other areas deemed important to the university's collective memory. Moreover, in keeping with the general view expressed by many current archivists, the policy highlights the fact that an overarching goal of the archives is not only to undertake a concerted effort to respect the collecting mandates of sister institutions, but also to work with them in an atmosphere of cooperation.<sup>35</sup>

So where does the archives presently stand? Much progress has been made, especially in the area of collecting, despite the lack of a formal collecting policy early on. As British archivist Caroline Williams contends, "if you have the resources you need to

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<sup>34</sup> Sweeney, "Archinews/Archinouvelles," 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

develop a proactive and systematic plan for enhancing collections – an acquisition strategy.”<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, many academic archives, including the University of Manitoba’s, did not have that luxury and tended to work in what Williams describes as "splendid institutional isolation" where concern for the collecting agenda of other similar archives was lacking, or at least not a high priority.<sup>37</sup> With time, however, the University of Manitoba Archives has gradually progressed in its overall approaches and strategies and has ultimately made fundamental changes in the way it manages its collections. In short, while the archives continues to amass crucial manuscripts and records,<sup>38</sup> only now, through the adoption of a formal Acquisition Policy is it able to solicit, accept, or decline records in a manner that adequately satisfies the needs of its primary clientele: the students, faculty, and staff of the University of Manitoba.

So what has changed for university archives, such as the University of Manitoba’s, since the surveys from over thirty years ago were first conducted? It is reasonable to suggest that academic archives changed significantly more in the decade following the survey, than in the period immediately preceding it. Academic archives will always exist in one form or another as long as there are universities, but they will only really thrive by aligning themselves with the academic mission of the university. Recognizing the potential of this increased academic role, since the 1990s archivists began to reconsider how archives could interface with students and researchers by investigating the manner in which they could more fully insert their repositories into the

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<sup>36</sup> Caroline Williams, *Managing Archives: Foundations, Principles and Practice* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2006), 46.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Sweeney, “Archinews/Archinouvelles,” 1. As of 2005, the archives’ holdings were composed of approximately 9000 linear feet of textual material, 130,000 photographs and negatives, 5,000 audiotapes, 2,500 videotapes, 600 films, 100 CDs, 2,200 architectural plans, 1,200 maps, and 30,000 rare books.

academic curriculum. That is, by recasting previous notions of what academic archives should entail, archivists began to consider a wider role for themselves and their repositories and in doing so, the concept of a teaching and academic role for archives became more fully realized. Canadian archival pioneer Hugh Taylor, an early advocate of an expanded role for archivists as educators, suggested that archivists do so by encouraging students to enter into dialogue with these records. In encouraging archivists to be involved in primary and undergraduate education, Taylor boldly predicted in 1972 that “[w]e may see the decline of the textbook as an essential teaching tool, simply because the one single point of view will be seen as inadequate and insufficiently open-ended.”<sup>39</sup> While as optimistic as it was bold, Taylor’s comment is all the more striking coming at a time when the archivist’s primary role – as illustrated by the University of Manitoba - was to simply collect information that supported research, and not to provide an educational role. As archivists writing at the time, such as Maher, Wilson, Warner, and Burckel and Cook noted, academic archives were still mainly focused on collecting archival records, with little attention given to promoting their use. , Public programming was only a minor concern and most efforts at that time were dedicated to addressing reference and research requests. Academic archives, like the University of Manitoba's, existed to be used and that was implicitly part of their formal mandate. Yet, how such use was to be pursued was left unclear and little thought or priority given to it by such archives. This was to change, however, once these archives became more established. Only then did public programming emerge as a core archival function and one that would ultimately lead to a more prominent role in a university’s teaching mission.

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<sup>39</sup> Hugh A. Taylor, “Clio in the Raw: Archival Materials and the Teaching of History.” *American Archivist* no. 35 (July/October 1972): 339.

## Chapter 1: The Rise of Archival Public Programming

Preserving records of historical value is undoubtedly of paramount importance to archivists, but in the end, archives exist in order to be used. Paraphrasing an age-old philosophical question: if a tree falls in a forest and nobody is around to witness the event, does it still make a sound? Better yet, if no one is aware of the tree's presence to begin with, can one ever truly know with any certainty whether it ever existed at all? Similarly, when archival materials lie dormant and unused in a repository, do they still retain their evidential value, or are they simply nothing more than extraneous information collecting dust on a shelf? Archivists are fond of stating, "we are what we keep" but perhaps it should really be, "we are what we use" to reflect one of the overarching goals of archives: facilitating engagement with archival materials. After all, as archivist John Grabowski points out, "[h]eritage becomes tangible only when seen. Hidden in a box, it becomes only another mystery to be associated with the arcane profession of an archivist and the dull pursuit of history."<sup>1</sup> While acquiring and preserving records of lasting historical importance are vital aspects of an archives' mandate, ensuring the accessibility of these records to a broad research community, as well as fostering learning, teaching, and research through instruction, reference, exhibitions, publications, special events, and education are equally important. Public programming, then, and the act of promoting awareness, and making accessible archival materials, has become an integral archival activity, and one whose undertaking has been greatly enhanced by the advent of the World Wide Web and its virtual environment.

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Grabowski, "Keepers, Users, and Finders: Building an Awareness of Archival Value," *American Archivist* vol. 55 (Summer 1992), 471.







public programming.<sup>13</sup> Put another way, Blais and Enns claim that public programming must emerge as an essential archival function and like all other archival activities, should reflect as precisely as possible the needs of core users and user groups, along with their evolving patterns of use. In short, theirs was a call for archival institutions to become the domain of users, rather than of archivists.

Echoing Blais and Enns' idea that public programming should be treated as a basic archival function is American archivist Timothy Ericson. Ericson's argument is premised on the notion that archivists preserve historical records so that they can be used and outreach represents the means of ensuring that they are used.<sup>14</sup> Thus, he insists, if the goal is use, then other archival functions - such as identification, acquisition, and description - are essentially the tools used to achieve this goal and must be repositioned in regard to the sequence in which they are performed in order to reflect this idea. In other words, public programming needs to be brought into the mainstream of archival practice and not simply relegated to the periphery of archival planning and considered an unnecessary, added responsibility.<sup>15</sup> In short, Ericson's discourse emphasizes the need for public programming to be integrated into archival planning as an integral component and not simply undertaken in isolation.

