AER Newsletter

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Welcome!

Welcome to the first, biannual Archival Educators Roundtable (AER) Newsletter! In 2016, the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) brought together like-minded professionals who use primary sources for public programming, outreach, and education, and the AER was born. As archival education is a still-developing field, the AER created a community where people could share their successes, challenges, and works in progress through casual workshops.

AER's network of educators, archivists, and archival education allies has since expanded its culture of support beyond the biannual meetings here at the RAC through social media, event attendance, joint publications, and email correspondence.

It is our hope that this AER Newsletter will further extend the table, so speak, reaching more colleagues as we spotlight educators, and showcase the projects, challenges, and successes of archival education. Just as the aim of AER meetings is to ensure that all perspectives on primary source education are honored, we encourage you, our dedicated AER audience, to reach out and contribute your insights to future AER Newsletters! Many thanks to our first issue's contributors--we couldn't have done it without you.

--Marissa Vassari, Archivist and Educator, Rockefeller Archive Center
Elizabeth Berkowitz, Outreach Program Manager, Rockefeller Archive Center

In this Issue

Parsons School of Design class instruction in The New School Archives © The New School.

Jenny Swadosh
Archivist
The New School Archives and Special Collections

universe knows from the reality TV show *Project Runway*). When I arrived in 2009, there was no existing instruction program in the archives unit, so I began developing one. Ten years later, hundreds of art and design students visit The New School Archives every semester. Most make their inaugural trip to the Archives as part of a class visit, organized by the students' instructor and myself.

In this article, I'll share some observations and tips to help foster archivist collaboration with design educators. Even a repository *not* focused on collecting design records can well serve design patrons. As my friend, archivist Jennifer Whitlock of the Vignelli Center for Design Studies, is fond of saying: "All archives are design archives!"

Finding Design in the Archive

One of the most striking and foundational features of the design classroom is the **focus on process** over content or product. While this emphasis is the inverse of the archival processing theory More Product Less Process (MPLP), design educators find repository collections or record groups that document a process—particularly a process that includes failures or setbacks—incredibly productive to teach design concepts. If records employ charts, graphs, or diagrams to visually detail this process, all the better!

Documentation that records how people interact with a designed object are also invaluable to design educators. Even seemingly innocuous materials can be design records. For instance, design students could evaluate institutional-level discussions about the development, re-evaluation, and/or outcomes of a standards manual—a graphic identity program.

Design pedagogy is always concerned with **getting students out of the classroom**. Design educators seem to detest the physical confines of the university class setting. The thing about design is that we live in a designed world, so every space is a potential lesson in observation. An archival repository not only counts as a place to visit and observe, but also may hold records documenting a physical location that the students can visit either before or after their archives trip.

Whether the setting documented in an archival holding is a city park or a business improvement district or a local house of worship is less relevant because the pedagogical emphasis is not on the content, but on the process of design. Combining the archival material with a field trip makes students question how a physical space is reflected on paper (or on Computer Aided Design (CAD) drawings).

Archives and Design's Collaborative Work

In design education, **group work and collaboration** are critical skills. "Collaboration," I know, is a buzzword of which many archivists are skeptical, but it is an essential component of a designer's praxis. Design students must be able to work together in groups to survive both design school and future professional careers.

Almost every archival lesson I create involves small group activities and the "jigsaw method" of instruction, whereby students share their findings with each other and with the teachers and me. I believe in shared authority, and this coincides with a crucial tenet of design thinking: the user is the expert. Consequently, records that document a collaboration (successful or unsuccessful), may be of interest to design faculty and students.

Archivists and Design Educators: Communication Strategies

While, as an archivist, you may find the link to a lengthy finding aid, or a text-heavy website a helpful support for a research project, I've often found that, instead, designers – students, educators, and practitioners – typically prefer communicating in person and talking through a research strategy.

Design educators and students are frequently at their best when in direct contact with artifacts, handling them, talking about them as they look, maybe even sketching them in a notebook while talking. Spontaneity—thinking through ideas through dialogue, even enacting rather than thinking and then writing about them–is common among members of the design community.

If you are committed to bringing design students and educators into your repository, be prepared to do a lot of talking and listening, and don't force people to read stuff!

Assessing Design Learning in the Archives

In design education, final course products or outputs are less likely to be in familiar academic genres of writing, e.g. the hated research paper. Design disciplines have **different ways of knowing and exploring concepts**.

Still from film "David & I," courtesy of Ting Teal. A student work dance performance based on archival materials.

