

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 students' research skills and networks of support for their coursework and careers. Instead of the archival materials explored in the case described, archival images and maps relevant to the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike will be highlighted on the poster to illustrate the types of sources that can be beneficial to geographic research.



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

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 For some topics in geography, historical content can be useful and relevant; however, instruction related to searching for these sources are often beyond the scope of an introductory session.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 teaching for Geography students who would be completing projects for a Human Geography course which would include some historical content. To best assist students in learning the skills and finding relevant sources, exposure to and interaction with archives and an archivist was thought to be of most value to students.

Both the librarian and the Reference and Discovery Archivist of the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections were involved in the development of the instructional session and related materials. This 3-hour session was delivered by both the librarian and archivist in January 2019 to a group of graduate and upper undergraduate Geography students.

Motivation

The motivation of the session was to equip students with the tools to:

- Have a solid understanding of their key concepts and various ways to search for their topic using strategic keywords
- Search the library catalogue and archival databases
- Understand the historical context in which the records were created

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."¹ 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 land-use 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.

The 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.

The librarian began the class with a keyword search exercise:

Keywords activity

Topic: _____

Keywords	Synonyms	Broader terms	Narrower terms	Related terms

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 think of the 5W's.

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?"



Because the professor had given the students this assignment before the class, students could follow along and think about conducting their own research. At the end of class, they followed up with the librarian and/or archivist on how to undergo more specific searches on their particular topic. If this assignment had not been announced before the class, this crucial opportunity would have been missed.



Image 2: Map of Winnipeg, 1910



Image 3: Crowd Scene at Victoria Park, 1919

Conclusion

The librarian and archivist provided their contact information and handouts as reminders of how to conduct research following the steps 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.

Project Research Checklist

Keyword brainstorm

Archival search

- Consulted a local newspaper archive
- Searched for relevant archival collections
- Visited UM Archives
- Consulted with an archivist
- Visited City of Winnipeg Archives

Library search

- Searched the Library Search for books and other print materials in the library
- Consulted with a librarian
- Searched the University of Winnipeg library website for relevant materials
- Consulted a UM Libraries subject guide (eg. Environment, earth and resources or Government Publications)

Online search

- Searched Google using advanced search strategies to identify grey literature

References

- 1) Association of College & Research Libraries (2015). Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.
- Image 1: University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Kip Park fonds (A2001-004), Box 7, Folder 24, Item 15
 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 116