ABSTRACT: Not much has been written recently about encouraging the use
of primary source materials by undergraduate and other students. Most of
the attention paid to this form of outreach has, in any event, been focused
on manuscripts repositories. College and university archives have special dif-
culties convincing students and faculty that their primary sources are relevant
to the curriculum. It is an effort that can result in tangible benefits for the
archives, however, and should receive high priority.

Most of what has been written in archival literature and said at professional
conferences regarding the use of primary sources in undergraduate teaching has
been focused on manuscripts repositories. As difficult as it is to overcome the
general reluctance of teachers and students to work primary sources into a
course curriculum, it is probably even more difficult when the primary sources
in question are the college's own archival records. No one seems to have done
a survey to determine the reasons, but some good guesses would be:
1) A college archives documents the history of the institution. There remains, it
appears, a strong prejudice in the minds of most teachers and students
against institutional history as being so stiflingly narrow, dry, and bureaucratic
that no one but a small and dreary band of economic historians or histori-
ans of higher education could possibly be interested in it.
2) Those who view institutional history as boring and pedantic probably charac-
terize institutional archivists as mousy antiquarians who might know the
entire genealogy of the school's first president but who would not have the
interest, skill, or background necessary to relate their holdings to a liberal
arts curriculum.
3) College archivists who have administrative rather than faculty appointments
may be seen as even further beyond the academic pale. Will they not always
give priority to answering the petty questions of an alumnus or satisfying the
bureaucratic demands of the dean rather than to serving the needs of the cur-
riculum?

One way or another, if college and university archives are going to become
partners in the curriculum, these stereotypes must be overcome. Easy to say, hard to do.

The difficulty has to do not only with the image others have of college and university archivists, but also with the image some of the archivists have of themselves. Archives are administrative units, meant to serve their institutions first and scholars second. Yet schools are unique institutions, in that their core function is not "production," "work," or fundraising but teaching (occasional mixed signals from administrators notwithstanding). The bottom line at a college is not the endowment, the legislative appropriation, or the alumni fund but the quality of instruction. Advancing the use of archival records in the curriculum should be considered an important part of, rather than an alternative to, the "administrative" duties of the archivist.

Much depends, of course, on the particular situation and mission of any given archives. When Carleton College hired its first professional archivist in 1985, most faculty and students did not know an archives existed at the college, and those who did seemed to hold the aforementioned stereotypical views of it. However, the new archivist had several things going in his favor. One was that his job description—the closest thing to a mission statement that the archives has to date—attaches high priority to stimulating "the use of archival materials as a resource and laboratory relevant to the educational program of the College." Thus, the archives started with the administration behind it in attempting to broaden curricular use of its holdings. It also started with a small student body and faculty (1800 and 170 respectively), on a campus with only one library (containing the archives), and in a town where the two college archives (Carleton and St. Olaf) are the only repositories of unpublished primary source material.

On the other hand, the archives is commensurately small: the archivist is the only professional, with support consisting of only thirty hours per week of undergraduate work-study help. The archivist also faced a pretty stable faculty, most of whose course curricula had been set for years; among the 95% of the faculty with PhDs were some—especially in the history department—who looked askance at the archivist’s paltry master’s degree in history. Moreover, the archivist in this case did not feel comfortable cultivating the types of personal contacts with faculty—or even students—that might come from "schmoozing" at cocktail parties or over dinner. A different type of approach was necessary.

Significant in the planning process for building curriculum use of the Carleton Archives was Timothy Ericson’s booklet, Academic Outreach: The Use of Archival Materials on the College Campus, and the solicited advice of other archivists at small colleges. These sources supplied several course assignments, covering a wide range of disciplines. Not a single one of these assignments has yet been of practical use at Carleton, in the sense of having been adopted or adapted by a faculty member, but gathering this information was vitally important in stimulating the archivist’s own ideas and in giving him needed moral support.

