Working in the Archives

PRACTICAL RESEARCH METHODS FOR RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

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To those who left their traces for us to find

Notes

1. A pdf of the finding aid for the James Berlin Papers is available at <http://www.lib.purdue.edu/spcol/fa/pdf/berlin.pdf>.

2. A *finding aid* is "a tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records." The *finding aid* is "a description of records that gives the repository physical and intellectual control over the materials and assists users to gain access to and understand the materials" (Pearce-Moses 168).

3. *Creator* is the term archivists use for "author" or "artist."

4. Berlin discusses his use of this article in his *Rhetoric Review* essay "Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom."

5. *Separation sheets* are forms that let the researcher know that an item or items were originally part of the folder's contents but were removed during processing. Ideally, separation sheets should identify the reason for the removal and the new location for the items that were separated.

6. Museum professionals differ from archivists in this manner, instead relying on their training for describing each item in their collections.

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VIEWING THE ARCHIVES: THE HIDDEN AND THE DIGITAL

Alexis E. Ramsey

A common assumption about archives is that, once inside, the researcher can access all their holdings or that all their holdings are available for public use. Yet, in reality, most archives have more unprocessed or partially processed collections than they do fully processed collections, creating, in effect, three distinct archives—the hidden, the partially hidden or partially processed, and the visible archive, which itself encompasses both traditional archives and, increasingly, digital archives. In order to effectively research on a given topic, a researcher must be aware of these three types of archives, as well as learn how to (potentially) access hidden and partially processed collections. Because of the huge quantities of hidden collections, the Association of Research Libraries is considering new initiatives to help make hidden collections more visible and thus accessible, even as archivists continue to work processing and preserving these collections. Further, researchers must learn how to navigate digital archives, especially in relation to or alongside more traditional archival research practices. Thus, novice and seasoned researchers alike need to be aware of how much information is held within a given archive (which often means turning to the archivist), how to access that information, and how the processing and digitizing protocols used by archives help turn hidden collections visible and visible collections digital.

Hidden Collections

Although collections are quickly and preliminarily processed when they arrive at the archives, the actual, in-depth processing is often delayed for months, if not years. Archivists, who are specifically trained in appraisal, begin by determining the research value of a collection. The research value influences the level of priority given to processing collections. Archivists also evaluate the collection based upon its size, the nature of its contents, and the resources available for processing. For example, a collection needing lots of preservation work or a collection of unusually large size might by necessity wait longer for processing until needed resources and personnel can be attained. There may be things of a confidential nature within the collection, such as Social Security numbers or credit-card numbers, that should not be made accessible to researchers because such things may cause harm to either the donor or the person to whom the papers belonged. Usually, however, it is the anticipated research value that determines when collections are processed. This value is often based on research patterns in the past and user demand as observed by the archivist. For example, at the Purdue University Archives and Special Collections, processing priority was given to the Herbert C. Brown Collection, donated to the university in spring 2006, even though it is quite large at over three hundred cubic feet. The papers are from Purdue's only Nobel Laureate, and Library Administration provided special funding for the processing of this collection because of its highly anticipated research demand.

Another example of how processing decisions are made stems from my own work with the Albert Viton papers. The collection comprises the business papers from his fifty-plus-year career as a representative with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. Although Viton did not attend Purdue University and the collection makes no reference to the University, he does have some connection to Purdue. In 2004, the Purdue University Press published his book *International Sugar Agreements: Promise and Reality* (chapter drafts are included in the collection), and in 2005, Viton endowed a scholarship in his name to recognize the top undergraduate who worked in the Purdue library system. His collection was accepted conditionally, provided that he would financially support processing—essentially providing funds for materials and for someone to do the actual processing. As a result, the archive was able to hire an archival assistant, and Viton's collection was processed almost immediately. Such processing decisions only serve to highlight the created nature of both the accessible/viewable and the hidden/invisible archive. The created nature of archives demands that researchers ask why certain collections are readily available, when these collections were processed, what the archive gained from the processing of these collections, and the purpose of processing these collections. This is not to suggest a conspiracy on the part of the archivists to keep certain collections hidden, but it does suggest that researchers must understand that there are very limited resources for processing, and, therefore, priorities must be set based on anticipated research use, cost for processing due to the nature and size of the collection, and relevance to the archive's collecting mission. Such priorities should be known to the researcher.

According to Purdue University Archivist Sammie Morris, the majority of archives have only a portion of their holdings processed and available for researchers. Further confirmation of this statistic is found in a survey conducted by Morris with the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), University Archivists Group, in December 2005. Morris compares the archives of all CIC institutions (the Big Ten, plus the University of Chicago) and reports that, on average, member archives had about 46 percent of their collections unprocessed, with a high of 80 percent processed and a low of 6.4 percent processed. While Morris cannot speak to how the other CIC institutions responded to the survey results, she has been actively working to process Purdue's collections. As of summer 2009, there are minimal catalog records for 90 percent of the archives and manuscript holdings. This minimal catalog means that the majority of the holdings have at least a title-level record in Archon, the university's online finding-aid database. As other authors within the current volume have stressed, communication between researcher and archivist is key for information retrieval, and in this case, I suggest that researchers directly ask their archivists for the amount of processed versus unprocessed collections, as well as about any unprocessed collections that may be of interest to the researcher. As I note later, interest in unprocessed collections may help make them accessible, even if conditionally, to researchers.

The problem of these unprocessed and as it were hidden collections is so pressing that a special task force was created by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) to study and report on these collections. The task force operated from 2001 to 2005 and examined special collections, looking specifically at how to lessen the number of hidden collections and how to further systematically and broadly digitize collections ("Special Collections"). In 2003, the ARL task force published a white paper,[1] assessing the problems associated with hidden collections and the scholarly barriers they create. Their bulleted list began with accessibility issues:

- Hidden or underprocessed collections are at a greater risk of being lost or stolen and are difficult or impossible to recover from legal authorities if they are underdocumeted. Unique and rare materials are particularly vulnerable.
- They are inaccessible to the scholarly community and thus hinder research and research results. Even when unprocessed collections are made available—which is a security risk—they are difficult, if not impossible, for researchers to locate unless they happen to suspect that the institution in question might have such a collection.
- Undergraduates, graduate students, and junior faculty, many of whom lack the financial wherewithal to travel to other institutions, are particularly affected by the lack of access to unprocessed collections in their own institutions. (Jones 3)

Another challenge associated with hidden collections is staffing priorities where access to these hidden collections is "staff dependent." This means that staff may be the only source of expertise on these collections or that staff resources may be diverted from processing collections to digitizing already processed collections. There is a strategic plan to this staff shift: the more items are digitized, the more effective public relations, and, therefore, the publicity of digitized collections begins to generate additional interest and financial support, which can then be used for processing the unprocessed collections. The problem remains, however, of "staff expertise," particularly when staff knowledgeable about certain collections retire before those collections can be processed.

An initiative proposed by the white paper and agreed upon by attendees at the 2003 Exposing Hidden Collections Conference at the Library of Congress is that "it is better to provide some level of access to all materials, than to provide comprehensive access to some materials and no access at all to others" (Jones 5). In other words, hidden collections should get acknowledgment in the catalog of holdings and at least be brought to the attention of researchers, even if they remain unusable. Some archives create minimal finding aids and/or catalog entries for unprocessed collections precisely so they can be found by researchers who arrive preprocessing. Extended availability is becoming more common every year, especially with the Greene-Meissner model of "more product, less processing" growing in popularity among archivists. The Greene-Meissner models suggest a set of processing guidelines that "expedites getting collection materials into the hands of users, that assures arrangement of materials *adequate* to user needs, that takes the minimal steps necessary to physically preserve collection materials, and that describes materials *sufficient* to promote use" (Greene and Meissner; italics in the original). The goal is to give researchers access to more or less the entire holdings of archives.

In July 2006, the ARL task force published its final status report, encouraging all member institutions to "address of all types of hidden collections: archival, rare books, audio, video, and other media" ("Special Collections") and to do so by following four recommendations: first, to test and use a "preliminary record" format; second, to encourage collection mapping to reveal both overlaps and hidden collections; third, to demonstrate how work processing hidden collections can provide learning opportunities and faculty-student collaboration; and fourth, to work with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), which often do not have archivists or special collections librarians, to train archivists and thereby expose their collections. Overall, however, the task force stressed the need to find funding to support these processing efforts. One newer source of funding available to institutions is a program created by the Council on Library and Information Resources and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The

nationwide program, begun in June 2008, provides funding to institutions to help them identify and catalog collections of high scholarly value ("CLIR Issues").

On a more individual level, a way to alleviate the problem of hidden collections is for the researcher to take the initiative and inquire of the archivist about other collections that may be related to his or her research topic but are not yet publicly available. Some archivists are willing to allow a researcher to look through, under carefully guarded conditions, the unprocessed collection. Even if a researcher is unable to work directly with an unprocessed collection, at the very least the researcher can include a footnote in his or her project about the hidden collection, thereby aiding future researchers. The researcher's inquiry may also cause the collection to get a level of preferential treatment and a timelier processing schedule. Again, unprocessed collections are highly susceptible to theft and damage because no complete finding aid exists that catalogs each item within the collection as well as its condition, meaning that work with unprocessed collections requires a great deal of trust between researcher and archivist and, thus, access is not always a realistic expectation. These suggestions emphasize the importance of a researcher actively working with archivists and not being shy in asking for help with collections or suggestions on other potentially useful collections.

