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# Use of Archives by Catholic Historians, 2010-2012: A Citation Study

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# USE OF ARCHIVES BY CATHOLIC HISTORIANS, 2010–2012: A CITATION STUDY

BY JILLIAN M. SLATER AND COLLEEN MAHONEY HOELSCHER

**ABSTRACT:** This article reports on a citation study examining the use of archives by researchers in the field of Catholic history. The authors collected citation data from three Catholic history journals published from 2010 through 2012. They analyzed two citation attributes: the type of materials cited and, for archival materials, the type of repository. This article presents results and observations from the study and discusses them in the context of archival practice. The authors discuss how findings from this study can inform collection development and archival description as well as ideas for further research.

## *Introduction*

This citation study examines Catholic historians' use of archival sources and the types of repositories where they access these materials. The authors analyzed 5,995 citations in three peer-reviewed journals that publish research in the field of American Catholic history. The study focused on recent scholarship and used articles published from 2010 through 2012. The authors selected the "reference study" method in which each source (for example, each book, journal, or archival collection) is counted only the first time it is cited. For the purpose of this article, the authors use the term "Catholic historians" to refer to historians who conduct research in the field of Catholic history. This study aims to document patterns in the use of archives and focuses on the types of repositories where historians access materials. The authors use findings from this study to address collection development and descriptive practices, considering Catholic repositories as well as broader archival practice.

### *Literature Review*

Many previous studies have examined historians' use of information sources, and a few have specifically considered archives. For example, Margaret Stieg Dalton and Laurie Charnigo used surveys and citation analysis to investigate the types and extent of sources that historians use.<sup>1</sup> They stated that "Sources used most frequently for primary information by . . . historians were, in descending order, archives, manuscripts and special collections, books, newspapers, government documents."<sup>2</sup> Other studies have examined historians' use of archives within the context of archival practice. For example, Frederic Miller's 1986 study evaluated citation patterns in social history research.<sup>3</sup> His in-depth evaluation included analysis of the number of citations to archival materials, subject of the article, date range of the archival collection, and number of repositories each historian visited. Miller concluded that although usage patterns vary, social historians remain reliant upon archival research; such statistics could therefore motivate acquisition and appraisal decisions.<sup>4</sup> Wendy Duff and Catherine Johnson have conducted studies on information-seeking behavior in archives.<sup>5</sup> In their 2002 study, interviews with historians revealed that familiarity with a collection or repository and the existence of finding aids are major factors that influence use.<sup>6</sup> Clark Elliott reviewed citation patterns in the history of science and discussed the potential impact of citation studies on archival appraisal.<sup>7</sup> He advocated for quantitative research as a solid foundation for informing archival practice. Diane Beattie used surveys and citation analysis to study the use of archives by researchers in the emerging field of women's history.<sup>8</sup> She suggested that studying citation data would allow archivists to respond more effectively to the needs of a particular user group. Chris Burns employed citation analysis to document historians' use of archives over a four-year period.<sup>9</sup> He discussed the importance of gathering data that may help guide acquisition policies, arrangement and description priorities, and instruction practices.

In studying Catholic historical materials, it is important to consider the unique context in which these records are kept. Three distinguishing characteristics come to mind: the types of repositories that house Catholic materials, the history of archival practice in the Catholic Church, and the complex nature of religious archives. Types of repositories, for example, include those operated by the church, such as diocesan archives or the archives of religious orders, as well as Catholic colleges and organizations. Catholic repositories are also distinctive within the history of general archival practice. Several articles published between 1950 and 1975 discuss their employees' lack of formal training, inadequate facilities, and need for modernization in Catholic archives.<sup>10</sup> Later, David Bearman's 1983 survey on the state of the archival profession documented the significant expansion and formalization of religious archival programs in the early 1980s.<sup>11</sup> James O'Toole, who has written extensively on Catholic archives, addressed the complex question, "What is different about religious archives?"<sup>12</sup> He provided four significant considerations: "the influence on the archives of external, non-archival beliefs; the inherent difficulties of the mandate to document the intangible; the impact of the decline of organized religion; and the difficulties created by an apparent incompatibility of archives work and religious belief."<sup>13</sup> Because of the

considerations mentioned above, collecting Catholic papers poses challenges not found in other arenas of archival practice.

