Seminar in Archives, Records, and Information Management

Spring 2010

Syllabus

Tuesdays, 5:30 – 8:15

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Note on location of the class: The first session, January 26, 2010, will meet on campus in HBK 0109. For the remainder of the semester, the class will meet in the Archives Center, NMAH, at Constitution Ave. between 12th and 14th St. (Nearest Metro stops: Federal Triangle and Smithsonian – 1 block, Metro Center – 3 blocks, and Archives – 4 blocks) Students should assemble at the Constitution entrance to the building; a museum staff member will escort you from the entrance to the Archives Center. Please note that the building closes to the general public at 5:30 pm; please make every effort to be inside the building before that time.

Instructor

In March 2007, I retired from full time service as senior archivist at the National Museum of American History. Today I hold an intermittent appointment at the Museum which includes teaching this course and an introduction to archival methods for the Museum Studies program at George Washington University. I also do occasional consulting work. As chief archivist, 1982-2004, I established the Archives Center and managed a staff of up to sixteen professionals. I am a past president and fellow of the Society of American Archivists. Topics I have written on include Native American archives, business history, archival surveys, and the archives profession. For more information:
http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/about/staff.cfm?key=12&staffkey=321

Rather than formal office hours, I look forward to seeing (or phoning) with students by prior arrangement. Please call, email, or speak with me during class evenings to set an appointment.
Introduction and Course Objectives

The main products of the seminar will be a “positioning paper” and a research paper on a topic selected by the student and approved by the instructor.

The purpose of the papers is to read more deeply in the professional literature, to develop substantial knowledge in an area of professional interest, and to build and demonstrate research and writing skills. The papers should address a significant archival question, issue, or problem. The research paper should draw on the relevant professional literature but, also, go beyond secondary sources. Research papers may draw on survey data, interviews, unpublished writings, and other primary information sources.

During the initial weeks of the seminar, the class will discuss assigned readings and review research resources. In the following weeks, students will make presentations to the seminar based on their “positioning paper.” The remainder of the semester will be built around student presentations of the findings of their research papers.

Each class session will begin with an “Open Forum,” an opportunity for students (and the instructor) to update the seminar on weekly research and writing progress and to raise questions, seek advice, and offer observations about topics under consideration (or chosen) for the research paper.

Assignments and Evaluation

1. Initial readings, discussions, and written assignments. During the first seven class sessions, students will read and discuss assignments on the general topic of archival research. Readings in the American Archivist also are available online at: http://archivists.metapress.com/home/main.mpx You will need to login as an SAA member or through a portal at the University of Maryland (which holds an institutional subscription). Other readings will be on electronic reserve unless otherwise noted. Students should be prepared to discuss their own ideas and questions and those provided by the instructor.

On February 9 and 16 students will make brief (about ten minutes) presentations on their examination of an assigned “research resource.” A written report of these findings -- roughly 1,000 words -- is due on the same day and should be submitted electronically for distribution to the class. The list of resources and details on this assignment are at the end of this syllabus.

During this period, students will work with the instructor to identify the topic for the “positioning paper” and the research paper. No later than February 16, students will submit a two page statement of their topics. This should include a clear statement of the question, the kinds of sources of information needed to answer the question, and anything
further to flesh out the ideas. The statement should answer the “so what?” question: why is this topic significant?

Students should become familiar with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and its potential application to their work. [http://www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB/](http://www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB/) Research intended for publication that involves human subjects (including surveys) may require IRB approval. Dr. Bruce Ambacher has volunteered to speak with students about the IRB and act as the faculty sponsor for students in this seminar.

January 26-March 2  15% of the grade.

2. **“Positioning paper” and presentation.** This 2,000-3,000 word paper critically reviews the literature on the selected topic and places the proposed research paper within this context. In other words, this assignment “positions” the research to be undertaken for the major paper within the ideas and arguments in the profession (and more broadly) about the topic. The “positioning paper” may make use of popular sources (including web sites) but must include at least seven books or articles from professional or scholarly journals. This paper, with necessary revisions, may be reused (in part or whole) as the literature review section of the final paper.

Students will make a fifteen minute presentation to the class based on their positioning paper and ask (and answer) questions and comments from the class. No later than the Friday evening before their presentations, students will provide the class with a copy of their “positioning paper.” The copy provided to the class may be an updated version of the one originally submitted. Students are expected to have read these submissions and come prepared with critical, helpful comments and questions. The instructor will provide written comments on the paper and a letter grade.

The “positioning paper” is due March 9.

March 9-March 30  15 % of the grade.

3. **Research paper presentation.** Students will make presentations of about fifteen minutes and lead a class discussion on their research paper topic. No later than the Thursday (midnight) before this presentation, students will circulate to the class a written interim work product. The nature of this interim work product will be determined early in the semester. This assignment is intended to help students shape the final paper by presenting their initial findings and argument to the seminar for questions and suggestions.

April 13-May 4  10% of the grade.
4. **Research paper.** The main product of the seminar will be a major research paper (approximately 6,500 words or 25 pages) on the topic selected in consultation with the instructor. The paper will be evaluated on the thoroughness of the research (including use of primary sources), originality, writing style, use of footnotes, and clarity in presenting and proving a thesis. Students may submit a draft of their paper for initial review by the instructor. Final papers should be submitted electronically. Students will receive a written critique of their papers. Upon request, marked-up versions of the papers will be returned to students.