The first direct and formal approach toward soliciting faculty interest came a few months after the archivist arrived on campus. Each fall, all twenty or thirty new faculty visit the library for a brief orientation session. The archivist had secured a presence in this session for the archives, and gave a ten-minute spiel
outlining what he naively imagined to be the range of possible topics and assignment types the archives could support. New faculty, he reasoned, might not have their syllabi tightly nailed down and might even be desperate for new ideas. New teachers proved not to be desperate, but by and large they have been the most receptive to suggestions for involving the archives in their curriculum. In the first two years of these orientation talks the archives was approached by four professors about developing course assignments for classes in botany, Afro-American history, American studies, and education. These courses are illustrative of the range of connections possible between the archives and the curriculum.

The education course, for example, is entitled “Youth, Culture, and Schooling.” In it, the students work in three-person groups to do projects on some aspect of adolescence. For three years now, the archivist has been invited into class to outline sources available in the archives. Although the students have other options for approaching their research, each year two or three of the groups do draw heavily on archival material. Each group requires an initial interview with the archivist to refine its topic—an interview that usually results in the students being urged to read the relevant background material in the published histories of the college. When they return, their requests are usually for such things as student handbooks, underground newspapers, subject files from the student senate and the dean of students office, course catalogs, and yearbooks.

The first four-hour lab for a course called “Biology of the Vascular Plants” is an introduction to the history and evolution of botany, using material from the library’s rare books collection and the college archives. The material is pre-selected by the professor in consultation with the archivist, so this assignment requires little additional work beyond explaining to the students how to handle fragile material. The archives material used for this assignment includes primarily 19th century course catalogs and early 20th century student papers.

For a course in American studies on “Issues in Higher Education”—the first two weeks of which examined the evolution of higher education in the U.S.—the archivist was asked to give a lecture on Carleton’s origins and growth as compared to that of the class’s main case study of Harvard. This course, unfortunately, was a one-time-only affair (the faculty member, who was also associate dean of students, left for another job the next year), but it illustrates that the archives can support the curriculum in ways other than as a resource for term paper or assignment research.

For a course on “20th Century Afro-American Protest Thought,” the archivist was invited to give a bibliographic instruction talk discussing the nature of a primary source and illustrating the types of relevant primary sources available in archives. This did not produce any student research; additionally, the course was taught by a visiting professor and not repeated. An early lesson one learns when attempting to increase undergraduate use of the archives: failures happen.

In addition to the library orientation presentation, every year the archivist reads Carleton’s course catalog and sends formal letters to professors teaching courses that might take advantage of the archives’ holdings; he also occasionally informs professors by letter concerning specific acquisitions. Until recently, this strategy had not repaid the effort. At one point the archivist was encouraged to address the entire English department faculty on how the archives might be
used for rhetoric courses (Carleton’s equivalent to freshman English). He was
granted a cordial reception but the only interest he was able to elicit was in
the archives’ holdings of the department’s recently defunct literary maga-
zine. **Failures happen.** Recently, however, a professor teaching a course in
visual anthropology received a memo outlining our holdings of photographs
and illustrated publications and encouraged a student to use these materials
for a term paper.

Even more important than these direct methods had been indirect contact
with faculty and students through the archives’ outreach program. Through
brochures, exhibits, and publications, the archives has sought to illustrate that
its holdings can be used for *interesting research*—research that transcends the
narrow bounds of “institutional history.” These efforts also attempt to show that
the archivist is liberally educated enough to develop and support curricular use
of the archives, and that the *academic* use of archives material is as important
a part of the archives’ mission as is administrative support. Finally, the exhib-
its and publications are part of a general attempt to make the archives more visi-
bile, accessible, and inviting.

To this end, the archivist undertook a weekly column in the campus news-
paper during 1986 and 1987, developed three exhibits per year (one for each
academic term) for display units near the archives in the library building, won
administrative financial support for writing and publishing an illustrated history
of the astronomy program at Carleton, and composed several lengthy features
for the alumni magazine. Most of the magazine articles drew heavily on exhibit
text, while the exhibits often drew on research for the column, so several birds
were killed (or at least wounded) with the same stone.

