Teaching with Primary Sources at Williams College
A summary report of the Ithaka S+R Teaching with Primary Sources Project

Lisa Conathan, Head of Special Collections
Lori DuBois, Reference and Instruction Librarian
Anne Peale, Special Collections Librarian

Students in Professor Brock’s Fall 2019 French 210 course, “Scientific Selves,” explore early books in the Chapin Library by Copernicus, Descartes, Pascal, Thevenot, etc., representing the Scientific Revolution and French colonization

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Summary of Findings

As part of an international study organized by Ithaka S+R, librarians at Williams College conducted interviews with 15 faculty members to learn about their practices of teaching with primary sources. For this study, primary sources were defined as "historical or contemporary human artefacts which are direct witnesses to a period, event, person/group, or phenomenon, and which are typically used as evidence in humanities and some social science research." Sources analyzed as data or consulted for artistic inspiration were excluded from the study, as were most literary texts in modern editions, reproductions of visual material, and other sources essential to the study of a discipline.

We found that the participants are motivated to use primary sources in their teaching in order to engage with materiality, generate excitement, move students out of their comfort zone, explore complexity and subjectivity, and foster curiosity and independent thought. Participants tend to perceive primary sources selected for textual content as fundamental to teaching, while sources selected for their material characteristics, especially rare books, manuscripts and works of art requiring in-person visits to repositories, are more likely to be perceived as extra enrichment.

Few faculty have formal training in primary source pedagogy. Participants commonly spoke of self-directed “trial and error” and learning on the job, often engaging other teachers and learning from shared syllabi. Faculty recognized the challenges of teaching students analytical skills to engage with material culture, and their own inexperience or discomfort can be a barrier. Faculty felt that they should already have the background knowledge and skills to teach with material sources, leading to uncertainty in the classroom when they do not. The study indicates a need for increased pedagogical support at all levels of faculty experience in teaching with primary sources, especially in teaching with material sources.

Co-instructors from the libraries and museum provide additional instruction to students on working with primary sources, especially material sources. Faculty experience time pressure when scheduling and planning in-person visits to collections, and collaboration is often limited by the late stage at which colleagues from the library and museum are brought into the planning process.

Faculty discover and locate sources through a variety of channels that include Google, library databases, prior knowledge of the topic, advice from colleagues, and assistance from librarians and museum staff. Participants reported particular challenges in selecting sources of an appropriate length, sources that use accessible script and language (whether in English or other languages), and sources that can be contextualized quickly in the classroom.

When teaching, faculty prioritize the development of analytical strategies for interpreting primary sources over the skills needed for independent research in collections. Faculty anticipate that students lack the necessary skills to seek out primary sources. Thus, most choose to pre-select
the sources their students need. When students need to locate sources themselves, faculty frequently direct them to research guides or library and museum staff for assistance.

Based on the results of this study we have identified several recommendations for staff who work with material sources, the Libraries as a whole, and the Williams campus including the Dean of Faculty and the Strategic Academic Initiative on the Future of the Arts at Williams. Our recommendations center on the need for pedagogical support for teaching with material sources, providing guidance when selecting appropriate materials for teaching, and assisting faculty in building student independent research skills.

The tangible and intangible outcomes of working with primary sources speak to the core values of a liberal arts education: learning to ask questions, formulate arguments, and assess the point of view of authors. Participants reported that primary source teaching helped boost students’ confidence and comfort with messiness and contradictions. It also generated excitement and improved engagement with material, especially when students worked with material sources. Primary sources are unruly. They can be difficult to define, difficult to obtain, and difficult to contextualize, but these features also make them engaging for students and faculty alike.
Introduction

How do Williams faculty teach with primary sources? During the fall of 2019, Williams librarians sought to answer this question by working with research and consulting nonprofit Ithaka S+R. A cohort of 25 other institutions conducted parallel studies. The goal of the project was to understand the practices of instructors who use primary sources to teach undergraduates in the humanities and social sciences, in order to develop resources and services to support them in their work. We interviewed 15 faculty members from across the humanities and social sciences, at all levels of seniority.

