Integrating archives into geography courses

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Abstract

When completing projects and papers for university geography courses, students are at least somewhat aware about searching for traditional academic sources such as journal articles and books; however, students are less familiar with other types of information sources.

This poster highlights the 3-hour session conducted at the University of Manitoba of how Human Geography students can access archives and integrate material into their assignments. This exposure increases awareness amongst students in geography will enhance research integrity of the field.

Introduction

Librarians frequently visit undergraduate geography courses to discuss searching for traditional sources such as journal articles and books. For some topics in geography, historical context can be useful and relevant. However, instruction related to searching for these sources is often beyond the scope of an introductory session.

In the Winter 2019 semester, a University of Manitoba Human Geography professor contacted the University of Manitoba Geography liaison librarian to develop some in-class session about archives. The library and archives decided to go forward and offered an hour session on archives and searching for secondary sources throughout their education as well as into their career. Improved information literacy in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.

Information literacy is defined as "the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning." By gaining this knowledge at the undergraduate level, students can enhance their understanding of primary and secondary sources throughout their education as well as into their career. Improved information literacy amongst students in geography will enhance research integrity of the field.

Process

The librarian and the archivist met to discuss how to convey information literacy in a 3-hour in-class lecture. They decided to pick a landuse example to focus their search results and to assist the students in following along in how to conduct research using the University’s library federated search portal and archival databases.

This session was held in the archives, and for most of the students it was their first time visiting an archive. By hosting the session in the archives, there was the flexibility to include more archival material and hands on interaction with possible sources that would otherwise not be able to travel to other locations.

This exercise was designed to have the students re-think how to search for secondary sources regarding their research topic. As the assignment was focused on historical land-use, it was especially important to reflect on potential name changes over time.

The remaining time was divided between the librarian and archivist as they presented how to search their different collections. To effectively illustrate how to navigate collections, it’s easiest to have a searching scenario to follow. This example can be used throughout the presentation to illustrate various methods and source types.

Before the archivist began discussing the research topic, the group discussed the purpose and uses of an archive. Next, primary sources were discussed, with a variety of types available to look at when researching the historical land-use of Victoria Park, including:

- Newspaper Accounts
- Photographs
- Textual Records
- Maps

Analyzing primary sources will help students to understand how an argument has been constructed and to adopt a more critical stance towards the records that they encounter. When conducting historical research and evaluating archival records there is the SWV.

Students were asked to think about these and how they could integrate archival research into their assignment. A question could be, “who gathered in Victoria Park during the Strike and what can this tell us about historical land use?”. Or, “why was Victoria Park used during the Strike, and why is it no longer a park?”

Introduction to archival research:

The librarian began the class with a keyword search exercise:


Project Research Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research activity</th>
<th>Search type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Searched Google using advanced search strategies to identify grey literature</td>
<td>Online search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched the University of Winnipeg library website for relevant materials</td>
<td>Library search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulted a librarian</td>
<td>Consulted with an archivist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched the City of Winnipeg Archives</td>
<td>Consulted with a local newspaper archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched the University of Winnipeg library website for relevant materials</td>
<td>Consulted with a librarian</td>
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Conclusion

The librarian and archivist provided their contact information and handouts as reminders of how to conduct research following the ideas provided throughout the session. This reinforced a relationship of assistance, where the students could reach out to the librarian or archivist in the future. Several students reached out to the archivist in the weeks following the session for guidance with navigating archival sources and narrowing search parameters.

The professor was appreciative of the session and noted that it would help the students to successfully complete their projects, and the session would be a welcome addition to future iterations of the course.

The session demonstrated that this type of research can be complex and involves various methodologies which are not included in traditional information literacy instruction, but can be of particular benefit to students studying human geography.

References


Image 1: Photograph of Amy St. Steam Plant, 1985

Image 2: University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Hugh Larmier Collection

Image 3: University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Pitblado Family fonds (PC 058), Box 3, Folder 8, Item 118