Although many previous studies have examined historians' use of archives and implications for archival practice, none have done this through the unique lens of Catholic history scholarship. Additionally, while accounts of the backgrounds of Catholic repositories exist, no studies have addressed how often historians are using materials from these repositories in their research. Knowing this, the authors identified a need to gather data on information sources used by Catholic historians and, specifically, the types of repositories where they access archival materials.

## *Methodology*

Citation analysis typically involves recording the details of citations from a number of publications to determine what materials are being consulted and then analyzing materials by type, frequency, or other factors.<sup>14</sup> For this study, the authors selected the "reference study" method. This method counts each source (for example, book, journal, or archival collection) only the first time it is cited.<sup>15</sup> For each reference, the authors evaluated two attributes: the type of materials cited, and for citations to archival materials, the type of repository where the materials are located. They recorded the data in spreadsheets, which were then used to calculate totals and percentages.

### **Journal Selection**

Three refereed journals with a focus on Catholic history in the United States were selected for the study: *American Catholic Studies*, *Catholic Historical Review*, and *US Catholic Historian*. The journals were selected based on publisher reputation, recommendations from librarians and scholars, and the authors' personal experience. *American Catholic Studies* has been published since 1887 and is the official journal of the American Catholic Historical Society. The journal has won several awards from the Catholic Press Association and is currently published by Villanova University.<sup>16</sup> *Catholic Historical Review* is the official journal of the American Catholic Historical Association and has been published by the Catholic University of America Press since 1915.<sup>17</sup> *US Catholic Historian* is published by Catholic University of America Press and is a "scholarly journal devoted to the history of the Catholic Church in the United States."<sup>18</sup> The authors felt that these journals represent current scholarly communication in the field and therefore provide a reliable sampling frame.

### **Citation Counting Criteria**

The authors analyzed citations in feature articles (excluding book reviews and opinion pieces) and gathered two sets of data. The first data set focused on the types of source materials and included the following categories: books, journal articles, archival materials, primary sources, and other materials. For purposes of this study and to ensure consistency, the authors used the definitions listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Definitions: Source Material Types**

Source Material	Definition
<b>Books</b>	Monographs, monographic series, edited or themed volumes including biographies, novels, and similar publications
<b>Journal articles</b>	Articles published in academic journals
<b>Archival materials</b>	Personal papers, organizational records, and artificial collections; also documents, artifacts, visual resource material, and/or moving images of enduring historical value
<b>Primary sources</b>	Items or documents that contain a firsthand account of events including newspaper articles, oral histories, maps, and land records, also gray literature, conference presentations, and theses or dissertations
<b>Other materials</b>	Materials not fitting into the above categories, for example, a conversation or personal correspondence between the author and an individual or group

The second data set captured information about citations to archival materials. These were classified based on the types of repositories. The authors established categories taking into account the scope of this study, personal experience, and an examination of similar studies and literature on Catholic archives. For example, Burns used the following repository types in his study on historians' use of archives: private collections, public offices, national archives, institutional archives, state and local archives, academic research collections, public libraries, historical societies, historical libraries and museums, and foreign repositories.<sup>19</sup> While Burns's categories are useful to document citations in broader historical research, the authors also wanted to document repositories that specifically collect Catholic materials. *The Directory of Archive and Manuscript Repositories in the United States* distinguishes three types of Catholic repositories: diocesan, religious orders, and Catholic colleges and universities.<sup>20</sup> James O'Toole later confirmed these as "the three major kinds of Catholic archives."<sup>21</sup>

Based on the considerations above, the authors identified eight categories of repositories for this study: diocesan archives, archives of religious orders, Catholic colleges or universities, non-Catholic colleges or universities, Catholic organizations, government archives, local sources, and other sources. They used the definitions in Table 2.

**Table 2. Definitions: Repository Types**

<b>Repository</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Diocesan archives</b>	Archdiocesan, diocesan, and parish archives or any repository in a district or see under the supervision of a bishop
<b>Archives of religious orders</b>	National, provincial, or local branches of Catholic vowed religious orders, such as orders of priests, brothers, and sisters
<b>Catholic colleges or universities</b>	Pontifical universities or private institutions of higher education operated by or with relationship to the Catholic Church
<b>Non-Catholic colleges or universities</b>	Secular institutions of higher education or those operated by religious organizations other than Catholic
<b>Catholic organizations</b>	Nonprofit organizations owned and operated by or affiliated with the Catholic Church
<b>Government archives</b>	National, state, and county archives, or any repository otherwise owned and operated by a government body
<b>Local sources</b>	Public library, historical society, or museum
<b>Other materials</b>	Private collections of individuals, repositories of non-Catholic religious groups, or any repository not covered by the above categories