The (In)Visible Digital Archive

Another way archivists are actively working to make collections both more accessible and more widely available is through digitizing certain collections or key parts of collections. Currently, the National Archives and Record Administration Electronic Records Initiative is working to provide long-term access to electronic contents "free from dependence on any specific hardware or software" ("Electronic Records Archives (ERA)"). This initiative demonstrates how seriously archives are taking the digitizing of collections, and understanding that digitizing will exponentially aid users in research may help to further and more broadly publicize the archives. The Library of Congress is currently digitizing its special collections "hewing to a philosophy that it should be digitizing objects that cannot be seen elsewhere" (Hafner 4). Yet, as Donald J. Waters, program officer for scholarly communication at the Mellon Foundation, asserts, "As interesting and as important as standout collections in individual libraries and archives might be, the mere fact of digitizing them does not mean that once they are online they will attract and sustain an audience" (Hafner 5). In other words, digitizing does not equal automatic profitability. Yet, the necessity and value of digital archives stems from the possibility of access. Further, digitizing can be another means for preserving extremely fragile documents. For example, digitizing a document that is already torn or disintegrating may decrease the amount the document is handled, helping to stave off further damage.

The choice to digitize certain collections over others is indicative of which collections are prioritized for the university archives. Karin Becker of the Nordic Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, writes that in being "charged with documenting and preserving that which is considered valuable, the museum has also become the institutionalized arbiter of value" (3). For the Purdue University Archives and Special Collections, value is assigned to those collections that, in relating to Purdue history, also showcase the contributions of Purdue faculty members to a more national or international audience. The University Archives values those collections that emphasize the role of Purdue in the life of these otherwise-famous individuals. The first collection to get fully digitized is the George Palmer Putnam Collection of Amelia Earhart Papers. A quick inventory of the other digitized collections reveals that all have Purdue affiliations, but most have not been digitized to the level of the Earhart papers.

The drive to digitize collections is hampered by three main impediments: "money, technology and copyright complications" (Hafner 2). Indeed, even the Library of Congress forecasts that "only 10 percent of the 132 million objects held will be digitized in the foreseeable future" (Hafner 2) because of the cost prohibitions. "Scanning alone on smaller items ranges from $6 to $9 for a 35-millimeter slide, to $7 to $11 a page for presidential papers, to $12 to $25 for poster-size pieces. (The cost of scanning an object can be a relatively minor part of the entire expense of digitizing and making an item accessible online.)" (Hafner 2). For smaller archives, such as county or business archives, the cost of digitizing may preclude any objects whatsoever from getting scanned or put online. Yet, to not digitize collections is to leave these items behind where they might "disappear from the collective cultural memory, potentially leaving our historical fabric riddled with holes" (Hafner 2). The problem with the latter statement is that it assumes archive holdings form any type of complete history, when, in reality, they themselves are just as "riddled with holes" and incomplete as any digitizing effort; however, the popularity of online research does suggest that nondigitized collections may become invisible for the average researcher.

Another difficulty with the digital archive—and by this I mean digital renderings of traditional archives—is that only certain items may be fully digitized. Items such as textiles, coins or medals, or other three-dimensional objects, lose detail when scanned—if scanning is possible at all. Indeed, one can argue that all texts, when digitized, lose something when confined to a screen. And the goal of digitizing is often to entice the researcher into the archive to see, touch, and smell the real thing. Being able to touch and smell documents are important aspects of archival work because a researcher should be able to take account of the collection for him- or herself and not only through digital renderings. For example, in "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," historian Jill Lepore opens the piece with the confession of how holding a piece of Noah Webster's hair made her feel "an eerie intimacy with Noah himself. And, against all logic, it made me feel as though I knew him—and, even less logically, *liked* him—just a bit better" (129; italics in the original). Being physically with archived objects allows for a level of intimacy with the collection. The importance of the senses in archival work also suggests that being inside or in physical contact with a collection is paramount for a researcher to write with any level of authority on the collection. For instance, as beautiful as a dress looks on screen, something of its research value, its uniqueness, is lost when I cannot hear how the fabric sounds as it moves, or smell the fabric, or cannot observe the rips, stains, or stitching up close and in person because imagining how the dress functioned as a wearable object becomes too difficult. The same is true for scanned documents and other more traditional archival holdings. I may note that a document looks fragile from its digital image, but I cannot see how truly fragile and thin the paper is. Nor, for instance, can I feel how hard a pen might have pressed into the paper. And while some scanning may be highly detailed and have the option of zooming into a document, not all scanning is so advanced. A researcher using digitized collections must take into account how using a digital collection affects research outcomes in both positive and negative ways.

Considerations about the link between traditional and digital collections, and how research is completed with digital collections, are evidenced in the digital processing decisions made in regards to the Putnam Collection of Earhart Papers at Purdue. The digital collection has its own Web site linked off the Archives and Special Collections homepage (http://www.lib.purdue.edu/spcol/aearhart/). The Earhart page features digital images of all the photographs and documents in the collection, access to the collection's finding aid, biographical information, news about the search for Earhart, and directions for physically accessing the collection. Each document or photograph has its own page, on which details of the digitizing process are noted: date scanned, capture device, capture details, resolution, color depth, color management, as well as information about the physical document: title and description of the object, extent of original, language, type. The page also allows viewers to magnify sections of the document/photograph.

The digitizing is part of the Digital Initiatives @ Purdue University Libraries Project, and its mission is "committed to the production and maintenance of archival quality digital reproductions from the unique collections in the Purdue University Libraries Archives and Special Collections to be delivered via state-of-the-art networking technology to the University scholarly community and to the world." The focus of the Digital Initiatives is to make the collections accessible, though a long-term purpose of the digitizing team is to utilize "Encoded Archival Description (EAD) to make the contents for finding aids for archival and special collections available in major bibliographic databases, as well as [. . . for] a future digital (institutional) repository" ("Digital Initiatives"). E-Archives developed from the Digital Initiatives to house scanned archival content. The site debuted in 2006 and by summer 2009 included about 107,000 digital objects from many of the university's major collections. Thus, there are two Web sites for Purdue's collections: Archon for finding aids and e-Archives for collections. The immediate result of digitizing is that the collection has been saved twice within the archives, both as documents in boxes and as documents on hard drives, and then again whenever images-of-documents are downloaded or printed by a researcher.

The collection demonstrates how the process of transforming traditional archives into digital archives reinterprets the singular topology of the archival space. The digital archive does not exist in one, centralized location but in the nonlocation of cyberspace. The "dismissal" of the physical archive space also lends to the collections a sense of informality as some of the strictures of researching within the archive are voided (namely, where and when a person can use the collections). The result is a sense of pliability, or perhaps even *playfulness*, in and with the collections because the actual collections themselves are not affected. Closing the browser replaces the collection as it was when the researcher first opened the page. Researchers can therefore continually "play" with the documents, examining how the importance of the materials varies when positioned in different ways (one is no longer limited to going folder by folder because the folders themselves are gone). Thus, the act of preserving documents on hard drives and showcasing documents online affects how we access and research "in archives."

If digitizing is causing a renegotiation of the archival space, digitizing is also reinterpreting the relationship between archivists and researchers. For instance, when examining collections online, researchers may assume that the archivist has been eliminated and no longer stands between the researcher and total access to the collection. Such an idea is misguided because it is the archivists who decide which collections warrant digitization and how that process will occur and be rendered on the computer screen. The archivist, though invisible, still controls access to collections. At the same time, because the archivist is not necessarily present when the researcher logs into the collections, the ability of the researcher to manipulate and realign collections is all the greater. Digital collections do not render one party obsolete, but they do force an altered understanding of how researcher and archivist "work" together, sometimes blurring the line between researcher and archivist. Some archives are making their finding aids and digitized collections available for comment and keywords by researchers. A researcher looking at a digital item could tag onto the item a comment that there is a similar item of importance available at another archives. Or a researcher could provide

caption information for an unidentified photo or provide cross-references or additional details in a finding aid.

The Putnam collection also showcases how digitizing artifacts can allow an object to stand alone, rather than as yet another piece in a large collection. Digitizing can reassign the (potential) meaning(s) of objects, perhaps distancing them from their intended or original meaning, or give prominence to a hitherto ignored object. Such reinterpretation is not necessarily negative because it privileges the documents, but it also has the potential to deny the objects a context. Archivists are concerned about this problem; some archives are providing the links to the digital objects from within the finding aid itself, allowing the researcher to see the digital item in context and original order. (Provenance, the theory that the contents of one collection must not get mingled with another collection's materials, is still intact. The only way to affect provenance is if digitized collections cannot be separated and searched on their own. With the Earhart collection, searching is limited to that collection, so provenance is always apparent. Also, the chain of custody and ownership information vital to provenance is available in the finding aid. Ideally, all digitized collections would be available for viewing within or alongside their finding aids.) The digital images of the Earhart documents remain grouped together on a single Web page, and the collection as a whole is given its own Web site, but the original order of the collection is lost. The Web site does not tell, other than through the finding aid, how the objects are situated against/next to each other in the file folders and boxes. The documents and photographs are linked to one another through keywords, but they are also highlighted individually. For instance, one photograph is titled "Amelia with unidentified person after arrival in Oakland" ("Amelia"), and each of the words in the title, except for the prepositions, are all links to other elements within the collection. One can also use a subject search to categorize the Earhart photographs or an advanced keyword search of the Earhart documents to pull up specific groupings of documents.