Leading Canadian archivist Barbara Craig also joined this discussion. Craig, too, espoused the need for integrating public programming activities with acquisition and preservation activities in a balanced whole. While Craig is cognizant of the importance of serving users and goes as far as to state that they should partake in the archival mission

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 454.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy L. Ericson, "Preoccupied With Our Own Gardens: Outreach and Archivists," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), 114,115.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 114, 116.





techniques, emulating museum environments and allowing archivists a greater presence in the interpretation of archival material.<sup>22</sup>

Against this background, then, public programming has continued to progress, over the past thirty years, facilitated in large part by the development and expansion of the Internet. Digital records and rapidly advancing technology present the archivist with many new challenges. Wilson has noted that, especially in the past decade, “public access to Canadian archival holdings has been transformed, it has been redefined in ways far beyond the imagination and dreams of those who have preceded us.”<sup>23</sup> Wilson is referring in large part to the manner in which computer technology and the World Wide Web have profoundly expanded the ways archives are able to carry out their outreach activities. Wilson's hope in the late 1980s and early 1990s of improving access to archives for a broader audience by, among other things, emulating the exhibitions developed by other cultural agencies such as museums, would ultimately be facilitated by digital technology.

Similarly, the proliferation of archives' Web sites that offer detailed, contextually rich descriptive databases and virtual exhibits of some of their key holdings, has also served Cook's vision of public programming well. Both cases are clearly illustrated by the voluminous number of archives engaging in interpretive activities online. Generally speaking, access to archival materials has improved as archival materials and services move beyond the “walls” of archival institutions. Likewise, public programming

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ian Wilson, “From One Generation to Another: The Transformation of Archival Access,” in *The Power and Passion of Archives: A Festschrift in Honour of Kent Haworth*, eds. Reuben Ware, Marion Beyer, and Cheryl Avery (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Printing Services and Association of Canadian Archivists, 2005), 137.

activities also appear to have benefited from archives' increased web presence, but to what extent?

While traditional archival public programming activities are still of great benefit, “the World Wide Web is a new and exciting venue through which archivists can pursue outreach activities for their repositories, reaching potential audiences in ways never before possible.”<sup>24</sup> So wrote American archivist William Landis in 1995 and by all accounts his prediction has held true. A Web presence can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between a repository and the community at large. As Pitcher says, the Internet is an invaluable tool that not only has the potential to provide improved access and services to existing users, but also to attract new ones as well.<sup>25</sup> The Web’s use of hypertext technology that provides links from one digital file to another has afforded archives the opportunity to attract what university archivist Crista Bradley refers to as “accidental audiences”. That is, those who visit Web sites by following links from other web pages, or casual users who are either unable to physically visit an archives, or simply prefer to view archival materials virtually.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the recent development of integrated databases linking different archives, or even different cultural resource institutions, could also be a boon to archival public programming.

The Web has become an important means by which many people undertake their public and personal business. The potential for archives to create greater awareness of their holdings is huge. No longer are archives constrained by reduced hours of operation;

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<sup>24</sup> William Landis, “Archival Outreach on the World Wide Web,” *Archival Issues* vol. 20, no. 2 (1995), 129.

<sup>25</sup> Pitcher, “Archives in the Classroom,” 30.

<sup>26</sup> Crista L. Bradley, “Coming of Age: Specialized Archival Public Programming For Older Canadians,” (Master’s Thesis, Department of History, Archival Studies, University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg, 2005), 18.

digital representations of archival images and documents are available for retrieval at any given time or location. Bradley also makes an interesting point concerning an archives' image. Bradley holds that it is conceivable that a Web presence could raise awareness about archives, simply by dispelling some of the negative stereotypes associated with these institutions. Thus, creating positive perceptions about themselves goes a long way toward archives being viewed as dynamic, engaging centres of knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Despite all of its perceived advantages, though, there are some concerns that must be considered when conducting Web-based public programming. For instance, Barbara Craig, writing on the expectations of archives users in the information age, maintains that many archives users – especially students – have been conditioned by extensive exposure to the Web to expect instant availability of information.<sup>28</sup> This can rarely be provided by archives. Another aspect of digital public programming that has to be considered involves inaccessibility. While Web sites have many obvious advantages over traditional programming methods, such as publications, there is still a risk of alienating potential users who do not have Internet access, do not have the appropriate software required to view the site, or who are simply uncomfortable with digital technology. Still, there are likely some individuals who prefer dealing with the physical attributes of an archival record, rather than the seemingly detached, impersonal nature of virtual records. And, finally, simply having a Web presence is often not enough to regularly attract new users. User studies have indicated that many people may use an archival service on the Internet for a one-time, specific purpose without any expectation of establishing any subsequent

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Craig, "Old Myths in New Clothes: Expectations of Archives Users," *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998), 118-120.



argues that because of the unique nature of the Web, the virtual exhibition is able to facilitate a greater level of interaction with the user through email chat rooms, and other interactive activities, than can be accomplished through its physical counterpart.<sup>32</sup> Not only do virtual exhibits allow user interaction, they encourage it and the results are often incorporated back into the exhibit.<sup>33</sup> Another development related to virtual exhibitions is that arguably the archivist's role as an interpreter of records is more pronounced because his or her role in contextualizing documents that have been removed from their traditional surroundings becomes more important.<sup>34</sup> Virtual exhibitions, however, are not the only way for an archive to undertake a presence online. Archives are also able to use the Web to convey finding aids, provide access to digitized materials not part of a virtual exhibition, and also to publicize other information related to their holdings, policies, or physical location.<sup>35</sup> How effective, then, are archives Web pages, and, in particular, virtual exhibitions in supporting public programming activities?

While the Web offers new ways for archivists to reach audiences, is it an outreach tool that can be utilized equally by all institutions, regardless of size? Advances in information technology have resulted in unlimited possibilities for archival outreach on the Web. Accordingly, many institutions have begun to take advantage of the opportunities thus afforded. Larger institutions, such as Library and Archives Canada (LAC)<sup>36</sup> devote much of their energy to creating virtual exhibits. As such, the LAC Web site uses exhibits to provide detailed information on many historical narratives about

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>33</sup> Goodine, "Archives, Postmodernism, and the Internet," 58.