### **Methodological Considerations**

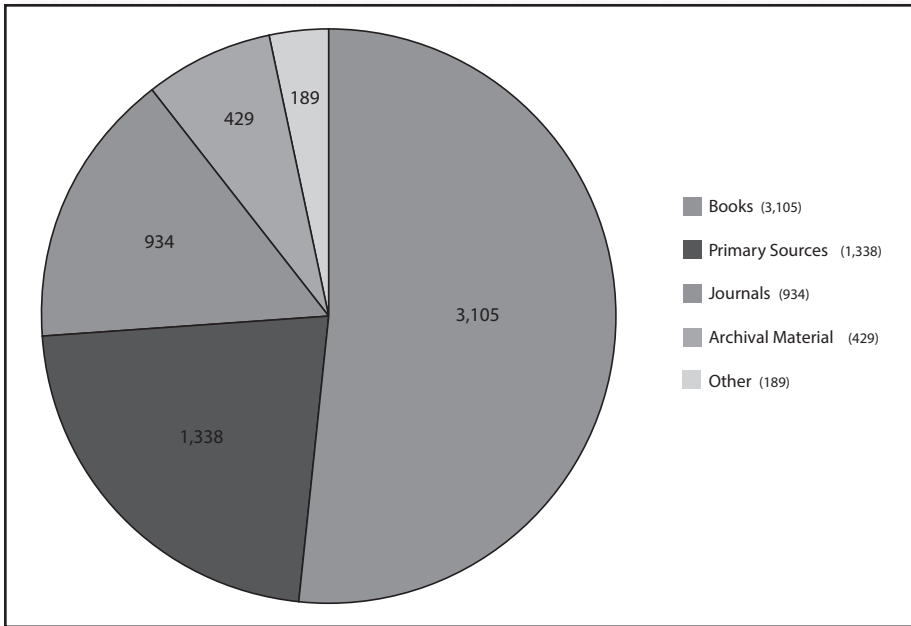
Many previous studies note the challenges inherent in the process of counting and analyzing citations. The extent and variety of information sources available and the subjectivity of certain sources make it difficult to classify some citations. Primary sources are particularly challenging to classify. Pearce-Moses notes that primary sources are inherently subjective and defining them often depends on how the materials are being used.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Results***

The authors analyzed 5,995 references from 130 feature articles for this study. The initial survey found that just over 50 percent of the references were to books; 22 percent to primary sources; 15 percent to journal articles; 7 percent to archival materials; and 3 percent of the references were to other sources (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Total References by Types of Materials, 2010–2012**

Types of Materials	Number of References	Percentage of Total
Books	3,105	51.79%
Journal articles	934	15.58%
Archival materials	429	7.16%
Primary sources	1,338	22.32%
Other sources	189	3.15%

