The Archives as Classroom: A Primary Source Mini-Course

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CASE #6

The Archives as Classroom:
A Primary Source Mini-Course

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

4A. Assess the appropriateness of a primary source for meeting the goals of a specific research or creative project.

4B. Critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source.

4C. Situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection.

4D. As part of the analysis of available resources, identify, interrogate, and consider the reasons for silences, gaps, contradictions, or evidence of power relationships in the documentary record and how they impact the research process.

4E. Factor physical and material elements into the interpretation of primary sources including the relationship between container (finding, media, or overall physical attributes) and informational content, and the relationship of original sources to physical or digital copies of those sources.

4F. Demonstrate historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical sources and historical actors.

CASE STUDY LOCATION

University of Dayton Libraries
300 College Park Avenue, Dayton, Ohio
https://udayton.edu/libraries/

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Introduction and Institutional Context

Archival and Primary Source Research (UDI 204) is a one-credit course at the University of Dayton designed to introduce students to the themes of historical empathy, visual literacy, privacy, and silences in the archives. This case study explores the pilot iteration of this mini-course, taught collaboratively with a team of six librarians and archivists. With the intention of furthering the goals of the University Libraries’ strategic plan, the course was developed to move beyond what can be accomplished during a one-shot instructional session in regard to primary source literacy. In addition to discussing the inherent challenges of developing and teaching a new course, the case study addresses challenges and opportunities for team teaching, the development of learning objectives based on the Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy, and the culminating project for the course.

Special collections are uniquely positioned in the organizational structure at the University of Dayton. A private, Catholic, and Marianist institution, the University of Dayton is a medium-sized research university, with approximately 8,330 enrolled undergraduates, and 50 employees in the University Libraries. There are three distinct special collection units within the library. The University Archives and Special Collections contains records documenting the history of the university, a rare book collection, and other archival special collections. The department has one faculty archivist and one staff member. The U.S. Catholic Special Collection preserves records of the Catholic Church and Catholic life in the United States and has one faculty archivist/librarian. The Marian Library, a department of four faculty librarians and archivists, and one staff member, is a special library with the mission to make the Blessed Virgin Mary better known, loved, and served. The Marian Library collection includes circulating books, periodicals, rare books, and archival and special collection material. Although the special collections librarians and archivists often collaborate on shared initiatives, the physical and organizational separation can be an additional barrier to getting students into the archives and understanding the different scope of each area. Similar barriers likewise exist between the special collections units and the library’s instruction team, a group of eight faculty librarians. The instruction librarians work regularly with courses that make use of primary sources, often in a one-shot instruction session. One of the implicit goals with this course was to strengthen the relationship between the special collections and instruction teams.

In the spring of 2017, the four archivists, the instruction coordinator, and the director of the Marian Library began planning the mini-course. A major goal of the mini-course was to help students navigate the separate locations of the special collections areas by introducing them to all three of the archives and special collections departments, while also exposing them to specific archival concepts. Several learning objectives from the Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy informed the course goals and the methods chosen to carry them out.

The instructors provided the students with the opportunity to research extensively the historical context and content of one item from the special collections. The instructors chose items that illuminated facets of the Catholic, Marianist, and local community history of the University of Dayton. Students conducted research into additional primary or secondary sources that helped them understand the archival object. Additionally, the instructors introduced several archival concepts that would help students further contextualize the objects. Specifically, this case study will focus on the ways that the course addressed the students’ ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate primary sources (learning objectives 4A through 4F). In the following Narrative, specific learning objective numbers are provided in parentheses where relevant.
Narrative

Using the Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy, the instructors developed eight learning objectives for the course. The syllabus (see Appendix 1) stated that by the end of the semester students would be able to:

- List and find the locations/departments for University Libraries archival and primary source collections;
- Define and identify primary sources/resources in the University Libraries archival and primary source collections;
- Develop confidence in their ability to navigate special collections protocols;
- Utilize appropriate techniques to save personal digital resources;
- Successfully search finding aids and databases to locate materials for a particular purpose;
- Analyze a primary source for context and relevance;
- Communicate the context and relevance of a primary source to an audience;
- Connect their present campus experiences with the Catholic, Marianist, campus and/or community past.

