

Incorporating Archives-based Research into the Curriculum: A Collaborative and Outcomes-based Approach

Verónica Reyes-Escudero

Associate Librarian / Borderlands Curator, Special Collections, The University of Arizona Libraries, USA

Abstract: In the last decade Special Collections and Archives at academic institutions have received a great deal of attention. Special Collections have become the area where academic libraries can distinguish themselves based on their unique holdings. Leveraging the importance of an archive's holdings can bring about a multitude of benefits ranging from increased student engagement, to better student learning, to donors funding research awards.

In this paper, the author will discuss ways in which Special Collections librarians and archivists are uniquely positioned to form collaborations across campus to provide rich and engaging student learning experiences. She will further discuss practical ways in which teaching with primary sources can provide avenues for outcomes-based learning as well as how instruction can be taken beyond the classroom to showcase student learning to campus constituencies and donors.

Keywords: information literacy, special collections, archives, donors, student engagement, education, unique collections, academic libraries

1. Introduction

In recent years academic libraries have turned their focus on to their special collections and to their unique holdings as a way to set themselves apart from other institutions. Recent reports and projects such as *Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report*, the 2010 *SPEC Kit 317*, *Special Collections Engagement* and *Archival Metrics: Promoting a Culture of Assessment in Archives and Special Collections*, have called attention on assessment activities in archives and special collections in order to better demonstrate value of the repositories. At the same time, assessing our information literacy activities and assessing student learning is still a struggle for many in academic institutions (Berenbak et al 2010). Although the literature

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on educational activities in Special Collections is scarce (Bahde, Smedberg 2012), and methods for assessment even more limited, special collections librarians and archivists have long had a role in educating undergraduate and graduate students on the use of primary source material (Carini 2009). Still, these two distinct, but similarly consistent calls to action, offer opportunities for special collections librarians and archivists to work within the context of their expertise to respond to the need to demonstrate the value that special collections bring to a campus community and the need to better assess student learning. In fact, as higher education programs call for deeper student engagement and require collaboration in the shadow of scarce resources, we have an opportunity to respond to that demand in a way that leverages the expertise of teaching faculty and the expertise and skills of librarians and archivists.

At the University of Arizona Libraries (UAL) Special Collections, innovative approaches to instruction are taking place that go far beyond the classroom. In collaboration with several professors over several years, Special Collections staff at the UAL has used the instruction experience to forge relationships with departments from Journalism, to History, to English. Working collaboratively to develop outcomes for student learning, faculty and librarians have had repeated success with familiarizing students with primary source material, incorporating archives into their research and further developing a deep understanding of the role archives play in our lives and the importance of these for our historical record. At the UAL, students have taken what they have learned from their Special Collections instructional experiences and showcased their learning to the campus in a variety of ways, from panel discussions to documentaries. The results of which include inspiring donors to develop endowments to further student research in the archive.

2. Archives-based Research in the Curriculum & Collaboration

As some have discussed (Bahde, Smedberg 2012, Oakleaf 2010, Pritchard 2011) in time of the economic downturn, a great need to demonstrate student learning contributed to the flurry of assessment on information literacy activities. As Bahde and Smedberg astutely point out in their review of the *ARL SPEC Kit on Special Collections Engagement*, there is an indication of frustration from participants at not knowing or being able to effectively measure their instructional programs. On the ground, the same frustration has been experienced throughout the broader information literacy movement in the past decade or so with a variety of measurement tools being applied with inconsistent success starting with SAILS and various others. If one of the end goals of assessment is to show the value of Special Collections instructional efforts in student learning and engagement, there are multi-faceted approaches that can be utilized. These approaches utilize special collections librarians and archivists' skills and expertise and can be handled within the already existing framework of operations within academic library archival repositories. This paper will focus on three faculty /librarian collaborations that took the approach of integrating archives-based research into the curriculum anchored on course

outcomes and demonstrating student learning. For each of these classes the faculty and librarian/archivist planned an event for the end of the term to showcase the student projects. The special collections librarian would utilize the skills, expertise and existing framework of providing community events that she could easily fold into the units' programmatic efforts.

