

LIB 399/4 credits
Exploring Uncharted Territory:
Primary Sources from the Inside Out
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Using archives and special collections can be intimidating to researchers unfamiliar with the organization and unique requirements of the materials. Yet assignments using primary sources are becoming more prevalent in the UO curriculum. Such assignments appear in history, journalism, and Honors College courses among others. This course is designed as an in-depth introduction to primary sources. Gaining a familiarity with basic archival principles, as well as handling, describing and organizing primary materials themselves, will facilitate students' future primary source research projects.

The course will provide the opportunity to develop a level of familiarity and comfort with a myriad of materials, and the ability to understand the materials from a new perspective. Being able to place primary sources in context is a necessary skill for students and can be applied broadly in thinking critically about almost any topic. The skills learned in this class will help students to learn to think for themselves and draw their own conclusions. The course will teach students how to use collections by exploring how they are created and how they are described. Students will learn to assess the authority and motivations of the creator of a document or collection and compare them to other information known about the issue and the times. No other course at the UO approaches primary research in this manner or to such a degree.

[Note: Teaching this course would give us a chance to break new ground. After searching Historical Abstracts, Library Literature, ERIC and various library program sites, it appears that few universities have taught this type of class from quite this approach before.]

Objectives

1. Students will know how to access & use a variety of primary sources materials by
 - learning about the ways in which materials are collected and organized
 - studying how to effectively use access tools specific to primary materials to find relevant sources
 - learning about the unique requirements for accessing archival materials

2. Students will be able to incorporate primary sources in their research by
 - learning to critically assess and select relevant sources
 - learning to place primary sources in their context

Topics to be Covered

- Handling archival materials
- Principles of archival organization—what/why/how people collect
- Types of information provided by finding aids
- Modes of access to primary sources
- Different physical formats of materials
- How to arrange & describe a collection
- Brief history of archives
- Guest lecture from users of primary sources such as documentary creators Rebecca Force (“History of the University of Oregon”) or journalism students
- Ethical issues—access, privacy, security, authenticity [readings from *Possession* or *A Gentle Madness*]
- Archives in the media
- Primary sources outside of Special Collections—maps, books, periodicals, microfilm, digital collections, etc.

Assignments

There will be two major assignments:

1. Create a finding aid for a collection or portion of a collection in the UO Special Collections & University Archives.

Understanding how and why collections are created and organized will help students become stronger researchers. Researchers in general lack a basic knowledge of archival principals. Gaining this knowledge will give students an edge in pursuit of unique research materials. Appropriate readings will be assigned to be discussed in class. Hands-on training will be given.

2. Write a paper placing their assigned collection in context.

More and more students are required to use primary sources in their research. This paper will provide an opportunity to ask critical questions about primary sources-- What time period was this created in? What else was going on during that time? Where was it created? What was happening in that area? What else can I find out about the person who created this source? Why did they create this document? Why was it preserved? etc.--and to place them in their context.

Other assignments: Brief oral presentation on findings from assignments 1 and 2, readings on relevant topics, read and critique a finding aid, etc.