The Williams team consisted of a research librarian who serves as a liaison to several of the participants’ departments and two special collections librarians. All three librarians often work with faculty to support teaching with primary sources and facilitate student research. We thought it was important to include perspectives of both special collections and general collections in this study and hoped the results would encourage further conversations and collaborations between special collections and research librarians. The project allowed us to learn more about how faculty are using primary sources beyond what we have directly experienced in library instruction, and learn more about how faculty view collaboration with librarians. This context will inform our ongoing collaborations with one another and with faculty.

For the purposes of this multi-institution study, Ithaka S+R defined primary sources as “historical or contemporary human artefacts which are direct witnesses to a period, event, person/group, or phenomenon, and which are typically used as evidence in humanities and some social science research.” Among participants, however, there was not a clear understanding of what was meant by primary source in the context of the interview. Interviewers encountered this lack of clarity frequently during the course of the interviews. Part of this difference in understanding may stem from the fact that many participants purposefully challenge the distinction between primary and secondary sources in their teaching, as discussed in the Course Design section of the Findings.

Participants often focused their responses on teaching with what we might term *material sources*: the rare books, manuscripts, and art objects found in Special Collections and the College Museum. Many participants also teach with *non-material sources*: primary sources in reproduction, in translation, or in edited scholarly volumes. In these cases the sources may be reproduced in the course packet, purchased as a textbook, or accessed from the Libraries in print or electronic format.
Methodology

Recruitment

This study used convenience sampling. After receiving institutional review board approval, the researchers created a list of 36 possible interview subjects who were known to use primary sources in their courses based on personal experience of the researchers working with the faculty member or recommendations from subject liaison librarians. Researchers then prioritized the list for recruitment based on department and rank (used as a proxy for number of years of teaching experience) to achieve a wide range of faculty experiences teaching with primary sources. The researchers then invited the top 15 names on the list to participate in the study, with each researcher contacting 5 faculty members with whom she had not previously worked with extensively (see Appendix A for recruitment email).

Participants

All but one of the faculty members responded to the invitation and agreed to be interviewed. The researchers contacted another faculty member on the list with the same rank and departmental affiliation, and that person agreed to participate, bringing the total number of participants to 15. While almost half of the informants were from the History department (n=7), there were participants from the American Studies (n=2), Classics (n=2), Art History (n=1), Economics (n=1), Religion (n=1), and Romance Languages (n=1) departments as well. In terms of rank, there were 7 full professors, 2 associate professors, 5 assistant professors, and 1 lecturer, with college-level teaching experience indicated in the interviews ranging from 2 to 33 years.

Interviews and coding

When faculty members responded that they would participate, the researchers scheduled an hour-long meeting at a mutually agreed upon private location. Interviews lasted for an average of 40 minutes. In the confirmation emails, researchers shared the informed consent form and requested that the interviewees choose a syllabus from a course in which they teach with primary sources to discuss in detail. The interviews followed the semi-structured interview question guide developed by Ithaka S+R (see Appendix B) and were audio recorded. A commercial service transcribed the audio, and the researchers de-identified the transcripts for coding.

Researchers conducted qualitative analyses using CATMA 5. Each researcher read and independently coded the transcripts using a combination of open coding and a shared tag set
Findings

Training and sharing teaching materials

Faculty participants in the study have a wide range of experience with Williams and with teaching. One participant was in their second year of teaching and had no prior teaching experience; others had decades of experience and had taught at other institutions. Participants spoke of learning to teach on the job at Williams and through graduate school experience, both informal (e.g., observing their professors to absorb effective teaching styles) and more formal (e.g., through experience as a teaching assistant, or more rarely, through direct pedagogical courses and workshops). Of those who underwent training, none identified training that was specific to teaching with primary sources and some participants noted this absence.

Beyond early career training that focused on experience as a graduate student and teaching assistant, participants commonly spoke of self-directed “trial and error” and learning on the job, often engaging other teachers. Their community of practice encompasses peers at Williams and at other institutions, including connections made on social media. Conversations with colleagues also shape teaching practice, as several participants explained:

I definitely learned from [faculty member at another college] that I wanted to have [students] use the college archives and write about Williams.