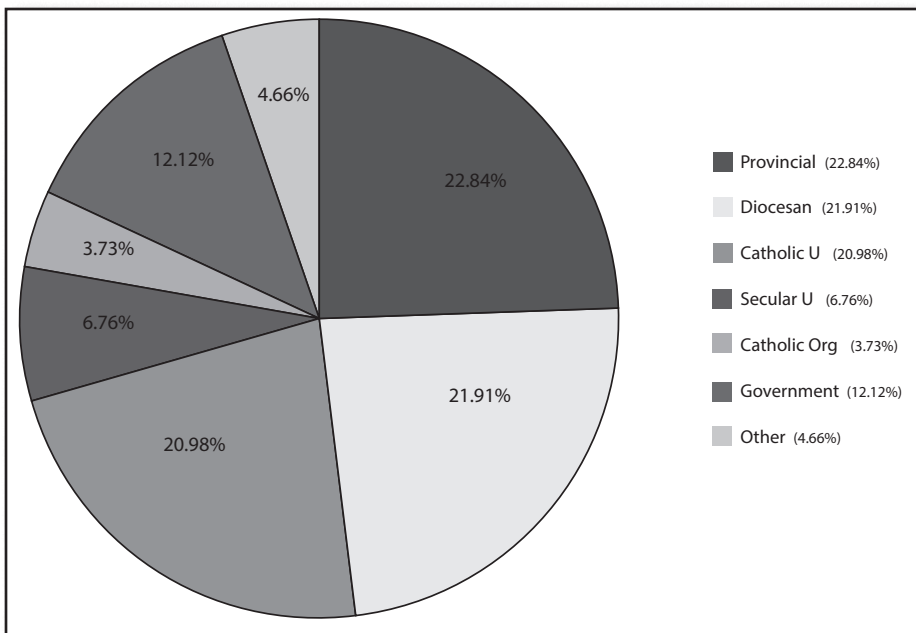


**Figure 1.** This chart shows the breakdown of the types of materials referenced by Catholic historians.

The second set of data counted and analyzed the types of repositories where archival materials were accessed. It revealed that researchers cited diocesan archives, archives of religious orders, and archival collections at Catholic colleges and universities most frequently. Each of these categories was cited over 20 percent of the time. Government archives were cited 12 percent of the time. Local repositories were cited 7 percent of the time. Non-Catholic colleges and universities were also cited about 7 percent of the time. Catholic organizations were cited approximately 4 percent of the time, and 5 percent of citations were to other repositories that did not fit in any of these categories (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Total References to Archival Materials by Repository Type, 2010–2012**

Types of Repositories	Number of References	Percentage of Total
Diocesan	94	21.91%
Order/Provincial	98	22.84%
Catholic college or university	90	20.98%
Non-Catholic college or university	29	6.76%
Catholic organization	16	3.73%
Government	52	12.12%
Local	30	6.99%
Other	20	4.66%



**Figure 2.** This chart shows a breakdown of the types of repositories used by Catholic historians.



## *Discussion*

The results and observations of this study are considered in the context of Catholic repositories as well as broader archival practice. The findings are discussed in regard to practical issues including archival description, collection development, and related activities.

### **Collection Development**

An important responsibility for archives is obtaining relevant materials, usually under the guidance of a collection development policy. Frank Boles wrote that “a well-focused collecting policy will result in a body of complementary, interrelated collections that may become a cultural treasure.”<sup>23</sup> The authors discuss collection development practices based on results and observations from the survey. While some issues are specific to repositories collecting Catholic history materials, many may be considered in a broad range of collecting contexts.

Nearly half of the repositories cited were those of dioceses or religious orders. This reveals that a majority of collections are being housed in repositories that routinely collect a well-defined range of historical documents. Official church records—including baptismal records, financial documents, administrative correspondence, and the personal papers of officials—are routinely collected at diocesan and archdiocesan archives.<sup>24</sup> Archives of religious orders collect administrative records related to the orders’ operations (such as schools, hospitals, or other businesses), personal papers of members, and artifacts associated with their groups’ histories.<sup>25</sup> For religious orders and diocesan archives, collection development practices may include updating records retention schedules or increasing outreach efforts to ensure that they continue to be the primary repositories.

Where does this leave other repositories? Archives other than those of dioceses and religious orders may face a challenge when collecting materials related to Catholic history. In this study, Catholic colleges and universities were cited approximately 20% of the time—about 5% less than dioceses or religious orders. The remaining 35% of citations were split between government, Catholic organizations, local repositories, and other sources.

Developing an awareness of the collecting scope of similar repositories will help archivists to approach collection development strategically. In the context of Catholic archives, many acquisitions are based on established relationships or routine records retention. This is also true for repositories in other specialized areas, such as those affiliated with particular religious, social, or political groups. Repositories without fixed arrangements (such as routine acquisition of permanent records) must be proactive to continue developing relevant and robust holdings.

For Catholic colleges and universities that house special collections, this may mean identifying previously untapped opportunities and updating their policies accordingly. Catholic colleges might direct outreach efforts toward collecting areas that official church archives do not already cover. For example, they may wish to focus on developing relationships with potential donors including notable lay individuals and families or church groups. For a broad range of special collections, becoming a “designated

repository” may be a mutually beneficial relationship. If resources allow, an archives could identify an organization that produces relevant materials and work with that organization to deposit its permanent records and/or develop a transfer schedule. James Geary provided an example of such a relationship in his case study on the arrangement between Kent State University and the Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio.<sup>26</sup> He discusses the advantages experienced by both organizations. Depositing its collections at Kent State has been an inexpensive way for the diocese to preserve its archives under professional care and provide increased access to the materials.<sup>27</sup> For the university, such a collection brings prestige to the repository, serves as additional incentive for other individuals or organizations to donate their records, and supports academic research.<sup>28</sup>