At the start of the semester, three students had enrolled in UDI 204. The University of Dayton has a structured course schedule with all regularly scheduled classes ending by 3:00 pm on Fridays. The team offered UDI 204 on Fridays from 3:30-5:00 pm to avoid other class conflicts. In hindsight, the timing may have contributed to small enrollment numbers. After the first three sessions of the course, an additional student requested to join the class. With two juniors, one sophomore, and a freshman, the composition of the small class was still quite varied. One student was a psychology major, two students were history majors, and one student was a mechanical engineering major who selected the course because he needed one credit and “the course sounded interesting.”

After introductions and basic procedural information from the syllabus, the first class session provided an overview of special collections research. Students learned about different types of archives, what kinds of materials each type generally collects, and some strategies and tools for locating archives and special collections. To illustrate this point, the instructor conducted a search for “Martin Luther King” on ArchiveGrid from OCLC and the results showed the many different repositories that hold material related to Dr. Martin Luther King. At the end of the class, the students completed a historical analysis worksheet from NARA to gauge their level of familiarity with primary source research.\(^1\) Using a photograph, a patent, and a letter, the students spent a few minutes answering guided questions from the worksheet about each item. In addition to basic identifying questions, students had to think about questions such as, “What was happening at the time in history this document was created,” or “Why was [the] photograph taken?” (4B). The students demonstrated varying levels of proficiency with this type of historical analysis. None of the students had previously visited an archive or used a finding aid, but this introduction afforded students with the opportunity to leave the course with new experiences and skills.

Week two of the course continued the overview of special collections research and specifically introduced students to some primary source resources online, such as Chronicling America from the

Library of Congress, Ohio Memory from the State Library of Ohio, and eCommons, the institutional repository at the University of Dayton. In addition to a discussion of the week’s readings on the core values and code of ethics for archivists, the students spent time speed dating items from the special collections in preparation for the final project. The instructors chose to guide the students in selection of items for the final project by pre-selecting several items that were presented to the students in the speed dating exercise. The items—rare books, photographs, newspapers, comic books, and other archival material—were placed at different tables throughout the room, and using a timer, students were asked to spend a few minutes getting to know each item to assist in determining their preferences for the final project. Selecting the items so early in the course allowed the students to think of their item during the class discussions.

Most of the classes centered on discussion of readings focused on specific archival themes, along with hands-on time with materials from each of the special collections areas. During week three, which focused on visual literacy, students looked at rare books and Marian scrapbooks from Italian schoolchildren. The items from the Marian Library’s collections were written in languages other than English, so the students had to think about what they could learn based on the physical characteristics and materiality of the item (4E).

During week four of the class, students used primary sources to construct a narrative about a house in the student neighborhood. Many students at the University of Dayton live in university-owned houses on campus that were once occupied by employees of the nearby National Cash Register Company. In this class session, students evaluated and synthesized information from a variety of sources, including census records, city directories, and Sanborn fire maps, to get all the facts needed to answer questions and tell the story (4A). Through this process students also wrestled with the idea of privacy, as they investigated personal details of previous house tenants and thought about their own story and connection to the University of Dayton community.

In the session on representation in the archives during week five, students were surprised to learn about silences in archives in general and some of the voices that were missing from the University Archives and Special Collections (4D). Student voices, for example, are particularly lacking in the collections in University Archives, which primarily includes official university records. The idea that archives, and even archivists, cannot be neutral was a recurring theme that was raised by the students and instructors during several class discussions.

In the U.S. Catholic Special Collection in week six, students looked at the language in historical religious education textbooks to frame discussion on historical empathy (4C and 4F). The textbooks came from several different eras, and the students analyzed the books’ ideological frameworks, language, and inclusion of pictures to help them brainstorm reasons behind the differences in the books. For example, the students noticed that the textbooks from the 1990s had more diversity in their selection of pictures, showing people of all races and genders, whereas the textbooks from the 1940s were much less diverse. Understanding the context of the textbooks—the creator, the intended audience, and the major events at the time of the item’s creation—all helped the students build empathy and engage with the past on a deeper level.