All participants spoke of sharing course materials including syllabi to some degree. Some participants, particularly newer faculty, relied quite heavily on this network of sharing (“I steal a lot”) while others with more teaching experience found the amount of exchange of teaching ideas to be "pretty modest." Participants spoke more of finding shared materials through personal networks (colleagues, advisors, friends of friends) rather than through publicly available platforms such as an institutional repository (though one participant reads “as many syllabi as Google will allow me to”).

Some participants spoke of a gap between their use of primary source materials and their pedagogical confidence with material sources as opposed to edited editions of texts. Even with support from library and museum staff, faculty reported some discomfort teaching with sources in campus collections. This perceived lack of personal competency may affect how often and how deeply faculty integrate material sources into their teaching. Some participants cited a need for pedagogical help to use materials effectively in the classroom.
We’re invited to use the materials and along with that seems to be this assumption that we’re knowledgeable about how to do that.

This sentiment is not universal (another participant said “It went well from the beginning”). The expressed lack of assuredness in using primary source materials in the classroom speaks to the need for ongoing efforts to support faculty in developing their course plans and in gaining experience that will develop confidence when engaging with primary sources.

Course design

With the exception of those new to the College, most faculty at Williams teach the same course multiple times, though the frequency of course offerings varies. Participants indicated that they rarely make major changes to the structure of existing courses, relying instead on incremental changes to readings and assignments. Faculty participants identified three main reasons that they develop new courses: to fill department needs, to reflect their own research interests, and in a few cases, because they are inspired by a specific set of primary sources—either an edited collection or holdings in the College Museum or Special Collections.

Researchers identified five key aims for student learning with primary sources: engage with materiality, generate excitement, move students out of their comfort zone, explore complexity and subjectivity, and foster curiosity and independent thought.

Most faculty interviewed do not consider it a priority to teach students to define a primary source, though several participants present their students with traditional definitions of “primary” in order to problematize the rigid categorization of sources. The flexibility of the term is part of its pedagogical utility and allows faculty to discuss concepts of information literacy. As one faculty member said, “Any source can be a primary source depending on how you’re looking at it.” Participants noted that this lack of a firm definition can be challenging for students: “What students struggle with is the fact that the distinction between primary and secondary sources is in the eye of the beholder.”

Calling on an inclusive definition of “primary sources,” participants discussed a broad range of material and non-material sources, from translated texts in edited collections and digitized newspapers to early manuscripts and art objects. Participants’ responses indicated that sources they include in course packets tend to be used as evidence to support in-class discussion, while other non-material formats are additionally used in student research. Non-material sources are also commonly used for textual analysis (close reading, analysis of rhetoric and document structure). Material sources are most commonly used to connect to the material past, provide context for topics addressed in the course, and facilitate in-class discussions or short written or oral assignments.

A clear dichotomy is evident in the way faculty approach teaching with primary sources selected for textual content, as opposed to sources selected for their material characteristics. Some
participants indicated that textual sources, typically those available in published or edited collections, are fundamental to their teaching, while primary sources accessed through the campus museum or special collections are more likely to be considered as a supplement to the core course content. This approach to material sources typically involves a single visit to a repository that can generate excitement in students, or serve, as one participant put it, as “a kind of tonic after years of textbook work.” Participants also reported, however, that these one-off engagements risk becoming superficial:

And I think [using material collections is] something I sometimes am willing to do, sometimes not willing to do. It depends, you know. Honestly, it’s hard for me to convince myself that that’s giving them an extra thing that’s really aiding the goals of the course beyond other types of primary sources I can bring to bear.

What I’m trying to move away from is from this [use of Special Collections materials] being a special treat, or sort of a one-off kind of fun activity, to being something that is more deeply integrated with the pedagogy and the course goals.