Although the digitizing of documents might make visiting the hard copies obsolete and although the crash of a computer threatens the digital archives in much the same way that fire and floods threaten "real" archives, digitizing cannot threaten the objects themselves because they have intrinsic value beyond their intellectual content. Similarly, good digitization projects such as Purdue's include off-site backup tapes and on-site backups on gold archival CDs so that if a computer crashed, the digital archives could be easily restored. Yet, Purdue University Archivist Morris is emphatic that "digitization is not the same as preservation" (Morris, interview), nor does digital equal forever, and, thus, the digital archive can never be anything but a supplement to the traditional archive. Further, "recourse to the virtual archive does not mean that their posterity is any more secure. . . . The archives which cyberspace houses are no less fragile or vulnerable to disappearance, for a variety of technological, economic, and political reasons" (Burton 3). Indeed, part of the reason for the level of detail on the digital document pages regarding scanning procedures is for preservation reasons, or what Morris refers to as "preservation metadata." The information is intended to be helpful for both the researcher and later archivists or IT staff who may need to update the technology that input the collections. Digitizing for that reason remains an ongoing process for archives because "digital material is ephemeral, and digital files must be maintained, backed up, refreshed, and migrated on a regular, ongoing basis to remain accessible with current hardware and software" (Morris, "Preservation" 2). In order for the collections to remain digitally accessible, archivists must have both the resources and the knowledge to continually update their digital collections. In "Preservation Considerations for Digitization of Archival Materials," Morris suggests that archivists create both a "digital surrogate" (4) and a print copy of the original document to benefit researchers and the archives alike. Yet, the question remains, what happens with nontraditional collections? How does one digitize a three-dimensional object? Such questions are a reminder of why digitization cannot threaten the archive—because digitization is not tangible. As realistic as a document looks on-screen, the image remains an image, a representation. Thus, Morris point outs, most scholars will still come to the archive for the experience of being in the archive and for the experience of being near the original collection.

Awareness of the relationship between the digital and traditional archives, as well as how collections are catalogued and processed in each setting, should encourage researchers to ask questions, explore both types of archives, and consider how each venue shapes research. Digital archives call attention to the created nature of all archives. The digital archive is just as, *if not more*, created than traditional archives because digitizing is expensive and time-consuming work. What is digitized is specially selected. Thus, in addition to negotiating new archival spaces, researchers must understand that the application of the terms *hidden*, *digital*, and *archive* are continually shifting: a collection may be hidden one visit and viewable at the next visit, and vice versa. A collection may be removed from active circulation for restoration or digitizing reasons, or a collection may be undergoing processing during one visit and completed the next. Furthermore, more and more collections are creating at least some type of online presence. At the same time, researchers must be aware of the difficulties faced by archivists who not only have to process hidden collections but also, nearly simultaneously, digitize their holdings. As archives evolve into the twenty-first century, researchers and archivists alike are confronted with new research questions, procedures, and decisions that necessitate both parties working together to preserve, yet make accessible, the fragile and fascinating items held by archives.

Note

1. *White papers* are short treatises written to educate industry customers.

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JOURNEYING INTO THE ARCHIVES: EXPLORING THE PRAGMATICS OF ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Katherine E. Tirabassi

I deposit my jacket and bag in the entryway of the University of New Hampshire Archives, stopping at the front desk to sign in and taking only my laptop, a notebook, and a pencil with me to one of the long, wooden tables. Because I visit the archives almost daily, the staff has assembled several boxes for me on a cart; I select the box I ended with yesterday, carry the box to a table, looking for one of two cushioned chairs because I plan to remain here for several hours. Opening the box, I pull out a folder and turn each page slowly, reading through the miscellaneous brochures, letters, and conference registration records for serendipitous finds—answers to my evolving research questions. Occasionally, I find an artifact that I want copied, and I place the long, thin, white paper bookmarks supplied by the archives to indicate which document I need. As I look through the folders, I take notes—possible leads to other boxes and folders, quotes that I will want to refer to, new questions that arise as I read, and connections that I want to remember later. Sometimes, I type out whole sections of an archival text, looking for patterns or information that I might not see otherwise.

The process I describe above presents a snapshot of my many days in the University of New Hampshire Archives as I conducted research for my dissertation. This scene is likely quite familiar to researchers who have worked on long-term archival projects. In some ways, my research process was random, as I sifted through folders that might or might not yield information useful to my study. In other ways, this research process was ordered; I developed a list of materials to look through, adding to that list as I learned of new resources and searching through these documents sequentially, folder by folder, box by box. The method itself was organic, shaped by the research process itself and shaped by other key theoretical and pragmatic factors that I discuss in this chapter. In developing this method, I read what I could about archival methodology, but after finding few pragmatic suggestions for conducting archival research, I ultimately found it was my entry into the archives itself that shaped my approach most significantly. Drawing on my work in the UNH Archives, as both a researcher myself and as a cocreator of a writing program archive, I present four principles of archival research that grew out of these experiences and that speak to some of the pragmatic concerns of archival research. This experiential model of archival research will, I hope, prove useful to researchers developing their own personal approaches to archival research.

How Archival Definitions Shape Research Approaches

In her article "X-Files in the Archive," Susan Miller argues that understanding what one means by archival research is an important consideration in taking up this work because "queries about how one does archival research rarely specify what it is that one learns how to do. That is, when we make prior assumptions about what 'archival research' is, we may erase many options and experiences that composition scholars haven't yet taken up" (1). Though the brief narrative at the beginning of this chapter presents my apparent familiarity with the UNH Archives, this familiarity developed over a series of encounters. With each visit to the archives, my understanding of the nature of archival research continued to shift as I encountered new surprises and struggled with seemingly irresolvable gaps within the archives. Each encounter also influenced every aspect of my research process—from designing my research project to negotiating the archives to deciding when to stop gathering data and begin data analysis.

Before spending time in an archive, I viewed an archive in terms of its apparent and obvious function: as a storage facility or repository preserving historical materials that might otherwise be lost in closets, attics, barns, and local landfills. But my first direct encounter with the UNH Archives, as part of a collaborative team designing a local writing program archive, reshaped my definitional views of archival research in significant ways. In the summer of 2003, Cinthia Gannett, then director of the UNH Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program, created a research team that included herself, me, fellow graduate student Amy Zenger, and composition historian John C. Brereton to create an archive for ten years' worth of writing center and WAC records (1993 to 2003) at UNH.[1] The generative work of creating this archive reshaped my view of an archive as an inert repository of artifacts to a layered, historical record of dynamic stories. I saw firsthand how artifacts already housed within a university archive could be reimagined with a fresh perspective by a researcher asking a different set of questions than those implied by the archive's established categories. I also saw

that artifacts could be added to the archive to extend the historical picture of a given collection or collections. This new conception of the archive aided me as I began my dissertation project on the history of writing instruction in the 1940s, a study I refer to throughout the rest of this chapter as I outline some practical approaches and challenges of archival research.[2]

Key Principles Shaping Archival Spaces

As I worked with materials to be submitted to the university archives, I developed not only a deeper theoretical understanding of an archive but also a better sense of the kinds of organizing principles governing the construction, maintenance, and investigation of an archival collection. In conducting research for my dissertation project, I recorded my personal observations of how the archives was constructed—where I found artifacts, how particular artifacts were labeled or linked in ways that I did not expect, and how this archival construction impacted me as a researcher. Through these observations, I came to see that there were four main research principles driving my work in the archives. These four principles helped me to negotiate the array of archival artifacts I encountered daily, formed my essential conceptual framework, and guided my day-to-day work in the archives, thus influencing my evolving understanding of the archives. I want to note here that the archival field has its own complex, defined, and clearly articulated series of organizing principles for archival construction requiring a great deal of study and expertise. In contrast, the principles that I outline here originated from my experiences researching in the UNH Archives and, as I show, served as a means of understanding and navigating *this* particular archival space. Because I realize that not all researchers will have the opportunity or resources to develop a writing program archive or to spend the amount of time that I did in an archive due to constraints of time, location, or deadlines, I offer these principles to those embarking on archival research projects, particularly projects in an unfamiliar archive. The four principles I have named and their descriptions are as follows:

Principle of selectivity: the researcher's understanding of how archivists select and omit artifacts for a given collection.

Principle of cross-referencing: the practice of searching across documents for contextual traces that clarify an archival document's rhetorical situation or that confirm, corroborate, clarify, or contradict a fact or point cited in a given document.

Principle of categorization: the development of keywords and finding aids that help researchers access information in the archive.