Collaborative Teaching with Design Faculty and Students:
A Sample Lesson

Jenny Swadosh
Archivist
The New School Archives and
Special Collections

For a simple "design learning in the archives" lesson plan, here's an example from a first-year Systems and Strategies class visit to The New School Archives:

The exercise had students examine orientation materials and handbooks. If you work in a university archive, you very well might have a collection like this, but, if not, many institutions create documentation to help orient new people to new systems or old people to new systems. Such items can be similarly used to support design curricula.

For the Systems and Strategies class, students viewed a selection of orientation materials that were distributed to Parsons School of Design students upon arriving on campus for their first year—an experience this class had recently undergone. Higher education is, at its core, a *system*, and, every year, a college or university must introduce this system to hundreds of new people.

Orientation at Parsons School of Design or at other New York City institutions add the complication of similarly introducing students to life in a new city and, for around 40% of our students, a new country. Orientations and handbooks are the typical institutional strategies to accomplish this task.

Under my (unobtrusive) guidance, we looked at selected items from the Parsons School of Design handbooks and orientation materials collection, which began in the late 1960s. By decade, we charted how orientation materials changed over time, primarily in form but also in content.

We thought about why the materials changed and if they were effective, and how one could even measure effectiveness. We asked: who made these documents, and how could that shape the final product? Students were charged with answering the question: if you were given the task of introducing a new group of students to higher education, could this archival collection help you?
As new students arrive on campus every August, the fall semester presents itself as a personally relevant design learning opportunity. An institutional archive's orientation documents, the concept of which the students are already intimately familiar, can provide an opportunity to re-evaluate how the rules of a place of higher education can be textually and graphically communicated.

WOMEN & THE AMERICAN STORY

Scaffolding Documents in Service of Women…and Teachers

Leslie Hayes
Director of Education
New York Historical Society

Only 13 percent of the historical figures in textbooks are women. The New-York Historical Society (N-YHS) is hoping to help correct this imbalance with its new online curriculum *Women & the American Story* (lovingly known as WAMS).

Launched in March 2019, WAMS is a free interactive website for teachers who wish to bring women's voices into their classroom. When finished, it will span the full length of American history. Currently, two units – *Early Encounters, 1492-1734* and *Modernizing America, 1889-1920* – are available, with two new units launching each fall through 2022!

WAMS tells the story of diverse women through primary sources. N-YHS has a long history of using primary sources to drive student learning and extensive experience with curriculum development. However, we used WAMS as an opportunity to take a step back and think critically about what a teacher needs to feel comfortable and confident using primary sources with students. Through focus groups and surveys, we learned that our biggest hurdle was making teachers a little less fearful to use archival documents with students of all levels.

We spent a huge amount of time debating how to mitigate the fear. Archival materials, especially lengthy documents, are critical to our work because we aim to honor and remember all women, including those not fortunate enough to have a painted portrait or photograph in the historic record. In order to include women of all walks of life – and across all time periods – we need to include documents.

After many, MANY hours of debate, we settled on a three-pronged approach:

First, whenever possible, we provide a hi-res copy of the original so students can interact with the actual archival material.

Second, we include a direct transcription of the document in a font that is easily readable for all.

Third, we provide a side-by-side summary of the document, written at a middle school level, based on a Lexile Framework tool. (You can see examples here and here – and throughout WAMS.)
We offer teachers the choice of which version they wish to print out for their students – the original archival document, the transcription, or the transcription with supported annotation.
In addition, we include a brief background summary, definitions for key vocabulary, and discussion questions to deepen the experience.

As one of the curriculum writers, I can tell you this process was incredibly time consuming. I spent hours transcribing. And I went through multiple iterations of the summary text, seeking feedback from my colleagues and a scholar advisor.

However, I can also tell you the work paid off. We have presented WAMS at several workshops and conferences to date (and have more on the calendar – join us!). Teachers consistently agree that the documents are a highlight. At one conference I had a fantastic conversation with a teacher from Little Rock, Arkansas in which she repeatedly thanked me for the side-by-side text. (I believe her opening comment to me was "Bless you!") She expressed how our scaffolded approach made our documents classroom ready and saved her hours of additional preparation. It was the best possible feedback.

I'm now in the process of writing my next unit (coming November 2019!) and I approach our document work with enthusiasm, knowing that it is easing the burden on teachers and increasing the likelihood of exciting, women-focused primary sources making it into the classroom.

Teachers participating in WAMS workshops.