<sup>34</sup> Bradley, "Coming of Age," 24.

<sup>35</sup> Goodine, "Archives, Postmodernism, and the Internet," 58.

<sup>36</sup> See the LAC Web site at <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/index-e.html>

Aboriginal people, exploration and settlement, war and the military, literature, sports and art and photography to name a few. In an analysis of one such exhibit – “Canada and the First World War” – Scott Goodine notes its accessibility to a wide range of users, regardless of their knowledge of Canadian history. He describes the interactive aspect of the exhibit and the fact that there are two main pathways available for users to follow. One pathway integrates multi-media archival documents into the biographies of various Canadians involved in the war, while the second pathway provides historical context in the form of information about Canadian society during the war.<sup>37</sup> Naturally, other elements of the exhibit are dedicated to aiding researchers and thus include the extent of LAC’s related holdings, as well as links to other organizations associated with the topic.<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, most of the other exhibits followed a similar structure, and utilized interpretative narratives in their attempt to create links between historical events and the LAC’s holdings. In this regard, if an exhibit is considered a medium of communication, whose intent is not only to educate but entertain, then the LAC Web site has done an admirable job. Perhaps it is asking too much to expect any virtual exhibit to be “all things to all people”. Maybe it is enough for it to simply provide only the necessary level of context to pique a users’ interest and explore the topic at hand, and presumably the repository’s holdings, in more detail. But what about smaller institutions, such as university archives? Are they capable of mounting successful digital collections or virtual exhibits in an environment of fiscal restraint? Most definitely, as the following example illustrates.

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<sup>37</sup> Goodine, "Archives, Postmodernism, and the Internet," 67,68.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 68.







Manitoba's T.G. Hamilton YouTube video, which deals with the paranormal activities of T.G. Hamilton, an early twentieth-century Winnipeg medical doctor. The video has been posted for nearly three years and has experienced well over one hundred thousand viewings. While the social interaction aspect of such a medium is limited to allowing viewers simply to provide additional commentary, the opportunity it provides as an outreach tool is undeniable.

Much of the social media used by archives to date seems to involve promoting a specific collection or event. Institutions that are active on Twitter and Facebook generally use them to showcase highly valued items from their collections that relate to specific anniversaries, commemorations, or current events. While these digital avenues serve archives in a promotional sense, they also allow them to engage a potentially new and different audience, one that would have otherwise not been familiar with the archives. Institutions like the City of Vancouver Archives are strong proponents of tools such as Twitter and use such technology to engage with both the local and archival communities online by providing information about upcoming events and workshops, new resources and services, as well as inviting followers to share ideas and suggestions with archives' staff.<sup>45</sup>

Other institutions have followed suit in similarly interesting and innovative ways. Podcasts, both in video and oral format, are increasingly being used to highlight aspects of archival collections and provide information and services regarding how to perform archival research and to analyze archival records. Duke University in North Carolina recently launched Duke Mobile 1.1, which provides a comprehensive digital image

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<sup>45</sup> City of Vancouver Archives – <http://Twitter.com/VanArchives>. Accessed August 29, 2010.



meaning from archives -- perhaps especially in academic archives whose sponsors have education as a primary mission.

In sum, the act of raising awareness of an archives and increasing the use of its records has always been a significant aspect of an archivists' responsibilities. Only recently, though, has it emerged as a core archival function, aided strongly by new technology that has allowed archives to reach out to vast new audiences. Prior to the advent of the Internet, public programming received a much-needed boost from Elsie Freeman's call for archivists to reconsider the status and nature of public programming. The ensuing debate concerning the theoretical implications of public programming ensured that it was well positioned as a core archival function after digital technology became more prevalent. Indeed, archival outreach and the Internet appear to be a perfect fit. Public programming provides the necessary means of not only attracting new users of an archive, but also for expanding existing audiences' awareness of what a particular repository holds and does.

It is not enough simply to present the holdings – or ‘information’ as it were – as many archivists have argued. Increased access to archival materials does not necessarily translate into increased understanding of them. A sense of a records' contextual richness is also necessary in order to understand its evidential value more completely. Providing contextuality, however, is only part of the solution. Users must be made aware of how to engage with the records in order to uncover their rich resources of information.

Thus, as public programming continues to evolve and expand through the use of the Internet, it is imperative that archives, and especially university archives, exploit their teaching function. Increasing awareness of extensive online digital collections and

virtual exhibits is a necessary first step. Yet, there seems to be a growing movement among university archivists that suggests archives need to go further by reaching out to the academic community and fostering interdisciplinary relationships, in an attempt to integrate their materials more fully into the university's curriculum. Promoting archival literacy, then, especially among university students, should be a primary objective and web-based outreach tools are but one way to help achieve this. In the words of archivist Peter Lester: "Records exist so that people may consult them; and why should archivists wait for people to discover them? People will not come unless they know what there is to consult."<sup>47</sup> And, of course, they will come if they know how to consult them. Unlike the proverbial tree in the forest, then, public programming – both traditional and Web-based – will ensure archives are, 'heard'.

University archives were not the prime movers behind the emergence of public programming, but by 2000 some university archivists began to recognize an opportunity to do so and to conceptualize a greater role for university archives as centres of learning.

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<sup>47</sup> Lester, "Is the Virtual Exhibition the Natural Successor to the Physical?" 87.

## Chapter 2: The Academic Function of Archives

Many archives are employing various traditional and non-traditional modes of public programming to facilitate interest in and ultimately use of their collections. How can they do so to conceptualize new outreach programs to enhance their teaching role? In other words, is there a recognizable academic function associated with archives and, more importantly, how can students best gain from such a function? Students, it seems, typically, find archives intimidating. Archival research is a complex process, but is that enough to keep students from using primary sources? Have university archivists been negligent in their outreach activities? Likely not, as most archives – including university and college archives – undertake some such activities to varying degrees. Public programming as a core archival activity has gained prominence, especially over the past thirty years as, in the words of archivist Tamar Chute, archives began to promote their collections and services if only to remain a viable part of their institution’s mission.<sup>1</sup> While acquiring and preserving records of lasting historical importance are vital aspects of an archives’ mandate, ensuring the accessibility of these records to a broad research community, as well as fostering learning, teaching, and research through instruction, reference, exhibits, publications, special events and education are equally important.