Principle of closure: the researcher's understanding that there are inherent gaps in archival records and that while the archive is complex and rich, it cannot be searched exhaustively. Finding the ending point or knowing when to make an exit is an essential part of archival research.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on defining and discussing these principles in greater detail, presenting my personal observations based on my work in the UNH Archives and explaining the applicability and importance of understanding each principle for researchers preparing to enter an archive. Although earlier I pointed out that each archive is different in methods and policies, I submit that some version of these principles is applicable in most, if not all, archival settings.

Principle of Selectivity

First, I observed that archivists need to be selective in developing a usable archive. For researchers, this means developing an understanding of how archivists select and omit materials for an archival collection; this is the application of the *principle of selectivity.* Including all of the materials from a donor into a given collection has the potential to create an archive that is too cumbersome for researchers and that could overwhelm the physical space of the archive. Some artifacts have to be omitted, while others are selected; applying a principle of selectivity allows the archivist to sift materials that are appropriate for a particular archival category and to negotiate with the donor(s) about what materials are most interesting or historically significant for the archive.[3] Keeping this principle in mind is important to the archival researcher because it emphasizes the need to interrogate the archival record and to enter the archive with questions about what kinds of stories aren't being told, can't be told, and won't be told given the data available. Because the archival record is inevitably incomplete, an awareness of such silences and gaps leads the researcher to look past established categories, established in the finding aids, in the archive in an attempt to fill in gaps, to ask new questions of the current archival record, to conceive of new labels for materials in the archive, and to look for materials that are not yet in the archive but that corroborate the researcher's developing thesis or fill in certain gaps in understanding. These materials might be found in a department's filing cabinets, in a community member's attic or basement, or on the shelves of a local historical society.

Principle of Cross-Referencing

Ironically, one of the places where archival researchers locate gaps is in the artifacts themselves, in artifacts that are acontextual—with no clear author and, at times, just a vague temporal marker. In order to look for contextual traces for these documents, if they can be found, we look, as we do in other cases of missing information, in new places and are, at times, willing to do more with less, or, as Ruth M. Mirtz puts it "to conduct research when we must fill in many blanks with what we know from events outside the documentary materials" (121). Because most archival materials reach the archivist, and consequently the researcher, in the form of boxes and folders that provide a marginal context at best and more often than not no context at all, the researcher needs to look for *contextual traces* that situate the document in time and place. Without these traces, the researcher has to infer the document's context and should, ethically, make it clear in the resultant historical narrative when intuitive leaps have been made. Carol Steedman notes that the historian is, after all, "the reader of what is never intended for his or her eyes" (30); the historian, then, needs to locate contextual traces to help him or her make interpretive connections about and between artifacts.

Understanding that such acontextual gaps are inherent in the archive, the researcher must apply a *principle of cross-referencing* in attempting to read across the documents to fill in some of these gaps. In reviewing documents to be submitted to the writing program archive and documents for my dissertation research, I learned how important a document's contextual traces can be. Whenever possible during my research process, I tried to develop notes that described a document's rhetorical situation—the author (when knowable), the intended audience, and the purpose of the document.[4] Finding these contextual traces helped me to determine whether certain documents were vital, useful, or tangential to my study, to confirm what I thought were emergent trends or developing traditions, and to reassess my understanding of the types of documents that could or should be relevant to my study. For example, when I first began my dissertation study, I looked at a series of letters focusing on the annual University of New Hampshire Writers' Conference, started by Carroll S. Towle and held from 1938 to 1961. Some of these letters were written on stationery that told me far more about the author than simply the signature—previously unknown information such as a home address or institutional affiliation. However, the letters also contained language that was understandable only to the members of that particular community. By searching the official brochures of the conference, I located some contextual traces within the letters; for example, in a letter signed by "John," I determined from the letter's content, from the writer's mention of a collaborative lecture that he was designing with the American poet Rolfe Humphries, and from the conference schedule and brochure of that year (1945) that this signature referred to John Holmes, American poet and teacher at Tufts University, who lectured and led writing groups at Towle's writers' conference for several years.

But in my experience, finding these contextual traces was not always so easy, apparent, or possible. Some documents were in folders assembled by faculty or staff members who could no longer be contacted, and the rhetorical situation of other documents was hard to decipher because quite simply too much time had passed or too much information was missing in the documents themselves. As I examined whole folders, I could sometimes find contextual traces in what archivists call the "original order"[5] within the folder; for example, if a document's temporal context was in question, as in an undated letter, the surrounding documents sometimes provided insights into the chronological order of the documents. And, as noted above, the concept of original order was helpful as I worked to piece together the story behind incomplete documents in a file, such as an incomplete series of letters between two writers.

Another means of finding contextual traces is by cross-referencing archival documents with other related documents, as I did with the Holmes letter, or with artifacts found in unofficial archives—student newspapers, college and university publications, departmental filing cabinets, historical societies' records, and public library special collections; researchers could also, as I did, interview faculty, staff, students, or local specialists who might shed some light, directly or indirectly, on gaps within certain documents. As I conducted my research, I developed particular questions to ask of the archival materials that I encountered in my study to extend my understanding of their context and of their appearance in the archive itself:

- Who included this document in the archival record, and why?
- Why is this document included in this location?
- Who created this document originally and for what purpose/audience?
- What gaps do I see in the archival record that might be filled in other places in the archive or in other unofficial archival sites? And, what gaps can't be filled?

The answers to these questions may be found in unexpected places. For example, after discovering a box of letters and poetry by Robert P. T. Coffin, American poet and long-standing "leader" (as they were called) at the summer UNH Writers' Conference, I found a few letters indicating Coffin's assessment of the writers' conference and a few letters describing the political climate of the Bowdoin College English Department during the 1940s. These discoveries were crucial to my study because I wanted to know how the writers' conference staff felt about its practices and emergent traditions and because I wanted to know more about the structures and debates in English departments at colleges and universities geographically close to UNH. Had I not searched a folder that seemed to be unrelated to my study, beyond Coffin's connection with the writers' conference, I might not have made this discovery, and I would have missed out on this piece of the contextual puzzle.

Principle of Categorization

As I conducted research in the archives, I also learned that, as they organize the documents found in an archive, archivists use what I call a *principle of categorization* to develop finding aids that make an archive accessible and navigable for researchers. When a researcher begins an archival research project, he or she should develop as many classification terms and key questions as possible in order to make the search more fruitful. However, because the archival record is incomplete, historical research is often messy, unwieldy, unexpected, and ultimately is always constructed by the historian's selections, omissions, and biases. Despite the laudable efforts of archivists who develop categories and multiple finding aids for archival materials, there will always be a researcher coming to the archive with a question that is not best served by these finding aids, though material in the archive might exist to respond to the question itself[6] (see Elizabeth Yakel, "Searching and Seeking in the Deep Web," and Sammie L. Morris and Shirley K Rose, "Invisible Hands," in the current collection). In short, finding aids and keywords cannot account for every research question. As Robert J. Connors notes, "archival papers and notes tend to be cataloged separately," and "usually researchers have no way to know what college archives contain without hands-on examination, and that can be expensive and difficult for many scholars" (20). For the researcher, then, it is important to take note of where a document is found and to consider why it is catalogued in this manner, considerations that provide insight into the archive's categorizing structures and allow the researcher to imagine additional potential locations in the archive that could yield relevant data.

In exploring the UNH Archives, for example, I determined that documents were organized based on four primary criteria:

- As a collection of artifacts donated by a certain person, as in Coffin's papers
- As a collection of artifacts created by university staff members, as in presidents' papers
- As a collection of artifacts created in connection with a given event or institutional tradition such as the UNH Writers' Conference (1938–61)
- As a collection of artifacts created in connection with a specific course, such as Freshman English, an academic department, or a university committee

I found that as I learned more about the archives' layout, I could cross-reference materials more easily because I could look for material about a specific person or course in two, three, or even all four categories.[7] Understanding the principle of categorization also provides the researcher with information about the ways that certain artifacts have been valued or viewed by archivists and, potentially, by the institution and can allow the researcher to consider how he or she might recategorize or resee the document in the context of his or her study. For example, in my dissertation study, I looked at a box containing the papers of Edward Eddy, assistant to the president during the early 1950s. This box was categorized by one of the roles that Eddy held at UNH, but the reason I was interested in the box was that it contained pedagogical information on the Freshman English course and documents created by the English Department regarding this course. Although Eddy's papers and his lesson plans for Freshman English were important, the more useful information for my purposes was the insight into the policies and practices of the English Department that this resource provided.

Principle of Closure

For the archival researcher, the time comes when following new leads and the search for cross-references must end. This principle of closure is inherent in the archival structure itself because collections—even while containing gaps—must eventually be opened to the public. In a similar vein, the archival researcher, too, must plan an exit from the archive in order to present his or her discoveries to a larger audience. As I spent hour after hour in the archives, observing the comings and goings of researchers, I began to recognize the importance of knowing when to make an exit from the archive or what I've called the principle of closure in archival research. Even when there may be more materials to investigate or cross-reference, there comes a time when the researcher needs to find closure for a given research project. The archival staff is available to help researchers locate and contextualize artifacts, but they obviously leave it up to the researchers to organize their time and to develop an exit strategy. This exit strategy can be shaped by external factors such as travel arrangements, financial resources, or project deadlines (or, in my case, the need to begin writing my dissertation). A key factor in finding closure can also arise from the researcher's need to make sense of the data already collected and/or to find out what more, if anything, needs to be gathered.