The substantive integration of material sources with teaching goals referred to by the second participant requires more coordination between faculty and co-instructors than a simple “show-and tell” or “special treat” visit. Participants reported that reference librarians, special collections staff, and curators at the campus museum provide additional instruction to their students on working with primary sources, especially material sources. Visits to primary source collections are prompted both by individualized outreach and by long-standing relationships with librarians and curators. Such visits can be logistically challenging. Many participants commented on the substantial amount of class time required to undertake an in-person visit, and some expressed anxiety about the ability to plan meaningful interactions with material sources in courses with more than about a dozen students. While some faculty members required students to complete collections-based assignments outside of class, the first introduction to the material was always scheduled as a full-group session during class time.

Most participants meet with librarians and curators before class visits to select content and plan pedagogical strategies. One participant mentioned working with an instructional designer, and was also the only faculty member who explicitly indicated using backwards design. Most faculty indicated that they shared a fully-formed syllabus with librarians and curators during planning discussions, suggesting that these collaborators often enter the conversation too late to encourage assignments and learning outcomes that fully integrate the use of primary sources.

Finding primary sources

Due to the study’s focus on teaching, the questions centered on understanding how faculty thought their students accessed sources and what barriers they saw to that access. Participants
were asked about how they located primary sources for teaching and about how their students found and accessed sources. The study gathered little information about how students use sources or about how pedagogical approaches affected student learning outcomes.

Participants reported discovering and locating sources through a variety of channels that included Google, library databases, prior knowledge of the topic, advice from colleagues, experience with the material as a student, and assistance from librarians and museum staff. Several faculty noted that they often rely on sources identified in the course of their own research.

I made a list of things that seem interesting, and then I went to our website, our database for the library, and put in some titles and started searching around a little bit.

I feel like a bad researcher saying this. But, yeah, usually it’s Google and a general library search and then chasing down citations through the articles and books that I find.

For sources held in Special Collections and the College Museum, faculty usually worked with staff to identify appropriate material for teaching. Participants cited deep staff knowledge of collections as helpful, but also noted that existing catalogs are incomplete and difficult to navigate independently (“It’s how to know what is in there, and how to utilize it”). This is a perennial issue for special collections libraries and we, like many other institutions, continue to work to make our user-facing description more relevant and actionable.

Participants reported that locating primary sources to support their teaching is time consuming. Time pressure limits the amount of energy faculty are willing to expend locating appropriate sources and tailoring them to course learning goals, thus influencing the types of sources faculty are willing to present in class. Several participants also expressed concern that students lack sufficient historical background knowledge to interpret sources (“You can’t count on any kind of historical framework”), and that the time required to supply that context made using primary sources impractical.

Participants anticipated significant limitations on students’ ability to use primary sources, as well as on the effort students would put into acquiring the skills necessary to locate and interpret sources. They reported that students default to Google searches, often without understanding the limitations of the platform, and that user interface affects students’ searching methods. In response to these anticipated deficits, participants often pre-selected sources, pointing students to library research guides with curated lists of sources and databases, and directing students to librarians for assistance in searching. Most participants reported that they supply the majority of the primary sources their students use.
When assigning original research, participants often directed students to library staff or research guides for assistance. Despite the fact that several participants’ goals for primary source teaching included increased student comfort with complexity and subjectivity, some participants also expressed concern that students would be confused by primary sources once they found them.

When discussing the challenges associated with identifying primary sources, participants mainly focused on their own experience rather than the experience of their students. They were concerned about the limitations of their familiarity with available sources, or about the existence of appropriate sources. Comments on students’ challenges were generally concentrated on skills deficits, rather than on the tools or materials available to students. Participants conveyed what they saw as a lack of experience with research or a lack of ability to find appropriate sources.