BENTLEY
HISTORICAL LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Work in Progress:
A Brief Look at the Bentley Historical Library's "Engaging the Archives" Seminar

Cinda Nofziger
Archivist for Academic Programs and Outreach
Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan

The Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, has just successfully completed its third Engaging the Archives Faculty Fellows seminar.

The seminar brings together faculty who teach using archival material, Bentley archivists, and research scientists for a semester-long seminar designed to develop syllabi and assignments that encourage deep student engagement with archival materials. Participants meet weekly for 1.5 hours over the course of a sixteen week semester.

This past winter semester six faculty participated. Coming from different disciplines, including history, art, music, and philosophy, the faculty brought various perspectives to teaching. They were joined by five archivists, also with different specialties, including digital curation, reference, and collections management.

Four research scientists from the University of Michigan each provided a lecture. Chancey Monte-Sano spoke about teaching historical thinking and the importance of planning and modeling. Elizabeth Yakel discussed archival intelligence and archival literacy to highlight the skills students need to develop to excel at archival research. Patricia Garcia described archival instruction assessment, and cognitive psychologist Bill Gehring provided an interactive engaging session about student cognition.

Faculty from previous iterations of the Engaging the Archives seminar returned to discuss

how the experience impacted their teaching.

In addition to hearing from these experts, faculty met for intensive individual sessions with archivists to brainstorm ideas about particular collections, as well as in-class activities and assignments.

During other weekly seminar sessions, all participants discussed the challenges--such as how to incorporate primary sources into very large classes, or how to think about narrowing a research topic down enough to be manageable in the time allowed--of engaging with archives.

They also discussed the opportunities, such as the impact on students of creating and disseminating knowledge through the creation of websites or podcasts.

The seminar culminated in a presentation of specific portions of the faculty participants' redesigned classes. The seminar was marked, as it usually is, by a deep sense of collegiality and collaboration. Faculty and archivists learned from and taught each other, and built stronger connections.

The seminar is funded by a grant from the University of Michigan's Office of the Provost. The grant was part of the University's Third Century Initiative, a project to develop "innovative ideas for enriching student learning."[1]

Each seminar is planned and facilitated by Bentley's Director Terrence McDonald, the Associate Director, Nancy Bartlett, and myself as the Bentley's Archivist for Academic Programs and Outreach. The faculty members receive a stipend for their participation.

More can be found about the seminar in the forthcoming book *Teaching Undergraduates with Archives*, due to be published by Maize Books, an imprint of Michigan Publishing, in November 2019.

The book will feature chapters drawn from selected presentations at 2018's *Teaching Undergraduates with Archives* symposium held at the University of Michigan.

If you have questions about the seminar or the book, please contact Cinda Nofziger, Archivist for Academic Programs and Outreach, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, cindamn@umich.edu.

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[1] Laurel Thomas Gnagey, "Six Projects Get Major Grants through Third Century Initiative," The Record. 2015 May 15. https://record.umich.edu/articles/six-projects-get-major-grants-through-third-century-initiative Accessed 2019 April 26.

Educator Spotlight

Primary Sources in the Classroom:
A K-12 Teacher's Perspective

Elisabeth Hickey, 5th Grade ELA Challenge Teacher
Washington Irving Intermediate School

Students of any age can learn from primary source materials, and they often do so without realizing it. However, as a teacher, it can be easy to shy away from developing learning experiences from primary sources, as such resources often aren't written into the curriculum. Using primary sources requires some extra work on the part of a teacher, which can be daunting without someone to help curate the materials.

So much of what teachers have to teach in a short period of time is dictated by state curricula. It's everything they can do to just cover required material using the sources provided. Secondary sources, drawn from a few well-placed and well-known primary source items, often make teaching a concept or event that much more achievable.

The teacher's reality therefore begs the question: why would teachers teach from primary sources when concepts in history, science, geography, and almost any other subject are summed up so nicely in textbooks, websites, and films? An overview is easy to digest, covers a lot of ground, and often provides answers to questions we didn't even know to ask. We don't have to dig so deeply, as long as we understand the basics. Someone else asked the questions, did the research, and discovered the answers, and any questions that may arise can be quickly explored with an internet search of other secondary sources. Industrialized education is meant to teach the masses and secondary sources are the perfect tool.

But what happens when students, even elementary students, see a picture of a tenement house on the Lower East Side of New York City during the 1910s? What do students imagine as they look at the residents of this tenement apartment, raggedly dressed, sitting in one room, beds and stove all within arm's length of each other? What do these same students think about when presented with a letter from 1911, the writer asking the New York House of Representatives to outlaw the common practice of putting toilets in airless tenement closets?