Archival research takes a researcher on a journey of surprises and serendipities and, at times, fruitful tangents. But the tangents can also become dead ends, consuming time and energy that he or she cannot afford to expend for too long. Although the researcher wants to be thorough, there needs to be an ending point, a clear deadline to archival research. Sometimes, that deadline comes in the form of a publication due date or a need to get to the writing. Or, the deadline comes as one's planned visit to an archive comes to an end, and there is a need to return home. As a researcher living close to the archive I was searching, I constantly struggled with the question of closure, wondering if and when had I cross-referenced enough or gathered enough data. But Carol Steedman points out that the researcher must accept that she "will not finish, that there will be something left unread, unnoted, untranscribed" (18). It is possible, of course, that a study need be long-term, stretching across months or years, and located in multiple archives; that all depends on the scope of the project and what the researcher's writing goals are. And, it is possible that a researcher might return to an archive

while writing about the research to confirm certain hypotheses or fill in gaps. But one danger in archival research is that the research can go on endlessly and can become consuming without a deadline. Returning to primary research questions can help a researcher evaluate whether he or she's gone too far off track or whether the search, while tangential, is still productive. There will always be one more box or folder that might bring a new discovery. But the researcher must, at some point, accept the need to stop researching, realize that some discoveries are best left for another time or another researcher, and engage in the process of writing—to share his or her research with the world.

Applications of Archival Research Principles in Local Contexts

This final section considers why the principles I've outlined in this chapter can help the researcher use his or her time in an archive productively. Understanding these principles of archival research allows the researcher to become acquainted with the richness and limitations of the local archive and to design a research study that takes these issues into account. As I have shown, they also provide strategies for the researcher to begin negotiating the archive. Connors argues that early in the research process, as questions are forming, researchers need to "know their archives," to know what materials are available and how to access them (25). I agree; researchers need to comb archival finding aids for terms that might yield partial answers to their research questions and to familiarize themselves with the policies, procedures, and terms of access of a given archive. For example, at the UNH Archives, the policies and procedures are outlined in a document that the researcher signs prior to working in the archives; the document focuses especially on how researchers should handle, obtain copies, and secure the "right to publish" archival materials. Understanding these policies early in the research process helps researchers prepare for the workday itself—to bring the proper note-taking materials, to gain access to materials stored in alternate facilities, and to plan for expenses related to archival research such as travel, length of research time, and photocopying documents.[8]

Part of knowing the archive is locating and accessing materials in the archive itself. Though I had some prior experience exploring the established archive before I started my dissertation research and had accessed online lists of finding aids telling me what materials I could expect to see, I found that I still needed to learn more about the archive itself, its structure, policies, and procedures, and the staff working daily in the archive to help me negotiate the distance between my research questions—what I wanted to know—and the artifacts that would give me answers or lead to more, nuanced questions. Another important part of knowing the archive is researching the archive in its local context, not only its specific policies and procedures but also its theoretical underpinnings and priorities. These factors affect the type and scope of archival collections and whether the researcher needs to pursue local resources beyond the archive. I developed the four principles described above by spending a significant amount of time in the local site of the UNH Archives.[9] Given that many researchers do not live in proximity to the archives they explore, I present these principles to provide researchers with initial points of consideration as they enter new archival spaces.

Approaches to archival research must be built, in part, in response to the local archive itself. Each archive has its own distinctive structures, strictures, procedures, and policies, and exploring materials as well as taking note of organizing features specific to a given archive are vital activities for archival researchers. As Gesa Kirsch comments, "being there physically, both in the archives and actual location where the historical subject lived, is invaluable. There are many things I would not have been able to explore virtually or online" (20). I have endeavored to provide specific suggestions for approaching archival research, shaped by my experiences working in the UNH Archives, but these suggestions are generalizable only to a point because the pragmatics of archival research are inextricably linked to the local archival context, and a researcher must negotiate strategies that fit within these local contexts as well.

When we choose to conduct archival research, it is because we have a passion for the work and the questions that are pushing us to find answers. Archival research can be exhilarating in the wake of a new discovery, but the overall research experience can be a slow, even painstaking, search for insight amid folders and boxes. A challenge in archival research is learning to negotiate the seeming idiosyncratic nature of an unfamiliar (or even a familiar) archive in pursuit of answers to our questions while remaining open to new directions that the artifacts might take us. Such pursuits take a great deal of time. Understanding—and adding to—the principles of archival research that I have outlined can help researchers navigate local archives more efficiently and lead the field of rhetoric/composition to serendipitous insights we might not otherwise have.

Notes

1. As we developed the materials, this work expanded to include other UNH writing programs as well. For a fuller account of this partnership, see Cinthia Gannett, Elizabeth Slomba, Katherine E. Tirabassi, Amy Zenger, and John C. Brereton, "'It Might Come in Handy': Composing a Writing Archive at the University of New Hampshire: A Collaboration between the Dimond Library and the Writing Across the Curriculum/Connors Writing Center, 2001–2003." *Centers for Learning: Libraries and Writing Centers in Collaboration* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries Publications in Librarianship, 2005), 115–34.

2. See Katherine E. Tirabassi, "Revisiting the 'Current-Traditional Era': Innovations in Writing Instruction at the University of New Hampshire, 1940–1949," Diss. University of New Hampshire, 2007.

3. There are moments, of course, when these principles of selectivity change, due to theoretical shifts in a field; in her work with the writing program archive, UNH Archivist Elizabeth Slomba notes that her field is just beginning to recognize student writing as valuable artifacts to be preserved. Her work with the team to develop a writing program archive helped her to see the importance of student writing to the field of composition:

> In some archival literature, archivists are encouraged to collect student papers to document student life on campus. But in practice, there is a tacit bias against collecting papers because they are difficult to collect, do not have inherent research value as secondary sources, and do not immediately reflect in themselves the student experience. But what Cinthia, John, Kate and Amy were advocating was the collection of papers for documenting both the process of writing as well as the textual products and along with evidence of writing pedagogies. This triangulation of materials made a difference in my understanding of the desirability of collecting all levels and stages of student work along with other program materials. And it also emphasized the advantages of studying writing in a university or college archive because the whole process could be studied from course development, to the kinds of specific genres assigned, to the resulting papers and teacher's responses and evaluations. (Gannett, Slomba, Tirabassi, Zenger, and Brereton 123)

4. Through her example of researching the origin of the entrance exam for first-year composition, Mirtz provides a useful methodology for reading archival documents: considering authorship of the document when available, looking for the existence of documents in different departments or locations, and then analyzing the trails of history that researchers can find in the lines of each document (124). For further information on reading archival materials, see the series of articles by John C. Brereton, Linda Ferreira-Buckley, and Stephen Mailloux, "Archivists with an Attitude," *College English* 61.5 (1999): 574–90.

5. According to archivist Richard Pearce-Moses, original order is defined by the field as "the organization and sequence of records established by the creator of the records." Pearce-Moses explains that original order "is a fundamental principal of archives" because "it preserves existing relationships and evidential significance that can be inferred from the context of the records," and "it exploits the record creator's mechanisms to access the records, saving the archives the work of creating new access tools." In describing the development of the UNH writing program archive, Amy Zenger and Katherine E. Tirabassi note that as the group prepared materials to be sent to the UNH Archives, its members learned more about the program they were part of as a result of original order "because the way documents are ordered can reveal a great deal about how the creators and users envisioned their own work" (127–28).

6. Susan Miller, in her discussion of the challenges of negotiating the "spotty texts" in an archive, points out that "unless a relevant archive . . . is well-catalogued to guide a researcher to examples of assignments and student writing that are proofs for *one* perspective on this hypothesis, an archive is a difficult place to be" (2).

7. Categories other than the ones outlined here do not fit within this listing; however, these general categories were the main organizing features that I identified while researching in the archives and that proved useful as I cross-referenced materials.

8. See Lynée Lewis Gaillet, "Archival Survival," in the current collection for a discussion of policies and procedures in the archive. In my experience, the policies and procedures of the archives helped to shape my research methodology, due to specific rules regarding how documents could be accessed, handled, reproduced, and the like.

9. Because I did not have to travel far to the archives, I was limited only by the hours of operation and by the time constraints of my project.

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(EN)GENDERING THE ARCHIVES FOR BASIC WRITING RESEARCH

Kelly Ritter

> I analyze a frankly male tradition. Sometimes the people quoted here wrote as though they considered women to be part of humanity, and sometimes they wrote as if they did not. My decision to write about a male tradition does not mean that I am not forwarding a feminist agenda.
>
> —*Sharon Crowley,* Composition in the University

> Rhetoric and composition scholars have been making use of an archive assembled by others, with other purposes in mind.
>
> —*John C. Brereton, "Rethinking Our Archive: A Beginning"*

I am new to the work of the archives. I became interested in researching the past—specifically the early twentieth century—while re-reading James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* when I happened upon Berlin's quick note mentioning the "Awkward Squad" at Yale in the 1920s. The Awkward Squad was the label given (by Yale faculty) to the students who placed into basic (remedial) writing there—students who took drill courses in grammar and style "off the books" until they could meet the institutional expectations for writing and be allowed back into "regular" first-year English literature courses. I was fascinated by this stratified notion of writing instruction—especially at Yale. As a teacher of basic writing at primarily urban, public institutions, I wanted to understand this decidedly elite, male tradition of basic writing and put that instruction in the context of what basic writing pedagogy means today. So I headed to the Yale University archives, just a few miles down the road, to find out more.