Nonprofit organizations or church groups may not always have the resources to care for and provide access to records of enduring historical value. Becoming a designated repository not only enhances a university’s special collections, but ensures that the materials are properly preserved and accessible. For example, the Marian Library at the University of Dayton and the Mariological Society of America, a Catholic theological association dedicated to the study of Mary, the mother of Jesus, established a designated repository relationship in 2012.<sup>29</sup> The Mariological Society is a small organization (under three hundred members) with few resources to preserve its permanent records and historical materials. While the society benefits by having its records properly cared for, the Marian Library benefits through the acquisition of a unique collection within the niche field of Mariology. The library included a “designated repository” statement in its collection development policy and may build upon this model in the future.

To keep collections relevant, repositories cannot always wait for donors to seek them out with unsolicited donations. A strategically crafted collection development policy helps archivists acquire materials that enrich their collections. The most heavily cited repositories in this study operate with some degree of routine records retention or strong donor affiliation. Developing an awareness of the collecting scope of similar repositories can be a good foundation for archivists in a variety of historical contexts. Exploring the potential for “designated repository” relationships can be a worthwhile approach for some special collections. A clearly articulated policy will help archivists to define and document priorities and direct collecting and outreach activities accordingly.

### **Description**

A variety of factors influence a historian’s choice to consult a particular body of records. For archival materials, studies have shown that the extent of description and indexing are factors that impact use.<sup>30</sup> In the present study, Catholic colleges and universities are among the most popular repositories where historians consult archival materials. In 2013, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops identified 246 degree-granting institutions of Catholic higher education in the United States, but references to Catholic colleges or universities in this study point toward a relative few of them.<sup>31</sup> Most citations are to the University of Notre Dame, Georgetown University, and Catholic University of America. Other heavily cited Catholic universities include Villanova University, Loyola University Chicago, and Boston College. All six of these universities provide access to online finding aids, making their archival holdings easily discoverable.

One discrepancy in this trend is the discoverability of diocesan and religious orders' archives. These repositories are heavily cited, yet based on samples from this category, dioceses and religious orders are much less likely than academic repositories to provide access to online finding aids. Familiarity and predictability may explain the persistent use of these collections. Duff and Johnson suggested that name recognition is a factor that influences use.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the routine nature of organizational records makes holdings in these repositories more predictable to the experienced researcher. Catholic historians tend to be familiar with the kinds of standard materials held at these repositories—diocesan and parish business records, religious orders' membership records, correspondence from the leadership of these organizations—and will be able to locate and use them even when online finding aids or inventories are not available.

The authors observed that some historians tend to cite heavily from a single collection, rather than citing materials from a variety of archival collections in an article. The authors speculate that, in some cases, additional related collections exist, but were not accessed. One way that archivists may facilitate further discovery of related materials is through descriptive elements. In *Describing Archives: A Content Standard, Second Edition (DACS)*, section 6.3 provides guidelines for documenting "Related Archival Materials." This element allows for description of "the existence and location of archival materials that are closely related to the materials being described by provenance, sphere of activity, or subject matter, either in the same repository, in other repositories, or elsewhere."<sup>33</sup> This field is not required for a *DACS*-compliant finding aid, but its use could greatly assist researchers in finding additional materials.

The authors also observed that, despite archival description standards such as *DACS*, historians cite archival materials relatively inconsistently. The unique nature of archival materials and various levels of description used at different archives (collection, box, file, or item level) make this a challenge for both archivists and historians. The authors observed in this study that many historians cite materials at the item level and a few include box and folder numbers. Some historians cite a repository but no collection title. Most historians use abbreviations when citing multiple materials from a single repository, but these vary from article to article. For example, the University Archives at the University of Notre Dame is abbreviated as AUND, UND, ND, and NDA in various articles. These inconsistencies may pose challenges for future researchers attempting to locate the same documents based on citations. Preferred citations for archival materials can be noted in *DACS*-compliant finding aids (*DACS* 7.1.5).<sup>34</sup> Another way archivists can encourage uniformity is to emphasize preferred citations in additional locations. For example, archivists could include the preferred citation on the repository's website, in an access and use policy, and in other guidelines that researchers use when consulting a collection. Increased visibility of the preferred citation may help improve consistency in published citations and discoverability for future researchers.