Several participants cited handwriting and unfamiliar language (whether in English or in other languages) as challenges when incorporating the use of manuscripts into their syllabus, whether they were from the 10th century or the 20th. Other challenges centered on identifying, selecting, and accessing the right sources for the course, whether it was navigating through an “embarrassment of riches” or dealing with a dearth of material (especially Asian, African, and non-English-language resources). In the case of the former challenge (too many resources) the participants generally worked with or relied upon librarians to select appropriate sources. For the latter challenge, in some cases the desired sources were impossible to acquire within the course of a semester due to market constraints and collection development priorities, while in other cases participants had worked with librarians to acquire material relevant to their courses. Librarians also directed faculty to online facsimile resources for material not held locally, although the availability of digitized material is limited for some fields. Digital collections are an important supplement to our resources, especially in fields or perspectives not historically prioritized in collection development.

**Working with primary sources**

The study prospectus, written by Ithaka S+R, cites three ways of interacting with primary sources in undergraduate teaching: analyzing sources as evidence, conducting original research, and curating collections of primary sources. In our interviews, participants widely reported students engaging in the first two activities, while the third was rarely mentioned.

Participants discussed digital tools and databases in the context of finding and accessing sources, but rarely mentioned them in the context of teaching. Participants did not prioritize novel pedagogical techniques drawing on the capabilities of primary source databases and digital humanities tools. Participants instead generally favored print materials and wanted students to be able to handle material sources.
Participants were often motivated to turn to primary sources in order to complicate a received historical narrative by challenging the authority of scholars who had previously written on a topic, or the authority of the creators of primary sources. They spoke of reading “against the grain” or reading “between the lines” to uncover new interpretations and narratives. Participants engaged with these interpretations in class discussions and in assignments.

Several participants spoke of using special collections or museum resources, which requires the class to physically visit a reading room or museum. The goal for these visits was often to connect with the material past, a very common sentiment among faculty who cite the impact of interacting with material objects in a special collections library, archive, or museum. Faculty cited the sensory experience of touching, smelling, and seeing objects up close as well as the opportunity to gain an understanding of the scale (big? small?) and physical properties (smooth? flexible?) of the material. In addition to the sensory experience, participants talked of a less tangible notion of the spirit of explorative inquiry (one compared sessions to jazz improvisation), in which the interaction and outcomes are not planned, nor necessarily anticipated, and students are engaged in a holistic manner.

We want them to engage not just their intellectual resources but their emotional ones, their psychological resources, their creative energy. And primary sources are by far the best way to do that in any kind of teaching environment.

In addition to the material experience, participants frequently cited contextualization as a motivation to use material sources. Participants wanted students to understand the circumstances under which resources were created, disseminated, and used, and even how they ended up in the library or museum. In these cases, participants viewed interaction with primary sources as an introduction to mature research methods in their field in order to develop students’ understanding not only of the subject matter, but of methodology. However, some participants noted that the time required to provide such context made teaching with primary sources impossible in some cases.

Participants who visited special collections or museums with this motivation spoke of the impact this experience had on the students. One reported that the students take to it “so well and so quickly,” another that it is “impactful for the students to know they have access to the original.” Several participants reported that, while we may assume that the current generation of students live their lives digitally, they are in fact fascinated by material sources. While participants may express the significance of introducing students to material sources, students do not always follow this up with optional use of such sources. As one participant suggested, there’s more we might do to exploit the natural interest that students have in material sources.
Participants who required students to make use of material sources in a special collections repository or a museum for final projects spoke of the planning required to do so. They visited these sites early in the semester, and required students to consider their topic and sources almost from the outset. In contrast, final projects based on historical newspapers or scholarly editions did not always require the same extent of scaffolding throughout the semester. In some classes the use of material sources was optional in a final project, with the professor encouraging or introducing it as an option. In these cases, a small number of students chose to do so.

While the concept of “curating collections” was mentioned infrequently, two participants described class projects to create special collections exhibits. One described in detail the scaffolding of small assignments that built upon one another throughout the semester, again demonstrating the lengthy time commitment necessary for meaningful engagement with material sources.

Instead of lengthy projects, some classes included one session devoted to material primary sources, meant to supplement the rest of the course content. In these sessions, engagement with the material fed an in-class discussion or brief assignment (a presentation or short writing assignment). Alternatively, students were required to visit the Special Collections reading room or College Museum in advance of class so they had some exposure to the materials before class discussion. Even this type of engagement often required more than one preparatory meeting either with a librarian or curator, or repeated visits in order to consult material. Although librarians and curators provided pedagogical guidance for working with primary sources, the extra effort required to align collection visits with course aims may be a barrier to faculty.