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4 eCommons, University of Dayton, accessed November 4, 2018, https://ecommons.udayton.edu./
For the final project students were asked to work with a specific artifact or subset of a collection (see Appendix 2). The prompt for the final assignment states that

...working with a specific artifact, you will research the time in which the artifact was created and connect the item to existing scholarship. You will need to find scholarly articles to help explain the value and importance of your research topic/item to the past. You may also use additional primary sources to help explain context.

The last few weeks of the class were dedicated to giving students time and assistance from the instructors to complete the project.

Week seven featured a guest speaker from the library’s reference and instruction team who taught students how to communicate their research effectively with a digital poster. The second half of the class included time for the students to visit the special collections and work with their item. During week eight, the instructors introduced the topic of personal digital archiving, using content that had been previously offered as a workshop to students on campus. The workshop focused on different ways students manage their own files; however, in the context of the course the session as it was taught did not cohesively fit. Students had additional time during week nine for research and then presented their posters to an audience during week ten.

One student worked with a book from the Marian Library’s rare book collection, titled Contemplations on the Life & Glory of Holy Mary, the Mother of Jesus: With a Daily Office, Agreeing to each Mystery Thereof (hereafter Contemplations). This item, a devotional book dedicated to Queen Catherine II of England (1638–1705), was published in 1685 at a time when Catholicism was controversial in England. The student used historical empathy to think about the political climate of the period and this text, and additional sources to contextualize why a book dedicated to a Catholic queen was of historical importance at this specific time (4A and 4C). The student, in his final project reflection, stated that “here we may find an answer about that little old book at the center of this inquiry. [Arthur] Bryant is telling his readers . . . that English Catholic priests were often trained abroad, outside of England, due to the virulent hostility of the Protestant population. . . . With this in mind, it is not so far-fetched to conjecture that Catholic devotional works, such as Contemplations, would also have been manufactured outside of England, but clearly for English consumption.” The same student also examined the physical characteristics of the book to determine the intent of the text (4E). Noticing the ornate designs of the binding, the student did further research regarding the importance of books beyond their textual information, for example as displays of wealth and status.

Seeing the vastly different directions that the students took their final projects was rewarding and informative for the instructors. Another student in the course chose to use the same theme of historical empathy, but his project was based around a student essay on suicide in The Exponent, a student-run periodical from the University Archives. He looked at the specific language and tone of the student writers in the essay, and used additional sources to demonstrate the shift in attitudes towards this controversial topic over time. By choosing this topic, he was able to connect the project to his personal experience at the University of Dayton and better understand the value of primary source research. A third student, who chose as a research topic the student neighborhood, developed a deeper understanding of the city’s history and its roots within this particular neighborhood. As a first-year student in a different discipline, he did not necessarily connect with the larger archival themes, but he did demonstrate a connection to local history.
Results

Since this course offering was brand new, the instructors were satisfied with overall results, particularly from a course administration standpoint. For most of the instructors, it was their first time teaching a for-credit course, so it took time to develop a coherent yet flexible syllabus with appropriate learning outcomes. In the end, the team was generally pleased with the course delivery, both with the teaching content and the student work products. It was also the first time that the librarians and archivists had worked closely together on a common project. The large size of the instruction team worked well for the first offering of the course, and contributed a greater variety of perspectives towards course planning.

The final project worked well as conceived. Students analyzed primary sources for context and value, and then communicated their findings through a poster presentation and a written reflection. Most students successfully demonstrated their ability to “situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection” (4C). The interest that the entire library took in the students’ final project was especially gratifying to the instructors. Many staff attended the poster presentations, which were conducted on a late Friday afternoon. From that perspective, this first-time, archives-focused course successfully attracted attention within the library to the cross-department collaboration that made it possible.