As a woman researcher into this somewhat alien world of men's-only writing, I tried in the summer of 2006 to create a cohesive story out of a great number of dirty, ragged, yet pristinely indexed and catalogued documents related to first-year writing in Yale's manuscripts and archives collection. I sat quietly among other scholars, all of whom were set upon the same general detective work as myself—piecing together clues about the past from the displaced locale of the present—but none of whom were *composition* scholars, I thought, as I peered casually over their shoulders. Some were sprawled over maps of antiquity; some were holding magnifying glasses to yellowed manuscripts written in other languages. Others were furiously typing notes on their laptops while balancing three or four books in their laps, fiercely protecting their findings. But no one was talking; no one was noticing me, either, as I wandered, a little aimlessly, back to a seat in the far reaches of the reading room, near the oscillating fan. My nervousness—(*Am I the only one who sweats in the summer?* Apparently.)—led me to other questions, ones that very much resemble the questions we often ask ourselves when we first begin to teach. Am I the only one here who is a visitor, who doesn't have some "legitimate" affiliation with this institution? Does anyone know that *I* don't know what I am doing? Or, to put it more boldly, am I the only *imposter* in the room?

My feelings of loneliness in that elongated, musty room—and my growing paranoia that my archival research was not nearly as legitimate as these other scholars' work—may have been a symptom of something larger—akin to John C. Brereton's comment about the relationship of the archives to rhetoric and writing. As a writing teacher, I felt not only a little lonely, missing the lively exchanges of my classrooms of writers, but also in uncharted research territory—to be at work on such an investigative project without the lively input of other composition and rhetoric scholars nearby, physically or virtually. The archives are a place of hallowed silence, often with no phones, Internet, or other connections to the modern world (yes, they allow laptops, in an odd way privileging the clean, streak-free shine of computer notetaking to the buzz of pens and paper, which may pollute or even ruin the archival materials altogether). And no personal effects—kind of like how prison must be, I thought, or high school gym class. All my belongings had to stay in a neat, little space just outside the reading room. In a gesture that harkened to nicer, simpler times, the surprisingly friendly staff attendant kept a stash of quarters for scholars who lacked the necessary money for the coin-operated lockers. If you borrowed the quarter, you gave it back after the locker spat it out and released your belongings. I wondered how many times that same quarter had been used and for what research. Did Jerome Karabel, for example, use that quarter to research into the anti-Semitic practices of Yale's admissions for his book *The Chosen*? Did George Pierson use that quarter to complete his two-volume, seminal history of Yale? How long had that quarter been jangling around, exactly? How long do the archives hold their accidental artifacts before letting them return to the open world?

I asked myself this last question, and ask it still today, because as a composition scholar, I found the archives a mysterious, secretive place—a club to which I had been granted temporary, if not full, membership. In addition to feeling alone in my historical query, I also had a difficult time tracing a clear, linear path to any information about basic writing at Yale, given the documents I culled from the archives for review. As Susan Wells notes, the archive often "resists knowledge in a number of ways. It refuses closure; often, it simply refuses any answer at all" (58). I, too, deduced that there was a clear resistance to closure in the scattering of documents that I found, none of which spoke directly to what I wanted to know about first-year writing, let alone basic writing. Importantly, there was *no* archive for the English department or for first-year writing itself. Nearly every other department had a box of archives (or multiple boxes) but not English.

My past perceptions of the openness of composition's history—and its collegial, shared present—was swiftly contradicted by this glaring absence of documentation regarding Yale's own first-year writing histories and larger English department. This was quite unlike the copious documents in Harvard's archives—as detailed by David Joliffe in his own archival reconstruction of student writing in the nineteenth century at Harvard. Joliffe's study was, in many ways, a more difficult undertaking: to analyze the themes (compositions) written by Harvard students in order to ascertain their social and political attitudes toward what Joliffe terms a "morality of instruction." But he had primary materials to work with; his search allowed for textual analysis to take place. Comparatively, I was hoping to find departmental curricular committee notes (or something equivalent), records of the construction of the Awkward Squad course, group, or classification, or, ideally, student accounts of participation in the course or discussions of its value (or lack thereof). No such luck.

Instead, I had to reconstruct a history of basic writing at Yale by thinking "outside the box," to use that corporate cliché. And what a box it was—with solid sides and hidden trap doors. Begin a search with "composition" and "Yale" in the online archival records—nothing. Try searching for "basic writing" and "Yale"—still nothing. Realizing that I was using modern terms to do distinctly unmodern work (a lesson of the archives for a scholar of the present like myself), I tried "remedial" and "Yale." Found some things—in related databases—but none of them archival, and none of them housed at or written by Yale divisions or officials. Finally, I *eliminated* composition-related search terms altogether and used "admissions" and "Yale," or "first year" and "Yale," or "undergraduate education" and "Yale." *Now* I got somewhere. Hence, the first lesson learned: Composition scholars, don't call it what it *is*; while scholars in other fields—literature, history, philosophy—may have their own clearly labeled archives, especially at elite institutions where our work is not a "subject," we do not have such luxuries of documentation. Instead, compositionists traversing the archives at such institutions must walk in a large circle *around* where key documents might be hidden, then move in smaller, concentric circles, closing in on the small scrap that might bear some archival fruit. Particularly for scholars working with early-twentieth-century or late-nineteenth-century archival materials, remember to consider past parlance for first-year writing. It's not "basic," it's "remedial" (or "hospital," or "dummy," or "zero" English, as Andrea Lunsford and Mike Rose have shown in their own historical work). Writing teachers who think not only in that perpetual present but forward to the future, the outcomes of today's writing projects, must in the archives reconstruct themselves as detectives of the past, which includes the pejorative past and all its labels. In doing this detective work, I thought immediately of that old comedy sketch "Think like a Phonebook." It's not "clothing," it's "apparel." Makes perfect sense.

Second lesson: Composition scholars cannot do archival work alone, just as in our larger professional lives. We need help from the inside. In writing program administration, for example, this help may be most readily found not in one's historical department but in the admissions office, the dean's office, the registrar, other departments—roundabout but valuable sources and locations. In archival work, the most obvious source—the archives themselves—similarly may not yield results. One needs an interpreter, an interloper who lives intimately on the inside of the institution but away from its academically driven biases and political locations (*Remedial Composition? Eek! We don't DO that here . . .*). My insider came in the form of Diane Kaplan, the director of Yale's archives, who rushed to my rescue just as I was about to throw in the towel and leave with the two pages of notes about the curricular offerings in first-year writing between 1920 and 1955 that I had gleaned from studying Yale undergraduate course catalogues (which cannot lie; they are contractual, as well as historical, fixed records of presence and absence).

Diane encouraged me to look at archival documents constructed elsewhere in the university to reconstruct what *may* have been the conditions for basic writers and basic writing at Yale from the perspectives of those other stakeholders in the process (dean, provost, president, scheduling officers). Diane helped me form those predatory-like circles around broad swaths of information in hopes of finding a few good traces of history in Yale's composition and rhetoric experiences. In doing so, Diane allowed me to conclude that the trajectory of first-year writing, especially basic writing, has *always* been intensely political; when no direct or primary documents would tell me about its institutional history at Yale, surely its ancillary documents, those which spoke of its budgeting, its faculty involvement, its curricular import schoolwide, would tell the tale.

Some of the types of documents are detailed below. These documents were housed in nonobvious places, such as the files of the dean and the president, the undergraduate admissions files, and, in one case, a private collection of student papers.

- *Memos* between the English department chair(s) and the dean, and/or the dean and the president. These memos were frequently cordial exchanges about staffing, budgets, or other faculty accomplishments (such as "congratulations to Professor X on the publication of his fine volume on DeFoe"). Other times, the memos were barely polite back-and-forth conversations about a troublesome faculty member or another departmental problem. Given that many of these problems concerned staffing the courses "nobody wants" (first-year writing), I was able to glean quite a bit of context and history from reading these memos and letters, as they discussed first-year writing as part of a larger problem or the end product of another, that is, student literacy concerns. Composition scholars must be willing to slog through these often lengthy exchanges and pull out the useful slivers of evidence. For example, a long letter about Professor Henry Canby, who in 1932 apparently wanted to reduce his teaching load, involved a discussion of how relieving him of his duties would compromise the overall staffing picture, including having to "omit provision for the Awkward Squad."
- *Annual reports* to and from the president. These invariably include the dollar amounts allocated for staffing courses, including first-year writing, as well as important figures such as enrollment numbers, number of students who failed a particular course, and sometimes grade distribution. Any composition scholar seeking an overall view of the state of a writing program at a particular historical marker can use these numbers to paint a larger picture of things.
- *Administrative documents* from university curriculum committees and other similar bodies. Sometimes, these committees have special names depending upon the subject—for example, the Committee on the Use of English by Students at Harvard. At Yale, more general curriculum committee files at the university level yield results, such as sample syllabi from the Basic Skills courses for the Army Specialized Training program, which included an early basic writing syllabus from the mid-1940s.
- *Sample student papers*, not from any English department archival collections but from the private collected papers of alumni. These were few and far between—and time-consuming to locate. I found few samples that I could use, one being a very nonfascinating paper on the poem "Low Barometer" written for English 15 (the literature-composition course at Yale) in 1953. This

student's collected papers also included his informal writing from preparatory school (in England) and some other exams. In sum, they did not help me significantly, but scholars in the archives should know that many alumni may keep their early papers in the archives.

