

## Expanding the Reach of the Archives through Instruction

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I have always enjoyed learning about history. As a child, I was enthralled with Ancient Egypt, Lewis and Clark, and acting out whatever I had learned about in history class. I was fortunate enough to have a father who obtained his master's in history while I was a child and who shaped my history lessons, since my parents homeschooled me. Thus, it was no surprise that I was a history major in college who wanted to pursue work in archives. However, most of my exposure to archives came through volunteering at archives at my public library and my college, Milligan College (now Milligan University). I more or less accidentally stumbled into the field and even realized that I had been using primary sources in various research projects but had had no real guidance. In my graduate school program in archives at Indiana University, I selected an internship at the Wylie House Museum, the historic house of the university's first president. While in my internship, I focused on outreach and instruction, contributing to curating an exhibit and assisting with instruction with the archivist. Instruction in primary sources has become one of my interests in the field, so when I came back to Milligan University in 2018 to be University Archivist, I was able to pursue that interest with the support of my colleagues. Milligan University has about 1,100 students, and I am the sole archivist for the school, but even with the small demographics and many other responsibilities I have, my library staff have been supportive of developing a primary source literacy instruction program.

When I started my position at Milligan, the previous archivist, Lindsay Kenderes, had already provided archives instruction to a couple classes in the past. One of these classes was a humanities class in interdisciplinary research methods, which was a wonderful springboard for developing primary source literacy instruction. Over the years since I started, I have added several more classes, thanks to being proactive about reaching out to faculty and through friendships with them. I have continued working with the humanities class, evolving the activities and approaches over the years to better serve the students. I have also taught sessions for art, journalism, composition, gender studies, and history classes. One area that I am slowly working on is the second semester of our required composition core. Currently, I have offered sessions to one professor's sections and another professor's online section. I would like to have a primary source literacy instruction session in every section. Our instruction librarian is already heavily involved with the composition core classes, and I would like to see primary source literacy instruction become embedded in the core as well. This past academic year, I reached seventy-five students across eleven sessions, including graduate students. This is still a small percentage of the campus population and a small number overall, but given that I have many other demands and that we are a small university, I am proud of how far we've come just in the past five years to offer sessions on primary sources to a range of students.

Several resources have been helpful in shaping my instructional practice. One is a course I took through Library Juice Academy on primary source instruction by Robin Katz. This was an outstanding course and helped define what I was doing. It gave me a better structure for designing my lesson plans and made

me better verbalize my goals for instruction sessions. I have also become active in the TPS (Teaching with Primary Sources) Collective, a free, virtual group made up of anyone who teaches with primary sources in some way. I know that if I have questions regarding primary source instruction that I can reach out to this group for ideas. Going all the way back to graduate school, I have read a lot of the literature on the topic and frequently try to read any new literature that I see in the *American Archivist* or other similar publications. Two books that I keep on my office shelf that have also been useful are *Past Or Portal?: Enhancing Undergraduate Learning Through Special Collections and Archives* by Eleanor Mitchell, Peggy Seiden, and Suzy Taraba and *Using Primary Sources: Hands-On Instructional Exercises* by Anne Bahde, Heather Smedberg, and Mattie Taormina. Even though many of these resources may be geared for larger schools, I have still found many useful pieces of information to help shape my instruction.

When I teach archives instruction sessions, I usually start with a brief lecture covering the basics of primary sources and archives. This has evolved over the years, and I have actually been pairing down the information I share during the lecture so as to not overwhelm the students, most of whom have very little concept of primary sources and archives. Most of the instruction session time is spent on the students experiencing items from the archives first-hand. The exact format and items changes with the content of the class with which I am working, but it typically involves the students examining one or more items and writing down the answers to some questions about it. I have developed a couple teaching collections for easy use in these classes. One is my standard teaching collection, which contains a wide variety of items that can be used in a class with a variety of students. Items such as pamphlets, photos, articles, and letters make up this collection. I also have a specific collection geared specifically for a history of photography class. This collection includes a variety of historic photographic mediums, which proves interesting for the students to hold and examine in the midst of learning about these formats. While students are examining the items in the session, I try to circulate around the room and interact with them one-on-one, answering questions and providing more history or context as the situation requires. I usually wrap up the sessions by asking some (or all, depending on the size of the class) students to share what they learned. It is always fascinating to see what students find interesting or what grabs their attention.

Milligan University may be a small school and I may be the solo archivist, but I have thoroughly enjoyed being able to reach more and more students over the years about primary sources and how to use them. My hope is that this is an interesting and unique experience that they have while attending the university that will help inform their research in their current classes, future classes, or even future graduate work.

#### Photo Credits:

TA\_001: Students moving books into the P.H. Welshimer Memorial Library, circa 1961. Photo from The Holloway Archives at Milligan University, Milligan, TN.

TA\_004: Domestic Science Cooking Class, undated. Photo from The Holloway Archives at Milligan University, Milligan, TN.