Yet university archives are arguably underutilized -- since most students and faculty members do not actually use their campus archives -- and despite the archives' location within an educational institution and privy to a highly concentrated, ever-renewing user community. A university archives can provide an ideal means to introduce students to an aspect of academic research that is frequently overlooked: engagement

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<sup>1</sup> Tamar G. Chute, “Selling the College and University Archives: Current Outreach Perspectives,” *Archival Issues* vol.25. nos. 1 and 2 (2000), 45.











school learning process.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, the goals of the project included: engaging archival and education researchers directly with elementary school teachers and students; assessing the ability of students to achieve archival literacy; evaluating the benefits of using primary sources to enrich elementary education; and exploring effective ways of incorporating primary sources into classroom activities.<sup>21</sup> The overarching challenge was to educate children about archives and to teach them how to use primary sources without sacrificing the authenticity and reliability of the records.<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, the results of the study indicated that both archivists and educators had reservations about the integration of primary sources in the classroom. For archivists, most of these concerns revolved around determining how best to encourage classroom use of primary sources, how to identify potential educator collaborators, as well as how to select content and facilitate integration and document lessons for reuse. The teachers' primary concerns included time constraints, lack of archival literacy, and fears about venturing into unfamiliar territory.<sup>23</sup>

How can these respective concerns be addressed? A close working relationship between archivists and teachers is imperative. Steps can be taken that build on such relationships to facilitate the incorporation of primary sources into the classroom. In general, the approach employed by Gilliland-Swetland and colleagues involves the cooperation of archivists, teachers, and researchers working together to develop, teach, and evaluate a classroom curriculum that involves the use of primary materials.

Specifically, the approaches include:

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> D'Angelo-Felliti, "Children's Use of Archives," 157.

<sup>23</sup> Gilliland-Swetland et al., "Integrating Primary Sources into the Elementary School Classroom," 90.



partnerships, archives can play an important role in the education of primary and secondary school children, can such efforts be applied to the university community? Is there a viable teaching function associated with university archives, and can it be successfully integrated into an academic curriculum?

The student population of a university is a huge, largely untapped audience and an academic archives' placement within this setting gives it a clear advantage over other institutions since it has direct access to a large, concentrated source of potential users. A university archives can provide an ideal opportunity to introduce students to an aspect of scholarly research often overlooked: the raw material of history itself.<sup>28</sup> Yet, academic archives represent so much more. They can introduce both undergraduate and graduate students to the importance of archival materials as evidence, and the critical thinking skills required to access this evidence are skills that can be applied across a wide range of academic disciplines. And therein lies their true value.

Although addressing the educational needs of academic communities presents an unparalleled opportunity for archivists to increase the awareness and relevance of university archives, the goal is not so easily attained. A significant characteristic of today's university and college students is that few of them relish visiting a library, and even less so an archives, when conducting research. Most students, it seems, are inclined to go out of their way to avoid archives and those that do use them utilize them only in a cursory manner, seldom taking the time to appreciate the scope and significance of the holdings. This has been the case more since the advent of the Internet and the ability to retrieve information with a few keystrokes. A recent study conducted at Colorado State

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<sup>28</sup> William J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen: The Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1992), 257.

University revealed that nearly sixty percent of undergraduate students relied on an Internet search engine as their first strategy for finding scholarly materials to meet their research needs. A mere twenty-three percent began their search with a library.<sup>29</sup> No mention was made of the tendency of students to use archival resources but, undoubtedly, the figure is much lower.

How can archives increase their profile and play a more meaningful role in the university education process? Archives do have much to offer the academic community and can potentially transform the intellectual work of the classroom. Archives can highlight the fact that they are organized to facilitate independent learning and are capable of supporting interdisciplinary study. If teaching students to think critically has become a major concern over the past couple of decades, then archives – and university archives in particular – are well-placed to act as centres of learning and university archivists as educators. As archivist Marcus C. Robyns maintains:

[S]econdary sources present students with someone else’s interpretation of past events; but because primary sources are themselves subjective in nature, their use in the research process requires the application of critical thinking skills. Here, the archivist can make a real difference in education by guiding students through the process of critical analysis, making the archives not only a repository of the past but a challenging center of critical inquiry.<sup>30</sup>

Convincing students and professors alike of the pedagogical benefits of working with primary sources should be an important aspect of a university’s outreach programme. There needs to be a strategy for serving students beyond what is currently in

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<sup>29</sup> Patricia Davitt Maughan, “The Winds of Change: Generation Y, Student Learning, and Assessment of Higher Education,” in *Student Engagement and Information Literacy*, ed., Craig Gibn (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2006), 75.

<sup>30</sup> Marcus C. Robyns, “The Archivist as Educator: Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into Historical Research Methods Instruction,” *American Archivist* vol.64, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2001), 365.

place, and one that involves fostering closer relationships with a range of academic disciplines. While many repositories remain fairly passive in their approach to outreach, there are a growing number of others that, driven by the desire to introduce undergraduates to the benefits of archival research, are taking a more assertive, enthusiastic approach. As Robyns contends, archivists in academic outreach should move beyond showing students the mechanics of how to access information and into partnerships with faculty in order to teach students critical analysis of that information.<sup>31</sup> Archivists should develop strategies to work with the academic community in planning projects to familiarize students with the use of primary sources.

The advantage of working directly with primary sources is also advanced by other archivists, and educators, such as Bianca Falbo. Falbo, a professor of nineteenth-century Anglo-American literature and print culture, regularly designs archival research projects for her undergraduate students.<sup>32</sup> Falbo believes that by asking students to work directly with original sources an opportunity is created for a more student-centred classroom, one which transforms the traditional pedagogical model that views the teacher as the owner and disseminator of information students are perceived to lack.<sup>33</sup> By working with primary sources on their own terms students are forced to reconsider what they believe they know about a particular event or person, as well as their experience in making sense of archival materials. To that end, Falbo makes a case for the benefits of being exposed to a text's materiality. That is, when an electronic or published version of a text is used, it generally "reinforces the notion that reading is only about access to words, outside of

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<sup>31</sup> Robyns, "The Archivist as Educator," 365.