- *Sample placement examinations* as well as sample entrance exams from the United States Armed Forces Institute and the University of Chicago Scholarship Exam, designed to determine higher-level placements in English literature as well as other subjects. Again, these documents were not archived by the English department but by the Records and Reports of the Office of Institutional Research. Current scholars may believe that "Institutional Research" only became an office in the university's current assessment craze. Not so. Yale's OIR had volumes of records, many pertaining to placement and admission, such as the examinations above and many cross-indexed with organizations such as ETS.
- *Articles* about Yale and first-year students, such as "The Brightest Ever," written by Katherine Kinkead in 1960 and archived under Yale's Office of Public Affairs. Scholars working in the archives and seeking materials about mass-required subjects such as first-year composition should consider what delving into these publicity files might garner. As we know, many a university reputation is built on the success or failure of its general education curriculum. Kinkead's article gave me a valuable context for the curricular developments happening at Yale during this time; in addition, I was able to access memos regarding the article, correspondence with Kinkead, and other related documents by searching through the public-affairs archival records.

As I read through these widely categorized, inner-sanctum documents and memos, I not only observed the lack of *direct* attention to first-year writing as a subject, let alone a scholarly endeavor on campus (a finding that did not surprise me, but I was eternally hopeful that my expectations would be overturned), but I also observed the total lack of women's involvement in this reconstructed history. Third lesson learned: The archives make a female scholar, especially a composition scholar—one who spends her life making meaning of writing as a path to identity—look at herself more closely and find that self objectified through history. In other words, I have always assumed that writing teachers are doing some agreed-upon, universal "good" in their work. Regardless of our gender or our "social standing," writing instruction is *good* work, not tempered by who we are socially or demographically. But I remembered myself in this work—remembered that I have "grown up" in composition studies benefiting from a highly liberal, democratized field since the 1970s. This position of particular subjectivity caused me to initially be limited in my archival research—unable to understand, for example, why there were no files for the writing program at Yale, let alone the English department. I had not understood, or had not been able to understand, what earlier *versions* of composition instruction looked like or for whom they were created. I expected volumes of information from an English studies/composition studies perspective, which in my experience, was also significantly created and maintained by women.

Instead, I found myself staring for inordinate periods of time at the handwritten correspondence that had been dictated to women to type for formal distribution to other male faculty and administrators, who were doing the "real" work in the field at this particular institution during this time period. I found myself wondering, therefore, was I the only Woman besides the secretary who had ever looked at these documents? And if so, why was that—especially because composition studies has, in my lifetime, been a field of women scholars, researchers, as well as teachers. Had no woman ever sought to interpret these documents before?

I tried to put this potential discovery in the context of how I had been trained to view composition studies—as someone who came to the field from creative writing, where gender ascriptions are less pronounced in favor of other political demarcations associated with the cultivation of "talent" (read: breeding, training, external and internal patronage of one's work). I knew that a traditional cultural label for the teaching of first-year composition—"tradition" encompassing notions of the pejorative, in its effort to maintain a practice that does not disrupt the status quo—has been "women's work." This label, however, as publicized and politicized by Sue Ellen Holbrook, has come to stand for renewed power and agency for women in composition studies—scholars, teachers, researchers—who are acutely aware of their positioned history in this heavily gender-coded field. The root of this label is academia's view of the teaching of first-year composition as a labor-intensive but critical duty of irritatingly enormous proportions, much like the mothering of numerous small children. Such a duty is best relegated to women whereas the "serious" work of teaching literature (and other subjects that are truly "about" something), the site of ideology, free-thinking, and philosophy, is best suited to men.

As Alice Gillam argues in "Feminism and Composition Research: Researching as a Woman," such a dichotomy can be attributed to "the equivocal term feminization, a term that can be read as meaning either a female takeover of composition or a composition takeover of the feminine" (48). I felt, in the archives, as if I were embarking on that "female takeover" in a particularly hostile—if inanimate—environment. Citing Elizabeth Flynn, Gillam notes further that Flynn's notion of "feminization" is "not equivalent to a feminist presence in composition discourse" (48). In other words, deconstructing and claiming the field of composition studies, for women, are Catch-22s: If we overtly claim the field for research and scholarship, it becomes highly feminized and thus marginalized by definition, but if we reject ownership of the field and equally overtly attribute masculine attributes to its methodologies, it becomes less gender coded but also less powerful as an arena of significantly women's work, in the positivist sense. Susan Miller argues that this is why "composition professionals have found it entirely reasonable, if not entirely successful, to redefine their hitherto blurred identity in more crisply masculine, scientific, terms" (123).

Perhaps because higher education in general and composition and rhetoric specifically have made these rather enormous strides in the last forty years, we often don't stop to consider what was happening, politically speaking, to the ultramarginalized world of basic writing before even *women* were allowed into its negatively constructed confines—that is, before composition itself was a discipline. More to the point, we rarely consider how it is for women to now reconstruct that all-male history in a field where the research, writing, and publishing of seminal documents that will characterize the field for the next generation of researchers and scholars are frequently done *by* these very women. This realization is part of the third lesson for new composition studies archival historians like myself: in order to understand the history that you seek to uncover, you must denounce your complicit ignorance *of* that history and recreate what has been lost, even if what results is in direct conflict with how and why the field is operating today.

As a woman researcher—one who never attended an Ivy League institution and one who works at an institution of more than 60 percent women students and faculty—I was also struck by my own emotions that arose when I encountered archival documents from this historical phenomenon, the pre–"women's work." Like Crowley, I encountered a set of documents that, in their rhetorical aggregate, sometimes did not seem to consider women "part of humanity." Also like Crowley, by investigating these documents and reflecting on their effect on me as a scholar, I believe I am now considering a more "feminist agenda" than I had previously envisioned when first undertaking this research. Now, I want to approach these archives that, in Susan Wells's words, are "full of echoes" where I must "suture together the relation between one text and another" (55) as the primary (historical) and secondary (political) meanings of these materials are often at odds with one another.

In particular, I have come to a secondary—though by no means less important—argument in my archival research. Though historical research such as mine has its cause rooted in the discussion and dissemination of essentially "men's work" during one portion of composition studies history (i.e., roughly 1920 to 1960) and its impact on the modern history of basic writing at selective institutions, *the reflection* on that research process can also be of value to other scholars—women scholars in particular. Every time we bring research to our

composition studies community, diverse in its needs and interests as it is, we need to think about *audience*. What kind of rhetors would we be otherwise? Investigating my own investigation of these archives—a kind of meta-analysis of the archival work—is a means by which I can reconsider these particular historical documents and their various audiences from a gendered, ergo inherently political perspective. And perhaps such a perspective can raise new questions about how and why we choose our historical research subjects and the ways in which we need to prepare ourselves for historical research in which our "selves" may be absent altogether.

Thus, I believe my research was affected by my identity as a reader—a woman, for whom these documents, memos, curricular plans, were *not* written and by whom they were never supposed to be seen. Perhaps giving readers a sense of a few key documents that I encountered in the Yale archives will provide some perspective on what is like to spy—and I use that word deliberately, to invoke the violation of boundaries and transcending of intended communications and confidences—into one setting for the all-male world of basic writing.

Here are some examples of the specific archival documents that caught my attention as I was doing my research in the Yale archives:

1. A faculty member who, after being denied tenure in Yale's English department in the mid-1930s, lamented that this meant he would have to teach at a "girl's school" for "much lower pay," thereby not only jeopardizing the financial welfare of his family but also his own career path—that is, that the girl's school was less career-worthy than his current position at Yale. He cites these as primary reasons for why he should be renewed/reinstated in Yale's English department. This memo I found among the records of the chairman, in otherwise pedestrian files detailing reappointments and awards of tenure. This faculty member was characterized as somewhat disgruntled for his complaint—but not a word was said to contradict his perception that a "girl's school" would, indeed, be a step down on the food chain. Such a research finding echoes another memo I later found when working in the Harvard archives, wherein a professor requests an assignment to English A (first-year writing) at Radcliffe, so that he might "try his hand at teaching girls," as if it were a new and amusing hobby, like stamp collecting.[1]

2. A bulletin from the late 1950s, published by the College Board (now ETS) but included in the Yale newspaper and archived in the files of the English department, that forwarded a proposal that the reading and grading of "freshman themes" should be done by "housewives" with college degrees, as a way to parse out the arduous labor associated with the teaching of writing (i.e., the *reading* of student writing). This document surprised me because I did not immediately see its connection to Yale, other than its publication in the Yale newspaper. But after some further thought, I realized that this news release fit into the archival

materials perfectly, as it reflected (if accidentally) the beginning of the end of "gentleman's" instruction in first-year writing. This news release served as the icing on the cake, the cake being represented by lament after lament in the archives—from the chair to the dean, the dean to the president—about the taxing, backbreaking work of grading "freshman themes." Such work took time away from the valuable work of literary instruction for these *scholarly men*. Such work was relegated to the faculty of the freshmen year, a male faculty of mostly junior professors and lecturers (or the pre-1950s equivalent). Around the time of this news release, the climate for research versus teaching was shifting to allow for the 2/2 (or less) teaching load now present in the Ivy League. I believe that the call to shift such menial tasks to "housewives" signaled the beginning of the end of overworked men teaching writing.