As standard procedure all course collaborations described here started by discussions with faculty about the goals for the course and the instructions session in Special Collections. As a matter of practice, the librarian has generally asked to discuss the course before accepting to schedule a class visit. This is where both parties have the opportunity to talk about hopes for the class, what learning outcomes and what student products are expected. As a starting point, the librarian often begins by describing the standard course outline for the Special Collections instruction session. Learning outcomes for the standard class visit includes archival literacy concepts as described in Anne Bahde and Heather Smedberg's paper, such as, how to use a finding aid, how to request materials, how to find primary sources (Bahde, Smedberg 2012). Other concepts include the handling of archival material and rare books. Depending on the level and the requirements of the course as well as other practical and suitability factors, other "artifactual intelligence concepts" (Bahde, Smedberg 2012) are also included such as, evaluating the historical context of a document, in addition to understanding the scope of the archival repository, understanding of what individuals, families or organizations collect, and practice with analysis and interpretation. As Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah Torres point out, librarians must be able to embrace both the practical and critical thinking concepts (Yakel, Torres 2003). One of the early struggles of assessment of information literacy activities had to do with offering classes and creating measures that were scalable, which was interpreted in some cases, as having to take a one size fits all approach. Not only did this cause undue anxiety, it also created barriers in developing creative approaches in working with faculty and their courses. However, if we take a hybrid approach, offering the faculty some standard approaches for covering certain learning goals while being flexible enough to address other needs, we will be able to meet our goals and engage students on a much deeper level. This way we can ensure that higher order critical thinking learning goals are covered as the course requires. This approach allows for standardizing stock of approaches that cover learning goals like the ones previously mentioned, saving the librarian/archivist time in not having to reinvent an instruction session each time. At the same time both the librarian/archivist and faculty have the flexibility of incorporating the approaches that will best work within the context of the course and expectations for students. Usually these are higher order learning outcomes such as contextualizing the original source within the historical period in which it was created.

The University of Arizona is a Research 1 large public university with just under 30,000 undergraduate students and over 6,000 graduate students and is a

member of the Association of American Universities and sits just 90 miles from the US/Mexico border. While the librarian and professors knew that student engagement and learning was happening as a result of students receiving instruction on using primary sources for their research, the partners wanted to demonstrate student engagement and learning beyond the classroom. Keeping in mind that the most effective assessment techniques are aligned with institutional (Pritchard 2011) and course goals, they had the perfect combination going into these partnerships. In the first case, The University of Arizona was gearing up to celebrate their 125th anniversary. In the second and third case, the University's strategic plan points out an area of focus on the U.S. /Mexico Borderlands (University of Arizona 2012-2016). The partners made sure to leverage those institutional goals as they worked on the curriculum, the learning goals, and the collections that would be pulled for the students to work with. As both professors and librarians heeded the need for demonstrating the value of special collections and learning in the classroom, a collaborative opportunity was born.

In the first case with the History faculty, there had been a significant relationship with librarians and professors working to incorporate learning outcomes relevant to primary sources. The curriculum committee went as far as to develop a gateway course that all history majors would take as a pre-requisite for their capstone course, formally HIST 396, now HIST 498. The History major outlines their learning outcomes including, "develop your historical imagination through working with primary source materials" (Dept. of History, accessed 5/31/13). The course requirements for HIST 396: The Nature and Practice of History outline their course goals as the final product being a "substantial paper"; "This project should base its argument substantially on a critical evaluation of primary sources..." (Dept. of History, accessed 5/28/13). Each section of the capstone course can vary in theme. Having discussed with the faculty early on about the strength of the collections, she decided to focus on University of Arizona history for the first and subsequent collaborations.

Another course that will serve as an example of deep student engagement and where archives-based research was embedded in the curriculum was that of a course in Journalism, JOUR 496D/596D: *Reporting in the US-Mexico Borderlands*. In this second case the professor approached the author as the Borderlands Curator during the planning stages of the course. The librarian and the professor had previously worked together on another course. The librarian had offered to work with her on ideas for showcasing her students' products, products which often resulted on visual news stories. With this in mind, both discussed the goals for the current course at length during the planning stages. As with previous courses they had worked on, the course goals would be centered on archival literacy concepts such as finding primary source material in Special Collections and other practical concepts mentioned above. For this particular course, and journalism students in general, the mechanics of finding material, handling material, and other practical concepts such as understanding procedures for obtaining permission to photograph or record and permission to

publish are uniquely important. The students were to produce a news documentary as their end of term product. The syllabus included the assignment requirements. The description of the stages to the video news documentary includes “Production (Stage 2)-shooting, video, interviews, and documents (e.g. historical materials from the UA Special Collections).” In the planning discussions the professor and librarian agreed that the aim would be that the news documentary would include primary source materials and or somehow anchor the documentary on primary source material from US/Mexico border collections in Special Collections. This course was convened with an undergraduate senior seminar JOUR 496I. The goals for the journalism undergraduate major includes, “Acquire the critical thinking and professional skills necessary to collect, evaluate and organize information in ways that fulfill the journalist's responsibility to the public....” For this reason we included analysis and interpretation as well as discussions about the benefits and options of anchoring their news stories on primary sources.