Students were graded on attendance, readings, and the final poster project (the final project was 40% of the grade). No specific assessments of individual learning outcomes were conducted outside the course grading. The instruction team graded the posters using a rubric, which awarded points based on the quality of a bibliography, a personal reflection, poster design, and poster content (see Appendix 3). The instruction coordinator had experience teaching one-credit research methods courses and grading with rubrics, and it was this knowledge that facilitated the final project rubric for UDI 204. The personal reflection portion of the final project asked students to address several questions prompting reflections about what they learned and how their chosen artifact connects to Catholic, Marianist, university, or community history. In this sense, students were assessed on learning objectives 4D and 4F, even though the rubric did not link to specific learning objectives. The poster content, as noted before, was evaluated against learning objective 4C. In future offerings of UDI 204 the instructors will explore incorporating the specific learning objectives into the assignment directions, and will also map them to the poster grading rubric.

During this pilot, the instructors did not design formal feedback mechanisms into the course. The instructors did meet afterwards to conduct a course debriefing, which was fruitful and offered many insights for how to improve the next time. For the next iteration of the course, students will fill out a mini-assessment exit ticket after each class asking for one thing that they learned, and one thing that was not clear. Additionally, the instructors plan to provide time in class for students to complete the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) form administered through the University of Dayton.

One student, a sophomore history major, indicated in speaking with one of instructors after the course that he appreciated the experience of working directly with the collections, especially the University Archives. He also noted that until taking this course he had not done any primary source research, so the project experience was valuable. His only suggestion for improving the course was to include assignments with

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the readings to ensure participation when the class met. Given the small number of students, it was clear when someone did not complete the readings, but the instructors will take this under advisement in revising the course for a future offering.

**Lessons Learned**

The instructors experienced both successes and failures while teaching the pilot offering of this mini-course. The students engaged very well with several of the primary source concepts they learned, in particular historical empathy and silences in the archives (4B, 4D, and 4F). They were active and engaged during discussion of these ideas, and incorporated them into their final projects. Their final projects demonstrated clear improvement in their ability to contextualize the archival items they studied when compared to the initial historical analysis worksheets that students completed in the first class (4C).

The students struggled more with the concept of visual literacy, or looking at physical and material elements to interpret primary sources (4E). The reading that the instructors selected to introduce this idea was more advanced than some of the others. It required the students to look beyond the primary argument of the article, and instead focus on critically examining the primary sources used by the author to support his ideas. The students had difficulty achieving this goal, and as a result the instructors plan to choose a simpler reading in future iterations of the course. Based on informal student feedback the instructors also plan to introduce short weekly assignments to the class to encourage students to complete their assigned readings.

The instructors also experienced several difficulties with the structure of the mini-course that had an impact on the effectiveness of their teaching. First, the continuity of the course suffered due to the large number of instructors. The instructors, for the most part, did not sit in on each other’s class sessions. Although they shared session outlines with each other, it was difficult to know how well the class stuck to the outline, what additional topics may have been covered, and to what depth a specific idea was discussed. Communication with the students was also a challenge due to the number of instructors. In the future, the instructors may choose to rotate teaching responsibility for the class in order to avoid some of these issues.

Despite these difficulties, the mini-course gained the attention of faculty from the history department. The library instructors have discussed with history faculty how to expand the mini-course and bring it to a wider audience of students, perhaps by requiring it along with the final capstone course, or by including a portion of it in an introductory history class. The mini-course succeeded in familiarizing students with the different special collections at the University of Dayton and the challenges of archival research. By making the changes discussed earlier in this piece, the course can reach more students and improve their primary source literacy.
Appendix 1: Course Syllabus

UDI 204: This Is UD: Archival and Primary Source Research

Syllabus

Team Taught:
Jennifer Brancato, University Archives. jbrancato1@udayton.edu
Sarah Cahalan, Marian Library. scahalan1@udayton.edu
Heidi Gauder, Roesch Library. hgauder1@udayton.edu
Kayla Harris, Marian Library. kharris2@udayton.edu
Kristina Schulz, University Archives. kschulz1@udayton.edu
Stephanie Shreffler, U.S. Catholic Collection. sshreffler1@udayton.edu

This course utilizes the Isidore course management system: http://isidore.udayton.edu

Meets Fridays 3:30-5pm. Consult schedule for location.