How about Voting Rights? To many students, this is an easy concept—citizens get to vote. But what questions arise when they see pre-suffrage advertisements demonizing women as unfit to vote? Or when they see a flyer threatening African-Americans who try to exercise their right to vote? Or when they read an actual government mandate that prevented selected American citizens from participating in the democratic process?

That's just it: *what questions arise.* Those questions are what can instigate a classroom unit, a project, a lesson. Those questions are what will drive a student to furiously search, remembering not only the answers but where and HOW they found them.

As teachers, we don't always need the answers. We don't always even need the questions. We just need the opportunity and the courage to allow real, "right-there" history to speak for itself.

Children are interested creatures. *They* will generate the questions. *They* will find the clues and the pieces to put answers to the questions. We teachers just need to start them off and guide them through the process of putting the puzzle together. Primary sources are essential to breathe life into the tried and true, but ultimately insufficient secondary source explanations.

For the past 3 years, I have had the opportunity to partner with archivists and historians at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) to bring primary source learning to my students. The Educational Outreach program at RAC collaborated with me to create a student-driven, primary-source-based project for my fifth graders. This project has grown and changed over the years, taking into account the interests and skill levels of each cohort of students. Each year has improved on the previous, in part because each subsequent group of 5th graders had already been introduced to the concept of primary sources and their roles in history "detective work" through seeing their older peers' work.

The fifth graders who engage in this project are high-achieving students participating in a pull-out "Challenge" class. They are initially presented with several primary source documents and asked to start "noticing" things that they see. They move from the obvious to the more subtle rather gracefully, asking questions along the way. Answers are provided sparingly by teachers, except with more primary sources if appropriate or available. As students become more familiar with the given sources, background information is provided by the teachers, but students usually come back the next day with much more.

These students are well-versed in finding information on the internet and in libraries, and their curiosity is often easily piqued. They do need to be taught, however, how to ask the right questions; navigate archival databases for sources; evaluate all types of information in an intelligent, well-thought-out way; organize their information to create a whole picture; and then answer those questions with evidence-based information. This is where archival educators and historians step in. Together, we plan out a course of learning that teaches students the basics of research. Students learn how to: ask appropriate, leading questions; search for information; evaluate that information; navigate data bases of primary sources; examine and evaluate those sources; use those sources as pieces of the puzzle; cite their sources; answer their questions; and present those answers in clear, concise ways.

Collaboration with an archival team on primary source education presents a more complete portrait of any given topic. **Archival educators** curate and help students find those sources, teaching methods of historical research along the way. **Archival historians** help students understand the material, teaching them how to look at historical information in the grand context and as a single point in history. **Classroom teachers** fill in the blanks, set schedules and guidelines and orchestrate the project throughout its duration.

In my projects with the RAC, my students worked towards three experiences for a final product: a town hall, where they answered questions from the "community" about the topic; a gallery walk to peers, family, and school officials, in which they presented their research on

tri-fold boards; and a gallery-walk presentation to professional archivists, historians, and graduate students. No competitive scores were necessary—the students didn't even ask for them. The enthusiastic reception of their presentations was feedback enough. For the most recent cohort, even six weeks after the project's completion, the students were still discussing their findings, and many of them are still searching for more answers.

Thanks to the educators at the RAC, this project has been a huge success in so many ways for three years. In reality, there is no way it couldn't be. Students have recognized the authenticity of their learning, and by becoming completely engaged in researching questions that they generated themselves, have learned information and methods that will serve them well later on.

Curiosity is the fire of human learning and primary sources can be the spark. Under the guidance of educational archivists and historians, history and research can come alive for young learners (not to mention for their teachers).

A fifth-grade student presents her work to RAC Research Fellow, Barry Goldberg.

Fifth-grade students in Elisabeth Hickey's class, presenting their archival research on Voter Education to parents at peers at a "Town Hall," Spring 2019.

A K-12 student at the Rockefeller Archive Center, learning that a "primary source" describes more than just paper documents!

Primary Source Problems

Have a tricky document you would love to showcase, but don't know how to do it? Run into any pedagogical or logistical stumbling blocks integrating primary sources into

your curriculum? Send your issue to us at AEREditor@rockarch.org, and we will crowd source feedback for the next newsletter!

Member News

Got some news to share? Email us at AEREditor@rockarch.org ! We'd love to hear from you.

Come join us at our next AER meeting at the Rockefeller Archive Center:

Thursday, August 22, 2019

Email Marissa Vassari at mvassari@rockarch.org if you plan on attending.

We hope to see you there!

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