None of the participants required students to discover their own material sources in Special Collections or the College Museum. Typically the rare books, manuscripts, or works of art used in a class were selected in advance by a librarian and/or the faculty member (usually together). Students were then either assigned a resource or given the option to choose from the selection for an assignment.

In the classroom, small groups or pairs were the most common ways to engage with material sources, with “think-pair-share” cited as well as more informal practices of roaming or milling around the room. Final assignments that required material sources included group projects engaging the entire class, or, more commonly, individual research projects in which students used sources tailored to their research interests.

Conclusions

Teaching with primary sources is transformative. Participants cited changes they saw in students and in themselves, describing students as “liberated” and “empowered.” The
experience is moving and meaningful. Participants reported that they gained new insights into students’ capabilities.

Working with primary sources helps boost students’ confidence and comfort with messiness and contradictions, as opposed to the packaged arguments (however complex) of secondary sources. This work speaks to the core values of a liberal arts education: learning to ask questions, formulate arguments, and assess the point of view of authors.

Participants also described more practical outcomes. Student research on institutional and local history has been added to Special Collections holdings. Student production feeds the College’s collecting and description of its collections. Interactions with students also affect the collection development decisions made by Special Collections staff. Other students have produced original research that was later published, excerpted, exhibited, or cited by other scholars. These tangible outcomes with applicability beyond a formal scholarly audience bring additional satisfaction to working with primary sources.

Faculty encounter challenges relating to teaching with primary sources throughout the process of developing a course. When included early in the process, co-instructors can help faculty identify sources and plan effective course-integrated pedagogy, but there is currently no centralized mechanism for this work. Our ongoing campus strategic planning process has identified the need for a teaching and learning center which could help coordinate support for course design. Early coordination with co-instructors also provides increased opportunities to arrange physical or digital access to sources, including those not currently available at Williams. In the absence of a core curriculum, instruction in the skills needed to identify and use primary sources occurs ad hoc on a course level. Uneven student competencies can discourage faculty from incorporating primary sources into their courses. While broad curricular reorganization is unlikely, a teaching and learning center could encourage and support more integration of information literacy and primary source literacy into courses throughout the curriculum.
Recommendations

All campus

- In collaboration with the Dean of Faculty, consider offering course development grants to incentivize primary source instruction collaboration with co-teachers.
- In concert with the Strategic Academic Initiative on the Future of the Arts at Williams, build upon students’ natural interest in material sources by creating opportunities for experiential learning in book history (printing, bookmaking, letter arts, calligraphy, papermaking, ink making, etc.).
- Promote contribution to and use of the College Archives syllabus collection to encourage learning and sharing of syllabi amongst current faculty, especially syllabi that have led to high-quality student research.

Libraries

- Create more programming targeted to faculty on primary source pedagogy.
- Continue to diversify primary source holdings to better reflect the Williams curriculum, working with faculty to identify high-priority areas and items.
- Prioritize user experience when describing material collections.
- Work with faculty to create assignments that promote independent student use of material sources.
- Conduct further research into how students use LibGuides and adjust guide design, content, and promotion accordingly.

Staff teaching with material collections

- Create informal learning opportunities to boost faculty confidence in the classroom use of material sources.
- Focus on building faculty capacity to navigate material collections rather than selecting on their behalf.
- Provide suggestions for shorter activities that engage with material sources.
- Communicate the time commitment typically associated with planning class use of material sources.
- Reach out to faculty who teach methods courses in the humanities and social sciences to encourage more consistent instruction relating to material sources, including sequencing from basic to more advanced skill development.
- Provide resources on paleography to help students challenged by early handwriting and incorporate paleography into our programming.
Appendix A: Recruitment email

Subject: Participate in a study on teaching with primary sources?