Course Description:
Students in this course will explore primary sources, utilize research techniques, and understand methods for preserving and finding materials related to the rich history of the University of Dayton and the surrounding area.

Course Objectives:
By the end of the semester, students will be able to
a. List and find the locations/departments for University Libraries archival and primary source collections.
b. Define and identify primary sources/resources in the University Libraries archival and primary source collections.
c. Develop confidence in their ability to navigate special collections protocols.
d. Utilize appropriate techniques in order to save personal digital resources.
e. Successfully search finding aids and databases in order to locate materials for a particular purpose.
f. Analyze a primary source for context and relevance.
g. Communicate the context and relevance of a primary source to an audience.
h. Connect their present campus experiences with the Catholic, Marianist, campus and/or community past.

Technology
This class makes occasional use of laptops. You will be advised as to when laptops are needed. Cell phones and other mobile devices may be used only for photography of artifacts or other class-related purposes.
Disabilities
To request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development, Ryan C. Harris Learning Teaching Center, Room 023 (229-2066). If you have a self-identification form from the Office for Student Disabilities indicating that you have a disability that requires accommodation, please present it to us so we can discuss the accommodations you might need in class.

Plagiarism
As a form of academic dishonesty, plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarized work will automatically receive an “F” for the course (see Student Handbook). Students may or may not be required to post their materials to Turnitin.com.

Dropping the Course
You are responsible for understanding the university’s policies and procedures regarding withdrawing from courses. And you should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for dropping classes. Information on withdrawal from courses is available in the Bulletin under Grades and Scholarship and from your Dean’s Office.

Grading
Grades will be calculated based on your class participation, completion of readings, and your final project. The grading breakdown is as follows:

Final Project: 200 points - 40%
Readings: 100 points - 20%
Class Participation: 200 points - 40%

Course Outline

Session 1: Introduction to Special Collections Research
Friday, January 19
Instructor: Kayla Harris
Location: Collab
Reading Due: N/A

Session 2: Introduction to Special Collections, continued: Speed Dating with Collections
Friday, January 26
Instructor: Kayla Harris
Location: Meet in Lobby of Roesch Library. Class in Room 501
Reading Due: SAA Core Value of Archivists and Code of Ethics for Archivists.
https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics
Introduce Final Project
**Session 3: Researching our Mary/Catholic Heritage in the Marian Library: Visual Literacy**  
Friday, February 2  
Instructors: Sarah Cahalan, Kayla Harris  
Location: Meet in Lobby of Roesch Library. Class in Marian Library, 3rd Floor  
Reading Due:  

**Session 4: Connecting UD to the Dayton Community’s Past: Privacy in Primary Research**  
Friday, February 9  
Instructor: Heidi Gauder  
Location: Collab  
Reading Due:  

**Session 5: Researching Our University History in the UD Archives: Representation in Archives**  
Friday, February 16  
Instructors: Jennifer Brancato, Kristina Schulz  
Location: Meet in Lobby of Roesch Library. Class in AE 213  
Readings Due:  

**Session 6: Exploring our Catholic Connections in the U.S. Catholic Collection: Historical Empathy**  
Friday, February 23  
Instructor: Stephanie Shreffler  
Location: Meet in Lobby of Roesch Library. Class in U.S. Catholic Collection  
Reading Due:  
Session 7: Research Day 1
Friday, March 9
Instructor: Guest Speaker Katy Kelly
Location: Collab
Reading Due: N/A

Session 8: Personal Digital Archiving
Friday, March 16
Instructors: Kayla Harris, Stephanie Shreffler
Location: Collab
Reading Due: N/A