### *Further Research*

The data collected in this study provide a foundation for looking at patterns of use, in this case, the types of repositories where Catholic historians access archival materials. Surveys or interviews with historians could complement this study and provide a rich source of qualitative information on the use of archives. For instance, why are diocesan and religious orders' archives (which were found to provide little or no access to online finding aids) the most heavily cited in the current study? To help answer this, historians could be asked about factors that influenced their choice to consult a specific body of records. Previous studies on information-seeking behavior in archives such as Duff and Johnson's analysis of e-mail reference questions or Dalton and Charnigo's 2004 hybrid (qualitative and quantitative) study may provide a foundation for developing a qualitative component to this study.<sup>35</sup>

As mentioned above, many historians tend to rely heavily on a single collection or repository. Since the "reference study" method was used (each citation was counted only the first time), the data do not reflect the extent to which some historians rely on archival sources. For example, Christopher Staysniak's article, "'We are definitely the pioneers of this movement': The Regis Lay Apostolate and the Origins of Postgraduate Volunteerism, 1949–1972" in *American Catholic Studies*, contains 35 citations to materials from Regis College Archives and Special Collections.<sup>36</sup> The reference study counted this as one (only the first time the repository was cited). An additional example is Seth Smith's article, "Implementing Vatican II in Two Rural, Southern Parishes" in *US Catholic Historian*, which contains a total of 84 citations to archival materials from four repositories.<sup>37</sup> In this study, only four references were analyzed (the first time each collection was cited). A more in-depth citation study could analyze every unique citation in each article. In Smith's article, for example, 84 citations would be analyzed. This would be a labor-intensive undertaking, but it would provide detailed documentation and further insight into historians' use of archival sources.

Catholic repositories, like other collections dealing with a particular field or topic, have unique sets of considerations based on the context in which they exist. Although the study was conducted within the framework of Catholic history, similar methodology could be applied to a variety of fields. For example, archivists at a repository specializing in women's materials could analyze the citations in *Journal of Women's History* and *Gender and History*, while a repository that collects items of local interest could examine citations in history journals specific to their region, such as *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* or *New England Quarterly*. Repositories in every niche face unique issues when acquiring new materials and making them known to researchers. Analyzing citation data is one way that archivists can identify patterns of use to help guide decision making in many areas of archival practice.

### *Conclusions*

This exploratory study provides an overview of Catholic historians' use of archival sources and repositories in recent years. It also offers insights into archival practices

that could be improved or adopted to ensure continued use of archives. First, it shows the importance of developing an awareness of the collecting practices of other repositories. Diocesan and religious orders' archives not only have an established role as the homes for materials created by their managing bodies, but they also have a known reputation among Catholic historians; other repositories may wish to direct their efforts toward content that is not already part of these organizations' collecting purview. For some archives, developing a collection may include forming a "designated repository" relationship with a nonprofit organization or other bodies creating relevant materials. Documenting priorities in a collection development policy will allow archivists to be efficacious when considering potential donors and prioritizing outreach activities.

Observations from this study are twofold regarding archival description. On one hand, heavily cited Catholic college and university archives all provide access to online finding aids. This supports the widely recognized importance of discoverable archival description. In contrast, the archives of dioceses and religious orders, which are cited somewhat more frequently, do not provide access to online finding aids. This suggests that other factors such as name recognition and predictability of holdings may influence a researcher's decision to consult records at these repositories. Further research, such as surveys with historians, would be useful for providing additional insight into factors that influence their choice to consult a certain body of records.

Potential also exists for adding or highlighting descriptive elements to facilitate discovery. For example, archivists might explore publicizing related archival materials in their finding aids, both for collections within their repository and, if resources allow, related collections at other repositories. Additionally, this study found that some archival citations in the history literature are inconsistent. One way that archivists might address this is by emphasizing a preferred citation in finding aids as well as other documentation such as access and use policies. This would encourage uniformity among published citations and improve discoverability of these materials in the future.

Finally, this study provides a foundation and incentive for further research on the use of archives by Catholic historians. It also reiterates the potential for citation analysis to inform practices in a variety of archival settings. The results and observations of this study confirm what many previous researchers have suggested: quantitative and/or qualitative studies on the use of archives can provide invaluable insights for archivists that will allow them to better meet the needs of users and ensure continued relevancy of archival collections.

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