The exhibits are mounted on a shoestring budget in second hand display
cases by someone (the archivist) with no direct exhibit training. But students
taking study breaks in the library read them. Faculty taking breaks from meet-
ings in nearby seminar rooms read them. Faculty and students read the
newspaper column and the alumni magazine as well. Most student newspa-
pers—at least at small colleges—*do* seem to be desperate for material, and the
archives column quickly became one of the most popular features. The exhibits
and the writings are usually aimed at relating Carleton history to some broad
tHEME in U.S. history. Recent efforts have focused, for example, on the gradual
secularization of a college founded by the Congregational Church, Carleton’s
long struggle to achieve and define true racial and cultural diversity on campus,
the response of students and administration to the nation’s wars, and the chang-
ing roles and expectations of women at the school.

All of this research and writing has been a lot of work. Where has it gotten
the archives? The question is answered in part by raw statistics: refer-
ence/research use of the archives has increased 200% since 1985. Successes
have ranged from minor to major. Biology professors have seen in exhibits pho-
tographs that they thought were excellent illustrations of changing land-use
patterns on and around the campus and have requested copies for use in class.
The history of the astronomy program got an economics professor interested
in the history of his department, which brought him down to the archives
and led to his directing one student to the archivist for term paper sources.
Students have seen in exhibits and newspaper columns various items or inci-
dents about which they wanted to give oral reports for their Spanish and
German courses. Students have also discovered topics for term papers in American studies, sociology, and religion courses.

The first religion paper, indeed, was an example of a best case scenario. The brief biography of Carleton’s first dean of women in an exhibit on women at Carleton prompted a junior in a course on women in American religion to investigate the dean’s views on women’s role in the Congregational Church. The student wrote an “A” paper and reported favorably to her professor about the assistance she had received in the archives. The professor came to talk to the archivist about giving a bibliographic instruction presentation to the entire course during the next year. Before the term was out, the professor also invited the archivist to her survey course in U.S. religious history to give a lecture on how the founders’ ideals for Carleton reflected mid-19th century Yankee protestant ideology (a lecture assisted by handouts of photocopied archival material). Failures do happen, but success often breeds success.

Along with the explicit link between outreach and undergraduate use of the archives there has been an implicit connection. The more visible and accessible the archives, the more likely are students to discover on their own unexpected or extracurricular uses for the archives. The archivist never would have known about an assignment in another religion course to do an essay on ritual and symbolism had not a student decided on his own that commencement would be a good example and that a tape of the previous year’s graduation exercises would furnish useful evidence. Despite the popularity of the archives with the biology department, it took a student from a geology class asking for historical photos of a certain part of campus to make clear that other natural sciences might be interested in the archives’ holdings, too. There has been a gratifying increase in the use of the archives by undergraduates doing research for extracurricular projects. Student senators interested in cleaning up the campus lakes and in restructuring the student activity fee have come to the archives for facts and background, and members of student organizations have begun coming to the archives for information and material to mount anniversary and informational exhibits.

The Carleton archives’ three years of experience in the realm of using archives to support undergraduate education suggest one general strategy for success: go beyond the traditional. Do not rely on the traditional direct approach with faculty, for example, individual letters and phone calls or even presentations to departments. Instead, reach out indirectly to students and teachers in as many ways as possible. Do not rely on traditional disciplines in planning outreach. History and political science have been failures in encouraging student use of the archives at Carleton. Biology and religion have been the biggest successes, followed by American studies, and the social sciences. (Across the river at St. Olaf, the archivist has had her best success with the religion, music, and women’s studies departments.) If students of geology and Spanish can find relevant material in the archives, it is easy to believe that almost anyone can.