<sup>32</sup> Bianca Falbo, "Teaching From Archives," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* vol.1, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 33.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.









what matters to its stakeholders – or users – so that a stronger connection with them can be made. Fundamental to any potential collaboration is the ability to communicate the relevance of a university archives to people so that they can recognize the archives' value and how it contributes to the teaching and learning process.

Against this background, a cursory review of various universities suggests academic programming is gaining in stature. Most archival institutions – whether affiliated with a university or not – undertake a certain degree of academic outreach that includes, as a minimum, hosting lectures or workshops, related mostly to learning how to access materials. For example, the Provincial Archives of Alberta offered programming for college and university students in the form of a workshop designed specifically to orientate students to the archives.<sup>44</sup> In addition, if a professor contacts the archives with the intent of bringing a class in to do research, staff at the archives will use the opportunity to arrange a tour of the facility and reserve tables in the reading room for the class to conduct research. Similarly, other university archives operate in much the same manner. Many archives, it seems, are content with speaking to classes when requested, cataloguing their records in the library's main electronic database, placing their collections on a web site, and participating in library tours and open houses. But is this enough? Archivist Tamar G. Chute is one of many who do not believe so. Chute claims that academic archivists, as members of a teaching institution, have a strong obligation to create educational programs for students and should consider outreach as a form of teaching.<sup>45</sup> As Ericson maintains, “[t]he goal is use...but if, after we brilliantly and

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<sup>44</sup> Jessica King, Personal Communication, February 6, 2007.

<sup>45</sup> Chute, “Selling the College and University Archives,” 38.

meticulously appraise, arrange, describe, and conserve our records, nobody comes to use them, then we have wasted our time."<sup>46</sup>

In what other ways, then, do academic archives reach their constituents? While archivists employ numerous strategies to reach students and faculty, one of their most important tasks should be to help educators in the classroom with their research, and in day-to-day activities.<sup>47</sup> Again, it is important that archives be proactive in this respect, and take the initiative of proposing specific ideas. Some university archivists look at courses being offered by different departments and then send faculty course ideas for research projects using the archives' collection. Likewise, approaching faculty with ideas regarding teaching seminars, giving workshops and orientations, or even delivering whole courses using primary documents and explicating advanced research methods have been undertaken by various archives. Strategically informing instructors of these potential services would likely go a long way in generating interest in an archives' holdings.

In sum, in light of what has been done regarding academic outreach, the question for university archives becomes: can we do more for the academic community? And the answer is a resounding yes, as the previous examples illustrate. There is vast potential for archives to act as educator, yet, this appears for the most part to be an underutilized, or often ignored component of their public programming mandate.

There is a need to increase active and collaborative learning and one way to achieve this is through student engagement. And how might this be achieved? Certainly, the work being done with pre-university students is an integral first step and provides the

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<sup>46</sup> Ericson, "Preoccupied With Our Own Gardens," 117.

<sup>47</sup> Chute, "Selling the College and University Archives," 39, 41.

necessary framework for an ongoing relationship with educators and students. After all, school children are potentially the users of tomorrow and instilling in them useful critical thinking skills can be an effective way of ensuring a higher level of engagement down the line. Many of the techniques used by educators and archivists to encourage and support the educational effort of elementary and high schools can also be applied to the university environment. Important critical thinking skills are associated with working with primary sources and these skills have universal applicability across a wide range of disciplines.

And the ability to think critically is one of the essential goals of a university education, as it allows for the selection of the most authentic and credible evidence from the wide array of information available, including archival materials. As Gibbs et al. assert, it is all too common, though, for many lecturing professors to confront the blank stares of student indifference when relying too heavily on the distilled information of a text book and, accordingly, “what may be needed to break through such responses is something easier to preach than practice: the active involvement of the student in the learning process.”<sup>48</sup>

The university archives can help achieve this goal. Regular engagement with the primary sources of an academic repository can encourage a student to move from being a passive consumer of facts to one who is actively involved in the knowledge-making process.

Use does not necessarily translate into understanding. What is also required to help students make the transition from user to creator of new knowledge is access to the knowledge and expertise of the archivist. Archivists, serving as mediators and translators, are able to put archival concerns into a language that their users can understand and use. Taking on a primary role as educator is an attractive one. On a

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<sup>48</sup> Gibbs et al., “Classroom, Research, and Public History,” 68.

practical basis, helping users develop critical thinking skills and learn to do what is appropriate for their own needs, makes archives a welcome collaborator in the learning process. As archivist Ellen Swain notes, students will not value the mission and activities of the archives if they do not have a keen understanding of what archivists do and why archives are important. And so archivists need to create an archival presence in the students' environment.<sup>49</sup> Offering a course that provides this understanding to students, as well as encouraging the development of archival literacy and critical thinking skills, could go a long way in demonstrating archivists' central role in teaching and archives as centres of learning.

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<sup>49</sup> Swain, "College Student as Archives' Consultant," 115.

### **Chapter 3: Toward A New University Archives Academic Public Programming**

Although in the past decade academic archivists began to devote more attention to providing archival education – mainly in the form of archival orientation sessions - little was still known concerning their outcomes. That is, how successful were these initiatives in facilitating both physical and intellectual access to records? Early surveys by Yakel and others focused on interviewing users regarding their understanding of archives. Archivists Wendy Duff and Joan Cherry explored this idea in 2008 by examining and compiling the results of several different orientation sessions. Not surprisingly, what they found was that prior to participating in such a session, approximately sixty-five percent of students indicated that they were not at all familiar with conducting research in archives and most notably, none of the students reported being very familiar with archives in general.<sup>1</sup> When asked about their expectations, many students said that they hoped to acquire increased comfort and familiarity with searching and using archives, as well as gain knowledge and a basic understanding of archives in general.<sup>2</sup> Most telling about the results, though, is that many – students and professors alike – indicated that they would have preferred a more direct, hands-on component to the instruction, suggesting that there is an appetite for archives-based instruction at the university level.<sup>3</sup> While there is thus a recognizable academic function associated with archives, are enough institutions doing an adequate job of it? Archivists are ideally suited to take on a role as educator, given their unique role in the knowledge creation process. They are not

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy M. Duff and Joan M. Cherry, “Archival Orientation for Undergraduate Students: An Exploration Study of Impact,” *American Archivist* vol. 71, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2008), 514.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.

simply custodians, but co-creators of knowledge. What, then, is the archivist's role in the learning process?