In other cases, collaborations are primed to occur serendipitously not around course goals, but around a unique opportunity. The course learning outcomes are set later. In the third case, in the fall of 2011, the author was working on an acquisition of travelogue films made in Mexico and other parts of the world, the Ken Wolfgang Film collection. In checking in with several professors on campus about the collection to get their thoughts on the research value either for their own research or their students and courses, one faculty member in the Department of English responded with great enthusiasm. She was preparing to offer a seminar on the history and theory of film, ENGL 596L. Being cognizant of the aforementioned areas of focus for the institution, we would work with the students to encourage them to work on the Mexico films. The learning outcomes were embedded in the course description in the syllabus, “Concepts around the archive that students will be introduced to include: survival and selections...; decay; provenance; organization; catalogues and taxonomies.... We will explore the rich array of primary sources available in the University Libraries and local archives....” The description continues to describe the end of term student product, “Written work will include a collection assessment, a conference abstract, and developmental assignments leading to a substantive seminar paper and/or conference presentation.”

Student learning outcomes are not always easily decipherable in the way that the profession is used to seeing them, for instance, in the way that The Association of College and Research Libraries' Information Literacy Competency Standard for Higher Education are articulated. However, collaborative efforts such as the ones described above, allow for both partners to come to an understanding of what concepts are important for students to go away with within the context of their learning and their assignments. These collaborations also offer opportunities for conducting both formative and summative assessments to varying degrees.

3. Student Engagement & Learning

As Bahde and Smedberg summarize O’Gara, Walters, and Putirskis on a blog post they authored on assessment in special collections, “assessment practices that generate the most useful results are multi-pronged in their approach. With each of these courses, the faculty and librarian built in multiple opportunities to observe learning in a way that was organic and iterative during various points in the course. Some of the following activities occurred during the initial session and some occurred outside of the visit to the repository. A list of formative assessment methods that were used with these courses follow:

- Students completed activities with finding aids and portions of collections and responded to questions relevant to the learning goals and reported out their findings
- Students conducted analysis and interpretation activities and reported out their observations for the rest of the class
- Students, who prepared poster presentations and oral presentations, were required to practice their presentations prior to the end of term showcase. Both faculty and librarian/archivist as well as invited doctoral candidates observed and asked questions of students related to the learning goals of the class

Each of these activities provided opportunities for the faculty and librarian to conduct formative assessment. At each point during these activities the professor and librarian were able to observe the learning that was taking place and had opportunities to provide feedback to students along the way.

In each case, as the professors and librarian planned for each of these courses, they wanted to provide a venue for students to demonstrate how transformative it can be to work with original sources. They planned an end-of-term event where students could demonstrate what they’ve learned to an audience of, not only the professor and librarian, but to administrators, parents and the larger community. This provided a multitude of opportunities beyond the score card. “Magic,” to borrow from Bahde’s and Smedberg apt title, happens when professors and librarians collaborate to deeply engage students with historical documents and to help them to be responsible for demonstrating their own learning. A showcase of their work, where students are responsible for articulating what they’ve learned most certainly provides an opportunity for summative assessment that hasn’t been lost on the audiences that have attended these events.

4. Benefits to Students, Donors & the Institution

In all cases the partners chose the UA Libraries’ Special Collections as the venue for the event. Special Collections added this event to their calendar as part of their event schedule. Incorporating the student showcases into their framework of events allowed for the events to be given the same level of attention of any other Special Collections event. This included funding for marketing and public relations, a reception, equipment and event set up and staff support. This was a great benefit to the professors involved in the partnership

and relatively easy for Special Collections to take on as it is part of their established framework.

The benefits to students, donors and to various units within the institution have been numerous. In the collaboration with the Department of History, students worked on the theme of University of Arizona history in the same year when the UA External Relations was undertaking a campaign to celebrate the UA's 125 anniversary. The UA Assistant Vice President for Marketing was invited to attend the students' run through of their presentations. Due to her attendance, she came away with an arsenal of ideas and stories for their campaign. External relations utilized some of the students' work and material from Special Collections for their news stories which ran that year. These news stories were featured in informative websites, marketing campaigns and other media outlets. The event itself gained a lot of attention and had an audience of campus administrators, faculty and staff, UA student ambassadors, parents and members of the larger community. This showcase not only raised the profile of both the Department of History and Special Collections, but the University also produced much publicity based on student work and learning. Parents were ecstatic to see their students in this venue and campus administrators commended the student presentations. Furthermore, higher level archival information literacy learning outcomes were demonstrated such as, evaluating the historical context of a document, understanding the scope of the archival repository, understanding of what individuals, families or organizations collect. Several students anchored their research on what they found in Special Collections, but delved further locating archives within the clubs and organizations they were researching. They also went as far as letting the librarian/archivist know of these collections and encouraged those with these collections to think about Special Collections for their material.