Session 9: Research Day 2 - Workshop together
Friday, March 23
Instructors: TBD
Location: As assigned
Assignment Due: Draft Bibliography

Session 10: Student presentations
Friday, April 6
Instructors: Jennifer Brancato, Heidi Gauder, Kayla Harris, Kristina Schulz, Stephanie Shreffler
Location: Collab
Assignment Due: Final Presentation, Bibliography, and Reflection
Appendix 2: Final Assignment

UDI 204 Final Assignment

For your final assignment, you will create a digital poster. Working with a specific artifact, you will research the time in which the artifact was created and connect the item to existing scholarship. You will need to find scholarly articles to help explain the value and importance of your research topic/item to the past. You may also use additional primary sources to help explain context.

Directions
Imagine that you have just stepped foot on the University of Dayton campus for the very first time and President Spina hands you an object or a picture. He says to you, “This item has a valuable connection to our Catholic, Marianist university history and our connection to the world. I am entrusting you to explain this object’s connection to the past and to prepare a presentation by the end of the semester. Since you are at a university, I need to know what other scholars might have said about the time period or this type of object. I also need to know your personal connection to the object and what you learned in your research.”

President Spina is asking for 3 deliverables: 1 poster presentation, a bibliography of research, and a reflection of what you have learned in this course.

Assignment Specifications
Due date: Friday, April 6, 8:00am.
Deliverables: Upload 1 powerpoint slide, bibliography, and reflection document to the UDI204 Isidore site. More information about the slide as the semester develops.

Research requirements: In addition to describing the primary source/artifact on the poster, you will need to provide historical context, explaining the object’s connection to the past. In order to successfully accomplish this part of the task, you will need to locate 2 scholarly articles, at minimum. You may also wish to consult other relevant primary sources and popular sources that help you understand why this item was important in the time that it was created and/or used. Any outside sources that you reference on the poster must be included in a separate bibliography. All sources should be cited in Turabian style format.

Reflection requirements: Because this poster is the culminating project, we are asking you to reflect on what you learned during this mini course. This course is intended to help you learn about particular collections, sources and methodologies, but also about larger themes that concern archival and historical research. How do these themes play into the artifact research you conducted? What new approaches and methodologies did you learn about in this course? Can you identify any research gaps associated with your artifact research? Be specific! 500 words.
### Appendix 3: Final Assignment Rubric

#### UDI 204 Final Assignment Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment component</th>
<th>Grading criteria</th>
<th>Point distribution</th>
<th>Point value</th>
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| **Bibliography**     | Includes at least 2 scholarly references | Reference 1: +20 pts  
Reference 2: +20 pts  
Extra citations: +5pts [total] | 50 points |
|                      | May also include additional citations | All citations correct or minor errors: +10pts | |
|                      | Correctly cited in Turabian format | Citations have major errors: +5pts | |
|                      |                                | Citations not Turabian: +0pts | |
| **Reflection**       | Coherent reflection that meets minimum word count | Reflection meets minimum word count: +20pts  
Reflection does not meet minimum word count: +10pts | 50 points |
|                      | Addresses question prompts in thoughtful and articulate manner. Indication that student has considered how the work in this course connects to our Catholic, Marianist, University and community history. | Reflection shows thoughtful consideration of coursework as it connects to history: +30pts  
Reflection includes only cursory consideration of coursework as it connects to history: +20pts  
Reflection fails to connect coursework to history and demonstrates very little learning: +10pts | |
| **Poster**           | Design: poster is attractive and readable [25 points] | Poster design layout readable & attractive, includes mix of images and text: +25pts | 100 points |
|                      | Content: Shows clear historical connection between object and a component of Catholic, Marianist, University, and community history. Includes appropriate historical context for the reader | Poster design mostly text OR images, difficult to read: +15pts | |
|                      | Language is clear and articulate [75 points] | Content has thoughtful inclusion of pieces a, b, and c: +75pts | |
|                      |                                | Content includes only 2 of required content pieces: +50pts | |
|                      |                                | Content includes only 1 of required content pieces: +25pts | |