Arguably, the emergence of postmodern thinking has had significant influence on archival practice, most notably in regard to the concept of context and a greater awareness of the multiple contextualities that are relevant to archival work and the notion that nothing can ever be truly and completely known. As archivist Terry Cook posits in an essay outlining the implications of postmodernism for archivists and the archival process, "...the postmodern shift requires moving away from identifying themselves as passive guardians of an inherited legacy to celebrating their role in actively shaping societal memory."<sup>4</sup> Cook is suggesting that there are multiple narratives – all serving many purposes, and quite often concealed to the casual archival user – that contribute to a record's meaning. Moreover, the archivist, in the course of performing archival functions, is one of the narrators and contributes to the record's meaning. Archivist and educator Tom Nesmith offers some additional insight in this respect. Like Cook, Nesmith believes that archival practices shape records and that because of this intervention, may actually even make a greater contribution to a record's creation and understanding than the original creator does.<sup>5</sup>

Three critical actions whereby the archivist exerts significant influence are: appraisal, arrangement and description, as well as public programming.<sup>6</sup> The idea being advanced by both Cook and Nesmith and now many others is that archivists, in the conscious choices and selections they make daily – including writing descriptions,

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<sup>4</sup> Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Nesmith, "Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives," *American Archivist* vol. 65, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002), 35.

<sup>6</sup> See Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense" and Nesmith, "Seeing Archives".

mediating reference requests, and translating materials into sources of meaning for users - contribute significantly to the many contextualities that already exist for a particular set of records. As archivist Heather MacNeil contends, these conscious and deliberate decisions about archival representations, "...constitute[s] the frame of reference that shapes the meaning and significance..."<sup>7</sup> of archival documents and, in effect, renders the archivist as one of the records' creators, or authors.

And with this role comes the responsibility for archivists to make available this additional information about the records' context of creation, including such aspects as its custodial history, the extent of the archivist's intervention – including information about why certain archival decisions were made and what is absent from the record – and the uses and influences of the records across time. In other words, additional contextuality concerning the records' existence, as well as insight into what they might be useful evidence of, and how they have been and might be used.<sup>8</sup>

In recognition of this advanced role, Nesmith noted that there has been a rise in what he terms a "new public programming".<sup>9</sup> He is referring to an expression of public programming that recognizes the roles that archivists and archival actions play in creating records and knowledge, and in shaping society thereby. The new public programming model, then, moves beyond conventional traditional approaches to programming to advance a more active promotion, use and understanding of archives. Some recent

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<sup>7</sup> Heather MacNeil, "'Picking Our Text': Archival Description, Authenticity, and the Archivist as Editor," *American Archivist* vol. 68 (Fall/Winter 2005), 272.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Nesmith, "Reopening Archives: Bringing New Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice." *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005), 270-271.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Nesmith, "Archivists and Public Affairs: Towards a New Archival Public Programming," in *Better Off Forgetting? Essays on Archives, Public Policy, and Collective Memory*. ed. Cheryl Avery and Mona Holmlund. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

examples of academic programming that aim to move beyond the traditional approach, include initiatives to include archives more significantly in the teaching process.

In Canada two universities have been especially successful in bringing attention to their archives: the University of Ottawa and the University of Calgary. Both exemplify the possibilities of for university archives in public programming outreach to scholars, professors, and students throughout the parent institution. The University of Ottawa has three archives. One in particular – the Canadian Women’s Movement Archives – has developed a close partnership with the university’s Institute of Women’s Studies.<sup>10</sup> As Lucie Desjardins, the university archivist explains, the relationship has evolved to the point where it is now customary that professors teaching the introductory and methodology classes in Women’s Studies take their students to the archives. Archives’ staff then usually conduct a short presentation that not only presents the archives’ collections, but also the procedures regarding how to consult and get reproductions of the material – mainly to demonstrate the differences between library and archives research – and give an example of how to integrate archival material into an undergraduate dissertation.<sup>11</sup> Complementing the presentations are various workshops where students learn the distinction between primary and secondary sources. Desjardins adds that, as part of the workshops, students are assigned small projects, or take-home exams, whereby, they are required to make a return visit to the archives to use the material. The University of Ottawa Archives and Special Collections attempts to assist instructors with incorporating research assignments into their courses. Moreover, “[w]hat students learn as they ponder primary materials are skills that they can use in other disciplines as

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<sup>10</sup> Lucie Desjardins, e-mail message to author, February 9, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.





and to create working partnerships to promote and support the development of the CAA and its unique collections, through instruction, reference, exhibitions, publications, and special events.<sup>17</sup> As such, the CAA has been able to build a research base that is not only local, but also regional, national, and international in scope as well. Ironically, building such a base was easier than building a research base from campus users, but as archivist Linda Fraser explains, building that outreach was absolutely critical to obtaining support from both the university and Libraries and Cultural Resources administration.<sup>18</sup>

Against this background, two faculties have emerged as direct stakeholders in the activities and collections of the CAA: the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Environmental Design, with other fields, such as history, education, geography, and business management also starting to show interest. In the beginning, notes Fraser, the only real use that students and faculty made of the CAA was the occasional undergraduate architectural history class tour of the archives to examine material that might be germane to what they were learning in class. In an attempt to increase the use of the archives by campus faculty, the CAA began inviting different faculty members to curate an exhibition based on the contents of the collection -- in hope that they would realize the significance of the archives' collection and its potential teaching and research use.<sup>19</sup>