In the collaboration with the journalism class, the event consisted of a screening of the students' documentary, *Another Side of the Border* along with a panel discussion with the students. The documentary consisted of issues not usually covered by the media such as the economic benefits of Mexican tourism in Pima County, relationships of the two countries over water and dual-country communities. Given the topic, the event drew great interest from the community. Some of the benefits with showcasing student work and our collaboration were unexpected. A notable community organization that has dealt with high profile immigration issues decided to donate their archive. The founder of the organization was present. A special collections colleague took the opportunity to inquire about the organization's archive. He was very impressed by the student and community engagement and decided to donate their collection on the spot. Another important donation followed soon thereafter. The students also gained more attention for their work and were asked by another community organization to screen the documentary at an important venue. The librarian moderated during the question answer part of the event and used the opportunity to ask questions relevant to the learning outcomes, as to

their research process and production process and how they incorporated the primary source material into their documentary. One of the students interviewed for the press release stated, “Any serious program on any social issues should have a historical background and offer historical facts directly from primary sources.”

In the case of the English class there were similar opportunities for summative assessment. Of course, in much the same way as the others, the papers would be assessed by the professor. But by providing a venue for students to present their work and respond to questions from the audience, the students owned the responsibility to demonstrate what they learned. In this case they worked with a collection that was newly acquired and unprocessed and made available to them as it was being processed and as the films were being synchronized and migrated for access. During the class visit to special collections the students had the opportunity to meet the donor’s wife and talk with her about the collection. In this way, the students had a very real exposure to the learning outcomes set forth for their class such as, survival and selections, the concept of decay, provenance and organization. During the class visit the students also experienced original order as they dealt with the collection prior to it being processed. They certainly learned about provenance as the librarian presented them with the story of the donor and then meeting his wife. They also experienced the idea of decay as they saw the film, the artefact, in its original state before it was migrated to digital form. The students also understood about survival and selections as they experienced first-hand what the donor kept and what survived before it was organized. The students who decided to work from this collection for their project engaged more deeply with these concepts as they worked with the collection outside of class on a more regular basis.

Like the others, the event was scheduled in special collections for the end of the term and was open to the public. The students who worked with the newly acquired collection, presented as a panel. The other students presented concurrently in another area of Special Collections. Given the themes of the presentations, the panels all had different audiences. This allowed for the donor’s wife and friends to attend the presentations related to the Ken Wolfgang Film collection all in one place. From the observations of the students’ presentations, the librarian and faculty could see how the students incorporated material from the archive, correspondence as well as film clips as they made observation related to film theory and production. They were proud to have been the first to gain access to this particular collection. It was equally important to focus on the donor and their friends as they experienced the work that had been done on the collection. The donor’s wife and her friends were so happy with the work Special Collections had done with the collection, from salvaging the 16 mm films by synchronizing and migrating them to digital form, to processing the collection, to creating an online exhibit. Most importantly, the donor’s wife was taken by the level of engagement the faculty and librarian partners took with the students. Because of this the donor’s wife and a close friend had

decided to present Special Collections with an endowment of over \$10,000 which will serve as awards for students conducting research in the archive. After seeing the students present, friends of the donors were also inspired to add to the endowment. Although we may not always be able to closely assess the learning of our students, there is no doubt that educational activities in special collections and archives have the ability to inspire beyond the classroom. The donor summed up the event by closing with, “You made my dreams come true.”

5. Conclusion

The value of educational efforts in special collections and archives can't always be measured in a scorecard. Results can go far beyond the classroom if we allow ourselves some creativity and respond to the diverse needs of our faculty partners and students. Although it may not be possible to engage at this level with each and every class that comes through special collections, we need to be careful about the all or nothing approach. It is important to recognize opportunities for demonstrating student learning and student engagement in ways that reach our campus and broader communities. As special collections and archives take a front seat in academic libraries, being open and flexible in the way that we can work with students and faculty has become essential. The outcomes that result from these collaborations are some of the most fulfilling for students and all involved.

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