3. The visual representation of the Yale English department in 1924—a solemn photograph of about thirty men between the ages of twenty-five and seventy—published in the Yale English Department newsletter of that year. The men look intently at the camera, stately and formal in their appearance, collective in their presence. This is less a group of *faculty* than a group of *distinguished men*. Long before scholars were thinking or writing about visual rhetoric, the photographer for this newsletter was surely thinking about the photographic presence of these men *as* the English Department itself. I was thinking about what these scholars would think of *me*, jeans-clad, dusty, girly me, looking at their pristine, posed photograph. Would I have even been *good* enough to teach their young men how to write?

4. The same newsletter's standing column, entitled "Father to Son," which included a letter of sendoff from a father *and mother* to their son, entering Yale, about his upcoming college experiences:

> When you receive this you will have attained your majority—the time when boys are conventionally supposed to take on the responsibilities of manhood. In other words, you have technically at least, ceased to be *our* boy and have become *your own man*. There is something inexpressibly sad to us in the thought; and if we did not realize that *our boy* is passing into good hands as he becomes *your man*, we should find it difficult to be reconciled to the change. . . . We love you not alone because you are our son, but because you have by every consideration of filial devotion and regard provided yourself worthy of it. (italics in original)

And so on . . . signed "your father and mother" (in the year 1899). Women and their concomitant social roles did not fit into this paradigm; the mother of this boy even appears as only a silent partner in the letter-writing enterprise. As a mother myself, I would feel slighted if I had to sign on to such a column and be such a silent agent in the creation of my child's intellectual identity. Again, such a heavily patriarchal tone echoes historian Samuel Eliot Morison's explanation of how those students relegated to remedial writing at Harvard in the 1920s were regarded by their tutor/instructor, who "takes in hand the pupils reported to him by various departments, gives them *fatherly advice*, and sees to it that they receive the steering that should be theirs" (70).

Of course, none of these documents themselves explicitly say "women excluded," but they do, in varying ways, create a world for men, by men, about men—or *gentlemen*, more acutely—with no future intention of being open or available to women readers. In addition, they allocate women very little space in these men's educational process, except to be approving mothers, at best, or silent workhorses, at worst, assigned to grade college writing from the secluded (and perhaps quite isolated) space of their own domestic spaces. These documents are the product of an age, to be certain, and are endemic of the culture much more than the discipline. But as archival documents that led me to other intellectual conclusions about basic writing, they redirected my research.

They caused me to consider what basic writing meant not only to Ivy League students of the time but also to *men* in general—especially the teaching of writing, the division of labor practices in writing, and the moral associations made between good writing and "good order" throughout the documents. Whether it was to account for returning servicemen in the 1940s who needed particular kinds of social and intellectual training based on their veteran and (implicitly) lower-intelligence status or whether it was to account for the increasing number of "less-prepared" men that Yale was forced to admit to stay financially afloat in the 1920s, first-year writing, archivally speaking, had as its central aim the intellectual *and* social growth of these young men in order that they be cleanly prepared for the higher-order task of literary analysis, the true province of men.

David Joliffe observes that Harvard composition students in the late nineteenth century were "urged to choose as their subject matter some aspect of contemporary manners or morals, to try to construct some ideological system to account for the phenomenon, and often to urge upon their readers a sense of what they see as their moral obligation for dealing with the issue at hand" (163). This is an interesting way to connect to the tone and register of the memos going between deans and chairs and deans and provosts in the early part of the twentieth century at Yale. I was struck by the rigorous formality of these exchanges—not because I expected the correspondence to start, "Hey Jim! What's up?" or be overloaded with modern slang or mannerisms. No, I was struck because the memos each had a significant amount of ethical appeals to them—that is, for the good and decency of the college, please allow Mr. X to remain on faculty, or please allow us $500.00 more for Project Y. Rarely did I see the politics of the larger university at play; instead, I primarily found men making appeals to other learned men, for the benefit of the young men taking the English courses and the only slightly older men teaching those courses.

For example, take this snippet of an annual report from 1929–30 that, rather than beginning with departmental needs or appeals, refers first to the retirement of an elderly dean:

> . . . his manifold services to every important aspect of teaching, scholarship, and administration will find appropriate recognition throughout the whole University. Here, his closest colleagues within his own Department unite with one accord in voicing Loyal admiration of his distinguished accomplishment and deepest gratitude for their Privilege of intimate fellowship with him. (Nettleton, "Report")

The notion of "intimate fellowship" in particular is pervasive in the archival materials that I uncovered—a kind of unspoken gentlemen's bond that unites these chairs and administrators. I further find this sort of discourse jarring to read as a woman—as I believe my presence in this "intimate fellowship" was never intended nor particularly foreseen. Unlike the kind of mixed-sex bonds that might be formed at a public, coed university, Yale's male faculty were heralded in these documents as the sheer *embodiment* of the quality and value of the English department. As Nettleton puts it in the 1924 English department newsletter, "the Yale English Department is no more and no less than the men who make it" ("English" 1061). While I concede that every department is proud of its faculty, Nettleton emphasizes not these men's scholarship or teaching acumen but their simple *presence* (collectively, as represented in the group photograph on the page of this newsletter) as evidence of its "substance" ("English" 1061).

Ultimately, the ways in which this gendered reading of the archives affected my research were many. First, I began to think of the homogeneous population at Yale in the early twentieth century as not just of primarily one social class, or one race, but very much of one gender. I had deliberately wanted to research this population for its homogeneous properties, but I had not fully considered how an environment of writing that in no way included women could color the tenor and scope of that writing instruction, at least in interuniversity documents and policies. Second, stemming from this, I began to see myself in a unique position as a researcher—as a teacher of basic writing who had always taught in diverse, mixed-gender classrooms and who considered single-gender settings from the perspective of *women's* education but never men's. Finally, my experiences in the archives allowed me to translate the notion of "access" quite differently. No longer was my research primarily about class distinctions or issues of economic access or educational status. Now I was more fully considering how gender—and the

aims of gendered instruction—indeed played a large role in the construction of these basic writing courses and—though this is speculative—may have contributed to their usually "secret" position in the curriculum, a curriculum of honor and good standing.

My archival experience has caused me to think carefully about Brereton's call to "begin asking what is missing from the archive and how it can get there" (574). But I mean to translate this call quite specifically as a call for missing perspectives *on* our archival material. We cannot change the facts when confronted with very specifically gender-coded materials such as the Yale archives; we cannot make women live and work where they were once excluded. But we *can* think about how that restricted history might open doors for us, as scholars, to reinterpret the histories of our field and ask, "What can we gain by confronting the discomfort we feel when these historical assumptions are overturned, if unexpectedly, by archival research?" As I continue to engender these archives for our basic writing historians, I hope to continue to be aware of how my position as a woman scholar in the present is a critical component in the search for and translation of our composing pasts.

Note

1. For more information on writing instruction at Radcliffe, see Sue Carter Simmons, "Radcliffe Responses to Harvard Rhetoric: 'An Absurdly Stiff Way of Thinking,'" and JoAnn Campbell, "Controlling Voices: The Legacy of English A at Radcliffe College 1883–1917."

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ARCHIVAL RESEARCH AS A SOCIAL PROCESS

Neal Lerner

Many of my experiences conducting archival research have been intensely isolating. Deep in university libraries, opening dusty boxes and leafing through yellowed papers that haven't felt a human touch in decades, I experience the stark contrast with the qualitative research projects I've conducted in which social interactions—interviews, participant observation, talk—*are* the research methods. In archives, I feel alone as I strive to grasp the worlds of Robert Moore, a graduate student at the University of Illinois in the late 1940s, or Francis "Mike" Appel, the director of the University of Minnesota General College Writing Laboratory in the 1930s. These efforts have offered me only glimpses of what the authors might have been thinking through the material that has somehow made its way into the archives. I emerge from these long sessions with only a partial knowledge of these previous worlds and disoriented to my present one, akin to coming back home after extended travel, the familiar made strange by my absence, to paraphrase Clifford Gertz.

The isolated nature of archival research conjures up notions of isolated writers producing texts that are the products of a benevolent muse. While such romantic ideals have long been countered by what we know about the essential social nature of composing, the social world created by archival research is due a similar treatment. In other words, my sense of isolation while conducting archival research is illusory, more of a statement about that particular moment (myself, alone, in a university archive) than about the larger enterprise. What I have come to realize is that the social forces that shape archival research are many, from a researcher's experiences and expectations, to contemporary events, to the choices made by those who have donated papers to an archive, leading to fragments of information that even the best archive will offer. In other words, archival research is not