Since then, students from the architecture and fine arts programmes have utilized the CAA for research and experiential learning purposes. The uses have been many and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



sites.<sup>22</sup> Since these students often present their work in public presentations to be juried, in addition to handing in project reports, they also frequently require scanned images for their presentations. As Stout elaborates, archives' staff make a point of attending the students' class and do a presentation on the variety of materials available to them and about the experience of using an archives, including how to locate them.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the mutual benefits of a partnership between a university archives and the academic community are obvious. The symbiotic nature of this relationship is such that faculty are able to concentrate on governing the curriculum while, archivists, in turn, provide specialized information skills and a commitment to the importance of critical thinking and archival literacy in the lives of students. In this way, then, the CAA has been able to use its collection for practicums in both the Museum and Heritage Studies programme and have its staff teach directed studies in fine arts that deal with the history of architectural photography and exhibition curation.<sup>24</sup> The proactive manner in which the CAA approaches collaborations with the academic community has increased the profile of the archives at the University of Calgary through teaching and learning opportunities. Again, it requires almost constant effort, but as this case and the other two case studies attest, the potential is clearly there to utilize better the teaching function of a university archives.

Incorporating archival elements into such teaching enables students to look beyond their textbooks for meaning and allows them to establish a tangible connection between the subject they are studying, the relevant archival records, and the archives in

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Linda Fraser, Personal Communication, March 22, 2007.

which these sources are preserved. At the University of Calgary, the Canadian Architectural Archives has been a longstanding proponent of academic public programming and has sought means by which its materials might be used in teaching. Foremost among their activities are the development and delivery of several archival – based courses organized with various faculty members and which typically entail students spending a term in the archives researching and selecting drawings for an exhibition. The final project includes the curation and installation of an exhibition, which has included such themes as regional decorative forms, modern Calgary architecture, university architecture, as well as case studies involving specific architects with a Calgary connection. In other instances, faculty from the history, art, architecture and environmental studies departments have, with assistance from the archivist, designed courses around archival research with the intent of providing students with practical research and critical thinking experience using primary sources that would complement other aspects of their academic and post-graduation life. Finally, as archivist Linda Fraser offers, the archives have in the past, also provided material for various courses where students research design precedents using drawings to build digital models of existing structures.<sup>25</sup>

Similar uses of archives in the classroom can be found at the University of Manitoba. In addition to the many history courses with an archival element, course insertion of archival materials in other disciplines appears to be moving forward. In the English department, one instructor has been a very vocal supporter of the university archives and particularly active in teaching several archives-based courses. Of special

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<sup>25</sup> Linda Fraser, Personal Communication, July, 2010.













can provide the necessary infrastructure for students to develop and share their own ideas about the past and, in effect, negotiate the gap between what is known and what is unknown.

There is fascination with historical representations, but as the literature suggests, interest in and an understanding of those representations are not necessarily compatible. Archivists frequently cite working with students as akin to working with other unskilled researchers in the sense that they become quickly overwhelmed if their research experience is not well structured, or they are intimidated by the information they are attempting to process.<sup>35</sup> It is true that most archives undertake, to varying degrees, academic outreach with the aim of promoting access. Accessibility, however, is not just limited to physical issues of availability of archival materials but also involves intellectual accessibility, or the ability to understand materials and their endless contextualities so that users may do effective work with primary sources. This involves becoming archival literate by being able to critically engage with all types of archival records. And it is this second avenue of access, gaining intellectual access by developing archival literacy competencies and contributing to the advancement of new knowledge that holds most promise for university archivists to raise their academic profile.

To understand archival literacy better, it is important to examine it in the context of what archivists Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah Torres term "archival intelligence."<sup>36</sup> As part of a study to define what characteristics denote an expert user of archives, Yakel and Torres suggest that gaining full intellectual access to an archival collection requires

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<sup>35</sup> Xiaomu Zhon, "Student Archival Research Activity: An Exploration Study," *American Archivist* vol. 71, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2008), 417.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah A. Torres, "AI: Archival Intelligence and User Expertise," *American Archivist* vol. 66, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003).













A document is more than its subject content and the context of its original creation. Throughout its life cycle, it continually evolves, acquiring additional meanings and layers, even after crossing the archival threshold. As such, archivists need to read documents against the grain to search for the deeper contexts of their meaning.<sup>48</sup>

Podolsky Nordland maintains that there is a continual evolution of the record as it passes from the creator to the archivist. The records' history places them within constantly changing contexts of meaning as they are reproduced and reused by subsequent users, including researchers and archivists. Building on archivist Hugh Taylor's belief that each time a record is published or publicized another layer of context is added, Podolsky Nordland suggests that "archivists need to re-examine the record in light of many possible provenances..." that can subtly alter its meaning.<sup>49</sup> Simply consulting a finding aid, though, is not enough to reveal these subtleties, as there is often little information on context and provenance contained in them. In the case of maps, finding aids provide detailed information on physical attributes, surface markings, wording and geographical features; however, it should be remembered that maps are only representations of geographical realities. In other words, "maps are a graphic language to be decoded. They are a construction of reality, images laden with intentions and consequences that can be studied in the societies of their time."<sup>50</sup> In short, archivists must convey to researchers the need to look beyond a single person or institution that created a record, to explore the connection of the record to its creator and the creating processes, and the uses of the record by the original and successor creators.

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<sup>48</sup> Lori Podolsky Nordland, "The Concept of 'Secondary Provenance': Re-interpreting Ac ko mok ki's Map as Evolving Text," *Archivaria* 58 (2004), 147.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>50</sup> J.B. Hartley, "Texts and Contexts in the Interpretation of Early Maps," in *From Sea Charts to Satellite Images: Interpreting North American History through Maps*, ed. David Buisseret (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 166.