Do not rely on traditional uses. The bulk of undergraduate use of the Carleton archives is not in the form of extensive research for term papers and class assignments. From photographs being used as teaching aids to yearbooks being examined for examples of the psychology of prejudice, brief “raids” into archival sources constitute legitimate use. If an archives is to have value to the undergraduate curriculum it cannot be an ivory tower within the ivory tower,
looking down upon anything but research for senior theses. Use of any kind begets further use, it would seem, and use of collections is, of course, one of the primary reasons for an archives’ existence. The use is legitimate, moreover, even though the bulk of it (at Carleton, at least) is not directly related to traditional provenance-based record groups or “unpublished sources” in the narrowest sense (that is, manuscript or even first generation typescript). Much of what gets used in the Carleton archives takes the form of mimeographed and stenciled reports, minutes, and circulars, or typeset items such as freshman handbooks, college fundraising brochures, and the student yearbook.8 Record groups get raided for folders bearing on a particular subject. But although “published,” subject oriented, and quickly raided, the material is still primary, and it presents a different set of challenges to undergraduates previously acquainted solely with hardbound books and Newsweek magazine as sources.

Unlike graduate students, who have years to spend on a project, undergraduates usually have a week or two at most; it is up to the archivist to be a teacher to some extent, providing the necessary background or explaining the importance of a folder’s provenance. The archivist as teacher may be, for some, the most nontraditional concept of all. But it is an important one. Archivists can be teachers not only by properly orienting undergraduates to the material they use in the archives, but by stepping into the classroom. Bringing the archives into the classroom is as legitimate an avenue of educational support as bringing students into the archives. This can encompass more than simply traditional courses on the history of the institution or even on the methodology of primary source research. Rather, archivists can enter the classroom to give bibliographic instruction and serve as guest lecturers in a wide variety of disciplines. It is the archivist’s responsibility to make the sources in his or her archives relevant to the liberal arts curriculum; if the archivist cannot do it, then nobody can, or at least nobody will.

At Carleton, part of the battle had been won from the start—the administration expected the archives to have an academic as well as an administrative mission. Success as an adjunct to the curriculum (as well as success in serving administrative reference needs) has led to tangible rewards from the school’s resource allocators.9 All colleges and universities exist primarily to educate, and successful performance as an academic support unit ought to carry weight with even the most hidebound school administration, but until we as archivists firmly believe that undergraduate education is an important part of our mission, no one else is likely to believe it. Using college and university archives as instructional materials should be viewed as an opportunity of great potential. It is up to us to exploit that potential, not to the exclusion of our administrative role, but as an integral part of it.

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NOTES


4. I use the word “college” advisedly, since this statement may be less clearly true of modern research universities.

5. Timothy L. Ericson, ed., Academic Outreach: The Use of Archival Materials on the College Campus (River Falls, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin, River Falls, 1984). Among the archives and archivists kind enough to supply me with material were (in no particular order): Anne Pearson, Oberlin; Ken Cramer, Dartmouth; Martha Slotten, Dickinson; Anne Kintner, Grinnell; Teresa Taylor, Bryn Mawr; Daria D’Arienzo, Amherst; Florence Hoffman, Denison; Joan Olson, St. Olaf.


7. However, ideas about how to attract math and computer science students would no doubt be eagerly received by many college and university archivists. Tim Ericson, in a letter to the author (11 November 1988), suggests appeals to faculty in business administration, computer science, and mathematics on the basis of the abundant statistical data held in most college and university archives. Ericson also points out that, in larger schools the “History of...” courses taught by departments of physical education, journalism, social welfare, education, agriculture, etc., may be more receptive to archives sources than history courses taught by the history department.

8. The notes, where preferences may also have implications for collection policies, but I rather suspect not. Reports and circulars are already extant in most record groups, and official college publications have long been identified as archival records. I have, indeed, argued elsewhere (“University History: How Important Is It, and How Can It Best Be Documented?” Midwest Archives Conference, Spring 1987) that collecting policies that serve the administrative goals of the college will inevitably produce a wealth of material on “extra-institutional” topics. The fact that undergraduates will often have little interest in provenance, record groups, or institutional history narrowly defined may suggest that traditional descriptive methods are insufficient
for college and university archives. The question of arrangement and description is, however, best left for another paper.

9. Between 1985 and 1989 the Carleton archives' budget has increased 185%, not including the addition (separately budgeted) of two microcomputers and other electronic hardware. The staff has not yet been enlarged, but the school has had a moratorium on such increases since 1980.