Dear [first name of instructor],

I’m writing to ask you whether you’d like to participate in a study Williams is conducting about teaching with primary sources. We are interviewing faculty whose students engage with primary sources in a variety of ways, including conducting research, analyzing sources as evidence, and curating collections of sources -- whether physical or digital. [Include a personalizing sentence specifying why we are reaching out to that faculty member in particular.] Would you be willing to participate in a one-hour interview to share your experiences and perspective? We are hoping to conduct interviews between August and October of this year.

Our local study is part of a project with 25 other higher ed. institutions in the US and UK, coordinated by Ithaka S+R, the nonprofit research and consulting arm of JSTOR’s parent organization. The information gathered at Williams will be included in a capstone report by Ithaka S+R which will consider broader trends in the evolving field of primary source teaching. This research study will help us understand how to better support Williams faculty in teaching. If you have any questions about the study, please don’t hesitate to reach out. We hope you’ll consider joining us in this project.

Sincerely,

[name of researcher]
Appendix B: Supporting teaching with primary sources interview guide

Background

Briefly describe your experience teaching undergraduates. *Examples: how long you’ve been teaching, what you currently teach, what types of courses (introductory lectures, advanced seminars) you teach*

» How does your teaching relate to your current or past research?

Training and Sharing Teaching Materials

How did you learn how to teach undergraduates with primary sources? *Examples: formal training, advice from colleagues or other staff, trial and error*

» Do you use any syllabi, assignment plans, collections of sources, or other instructional resources that you received from others?

» Do you make your own syllabi, assignment plans, collections of sources, or other instructional resources available to others? If so, how? If not, why not?

Course Design

I’d like you to think of a specific course in which you teach with primary sources that we can discuss in greater detail.

» Do you have a syllabus you’re willing to show me? I will not share or reproduce this except for research purposes.

» Tell me a bit about the course. *Examples: pedagogical aims, why you developed it, how it has evolved over time*

» Explain how you incorporate primary sources into this course. *If appropriate, refer to the syllabus*

» Why did you decide to incorporate primary sources into this course in this way?

» What challenges do you face in incorporating primary sources into this course?

» Do you incorporate primary sources into all your courses in a similar way? Why or why not?

In this course, does anyone else provide instruction for your students in working with primary sources? *Examples: co-instructor, archivist, embedded librarian, teaching assistant*
» How does their instruction relate to the rest of the course?
» How do you communicate with them about what they teach, how they teach it, and what the students learn?

Finding Primary Sources

Returning to think about your undergraduate teaching in general, how do you find the primary sources that you use in your courses? Examples: Google, databases, own research, library staff

» Do you keep a collection of digital or physical sources that you use for teaching?
» What challenges do you face in finding appropriate sources to use?

How do your students find and access primary sources?

» Do you specify sources which students must use, or do you expect them to locate and select sources themselves?
» If the former, how do you direct students to the correct sources? Do you face any challenges relating to students’ abilities to access the sources?
» If the latter, do you teach students how to find primary sources and/or select appropriate sources to work with? Do you face any challenges relating to students’ abilities to find and/or select appropriate sources?

Working with Primary Sources

How do the ways in which you teach with primary sources relate to goals for student learning in your discipline?

» Do you teach your students what a primary source is? If so, how?
» To what extent is it important to you that your students develop information literacy or civic engagement through working with primary sources?

In what formats do your students engage with primary sources? Examples: print editions, digital images on a course management platform, documents in an archive, born-digital material, oral histories

» Do your students visit special collections, archives, or museums, either in class or outside of class? If so, do you or does someone else teach them how to conduct research in these settings?
» Do your students use any digital tools to examine, interact with, or present the sources? Examples: 3D images, zoom and hyperlink features, collaborative annotation platforms, websites, wikis
» To what extent are these formats and tools pedagogically important to you?
» Do you encounter any challenges relating to the formats and tools with which your students engage with primary sources?

Wrapping Up

Looking toward the future, what challenges or opportunities will instructors encounter in teaching undergraduates with primary sources?

Is there anything else I should know?