What, then, are some of the other considerations that an archivist must undertake in order to glean useful knowledge from records? Certainly, it is crucial to examine some of the key features of documents, the elements that make them what they are. In particular, the document's form, genre, and conventions of representation.<sup>51</sup> Form relates to the specific, prescribed makeup of a document with, or without, preset particular internal categories of information. The diaries and letters found in the Prairie Immigration Experience collection are examples of forms without preset categories of information as their internal content varies. Within these documentary forms are genres. In the Spencer Family fonds, Lucy Spencer's personal diaries represent a genre of the diary form as they are a specific type of diary highlighting her family's immigration experiences. Conventions of representation are ways of communicating within forms and genres of documents. In other words, the ways in which information is organized within the document.<sup>52</sup> In the case of the Spencer Family fonds, the diaries include certain phrases and draw on specific communicative processes because they are representative of the conventions of a particular society in a particular era. By reading the language of context, including the conventions of representation, the archivist can develop a fuller understanding of the document and in doing so, provide the means of access to information and of verifying its authenticity.

While the above approaches to understanding the history of a record can be universally applied to all records, each particular source requires slightly different handling. The personal documents that comprise the bulk of the Prairie Immigration Experience collection provide a unique insight into family life in late-nineteenth and

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<sup>51</sup> University of Manitoba, Archival Studies Program Lecture Notes, January 9, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> University of Manitoba, Archival Studies Program Lecture Notes, January 9, 2007.

early-twentieth-century Canada. While the letters, diaries, photographs, and newspaper clippings can all be assessed and utilized in the same manner as other source material, each type warrants its own form of analysis.

How, then, can we attempt to obtain what needs to be known about these records? The materials from W.C. Murray fonds used in the Prairie Immigration Experience consist, among other things, of correspondence pertaining to Dr. Murray's activities on royal commissions and include letters dealing with various aspects of community life. The first issue to consider is what the letters tell us about the author. Can Murray's commentary be considered representative of the society he is writing about, given that as a doctor his views are likely more heavily biased towards that part of society reserved for professionals? Moreover, when researchers read the correspondence, what are they adding? That is, does a reader's bias play a role in how the letters are interpreted and understood? Similarly, what is missing in the correspondence? As historian John Scott contends, "writer and recipient share a particular cultural world in which elaboration is frequently unnecessary, not only in relation to particular people and events, but also in relation to certain social conventions and institutions."<sup>53</sup> Finally, how can researchers know with any certainty, who the author of the correspondence truly was and who its intended recipient was? That is, whether it is actually what it purports to be. All of these questions and more need to be addressed in order to gain the full contextual value of the record.

Diaries, by their very nature, also raise questions of authenticity and intent, especially when they are incomplete, or unsigned. Again, looking at the Spencer Family

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<sup>53</sup> John Scott, *A Matter of Record* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 180.

fonds, is it possible that someone other than the credited author has written the document and if so, how would this affect our understanding of it? Could certain parts of the diary have been edited or suppressed without the author's knowledge? Scott notes that "the issue of credibility involves not only the assessment of the factual accuracy of diaries and letters as descriptions of the world, but also the question of the extent to which accurate, or not, they sincerely report the author's perceptions and feelings."<sup>54</sup> How do we accurately weigh one person's reflections or assess the value of emotional content? The value of diaries and letters may lie more in their status as recollected experience, rather than recorded fact.

Much has been written concerning the difficulty of understanding how and what we know when we look at an object, such as a photograph. Is there a distinction between simply seeing an object in the physical sense and understanding what it actually represents as a communication process? Many would argue that both of these forms of seeing occur simultaneously but this was not always the case. At one time, photographs were understood primarily in the literal sense and were a key way in which people understood the world. As Julianne Newton contends, "only one hundred years ago, people believed that what they saw in photographs was true."<sup>55</sup> But truth has many faces as archivists very well know. Increasingly, the long-held notion that photographs, by their very essence, are reliable and credible mediums is being questioned. Because of photography's apparently objective nature, its end result – the photograph - was often associated with truth. However, this idea has become fundamentally recast in light of current beliefs that recognize photography's relationship with reality is as tenuous as that

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>55</sup> Julianne Newton, *The Burden of Visual Truth* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 2001), 3.



















adapted to a variety of departments. In the absence of a specialized archival course, finding ways to insert archives into the curriculum via lectures and seminars, orientations, or even workshops and conferences are viable alternatives. Undertaking such endeavours in a regularized fashion provides archivists with the means of formalizing relationships with faculty and helps provide a platform for archivists to make the case for an enhanced academic role. Whether simply advising on potential assignments or pertinent materials, or collaborating on prospective courses with an archival literacy component, cultivating symbiotic relationships with faculty and university administrators provides the best possible means of ensuring students are adequately trained on the intricacies of archival research and exposed to the rich and varied holdings of their academic archives.

## Conclusion

Interest in outreach activities by archives has increased over the past thirty years, although academic outreach as it relates to the teaching function of a university archives has not been as thoroughly explored. Although there have been some recent advances, relationships between university archives and the academic community of the parent institution might be more fully developed. While the literature suggests that some progress has been made by academic archives in regard to their support for primary and secondary school education, integrating such archives within an interdisciplinary network of faculties and departments at the university and college level does not appear to be emphasized as much as it could be at many academic archives.

There are many advantages in doing so. In recent years, growing appreciation among archivists and scholars of many kinds of the impact of archives on knowledge creation and thereby societal development prompts new consideration of the importance of understanding this phenomenon. The extraordinary new range of uses of archives that have emerged in recent years also suggests that understanding archives and their uses is of general value to students in many fields who in later life may well come to rely on them more than previous generations have. The massive amounts of information in the purview and custody of archives, and now becoming more readily available through digital means on the Internet, adds further weight to the view that further archival education is needed if this new opportunity is to be seized. Archivists are well positioned to educate students in these matters, or in what might be called archival literacy.

Archival literacy can help transform university teaching and learning environments by ensuring that the academic community is knowledgeable about finding,

evaluating, analyzing, integrating, managing, and conveying information from and about archives. Till now, emphasis has been placed by archivists and faculty on providing basic information about the services and holdings of archives. The changes in our understanding of archives outlined above suggest there is now a need to take a crucial next step toward more formal education in archival literacy. This thesis has focused on how a formal course offered by a university's archivists might fill this need. A university archives has a potentially important role in academic teaching and learning – a function that is tightly aligned with a university's fundamental academic mission. The end results could be the creation of a more vibrant learning environment and much better understanding and support of the role of archives on campus and in society generally.





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