Final papers are due May 13, 5:00 pm  60% of the grade.

**Grade**

The course grade will be assigned in accordance with University and CLIS guidelines: A=Outstanding; B=Satisfactory; C=Barely Adequate; D/F=Failure; I=Incomplete.

**Please note:** This course follows all University policies and procedures, including adherence to the Honor Code ([http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/code.html](http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/code.html)), accommodation for students with disabilities, and consideration for religious holidays.

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**Part I. Introduction to the course**

1. **January 26**  Overview of the course, review of objectives. Note: **The first session, Tuesday, January 26, 2009, will meet on campus in HBK 0109:** for the remainder of the semester, the class will meet in the Archives Center, NMAH.

2. **February 2**  Readings on research in archives.

   Terry Eastwood, “Archival Research: the University of British Columbia Experience,” 243-257


   Peter Wosh, “Research and Reality Checks: Change and Continuity in NYU’s Archival Management Program,” 271-283

   Eric Ketelaar, “Archivists Research Saving the Profession,” 322-340

   Terry Cook, “‘The Imperative of Challenging Absolutes’ in Graduate Archival Education Programs: Issues for Educations and the Profession,” 380-391,

All in _American Archivist_ 63 (Fall/Winter 2000)
Have a look at these pages, especially the SAA Research Forums, 2007-2009. What are the current topics and approaches reflected here?

Come prepared to discuss these questions (based on the readings): What does “archival” research investigate? (What kinds of questions, topics, subjects?) What is the purpose (or utility) of such research? For whom? How does archival research advance the profession? Think of your own research paper in terms of the frameworks presented by one (or more) of the authors.

3. February 9 Resources for Archival Research (1)

Brief presentations by half of seminar on their examination of an assigned “research resource.” A written report of these findings is due on the same day and should be submitted electronically to the instructor (for distribution to the class).

4. February 16 Resources for Archival Research (2)

Presentations by remaining students

**Statement of topic for “positioning paper” and research paper due**

5. February 23 Research and Writing Strategies

Julia Hendry, “Primary Sources in k-12 Education: Opportunities for Archivists,” *American Archivist* 70 (Spring/Summer 2007), 114-129.


6. March 2 Readings: Student research in archives. (Pease Award winning articles)


7. March 9 Topic to be determined

“Positioning paper” due
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March 15-21   **Spring Break**

Part II. “Positioning Paper” Presentations

8. March 23   Student presentations
9. March 30   Student presentations
10. April 6   No class meeting: individual consultations

Part III. Research Paper Presentations

11. April 13   Student presentations
12. April 20   Student presentations
13. April 27   Student presentations
14. May 4     Student Presentations
15. May 11    Final class discussion
               Course evaluation: discussion and confidential evaluation for CLIS

May 13    **Research papers due electronically – No Exceptions – 5:30 pm**
Resources for Research in Archival Topics

Professional/Scholarly Journals

Archivaria: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1975-
Archival science: international journal on recorded information; Boston : Kluwer Academic, 2001-
Journal of Archival Organization, Binghamton, N.Y. : Haworth Information Press, c2002-
Archives and Manuscripts, Canberra, etc. 1959--
American Archivist, 1938-
Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference: 1984-
Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals, 2004-

Organizations: (excluding their professional journals, but including other publications, web sites, activities)

SAA
Association of Canadian Archivists
Research Libraries Group/OCLC
Visual Resources Association
Oral History Association
Association of Moving Image Archivists
Northeast Documents Conservation Center (NEDCC)
Council on Library and Information Resources
International Council on Archives (ICA)
Council of State Archivists

Institutions (report may be limited to a subset of the entire institution)

National Archives Library Information Center (ALIC)
National Archives (excluding ALIC)
Library of Congress

Databases/Bibliographies

Library Literature and Information Science
Historical Abstracts
American History and Life

Others

The writings of Richard Cox
Instructions for “Research Resources” assignment:

The purpose of this assignment is to introduce the class to a wide range of resources that might be used in the course of doing archival research. Students will give a brief presentation (about ten minutes) and submit a brief written report (roughly 1,000 words). The report should be submitted electronically for distribution to the entire class.

The presentation and report should answer “fact” questions (where relevant) such as:

What is this resource? What is its purpose/mission?
Who is its creator/publisher?
Where is this resource located?
What time period does it cover?
How is this resource organized? Intellectually? Physically?
What scholarly apparatus is employed by this resource? (footnotes, bibliography)
Is there a peer review process prior to publication? How does it operate?
What access tools are available for using this resource? Indexes? Abstracts? Staff? Online information?

More importantly, the presentation and report should provide a critical analysis of the resource, answering questions such as:

What is the audience for this resource?
What is the content of this resource?
What topics are covered? What are the emphases? What’s missing that you might expect?
How have these shifted over time?
For resources with identified, individual authors (e.g. journals and book publications), what are their backgrounds and credentials?
To what extent is original data reported?
What kinds of archival research would this resource support? How might it be helpful to students in this seminar?