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Information Literacy in Place-Based Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning

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In this chapter, I explore information literacy in virtual or hybrid place-based interdisciplinary undergraduate courses. Through searching of digitized archives and special collections, students engage in a virtual exploration of place, becoming familiar with it through its cultural objects that are preserved and distributed digitally. Virtual learning is by definition place-based, even though the physical experience of the place is outside of real time and physicality. Virtual experiences of a physical place enhance students' understanding, as they permit repeat visits to a place, or experiences of a place when an entire class visit is not possible or feasible. This permits students to develop a shared knowledge base more quickly and easily, which facilitates entry into the course content.

Whether teaching as a guest lecturer or as a co-instructor, I infuse information literacy competencies into assignments and classroom activities. I rely on the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education[1],* hereafter called the Framework, to shape the specific competencies that I teach. Four of the six frames of the Framework map especially well to interdisciplinary teaching and learning: *information has value*, *authority is constructed and contextual*, *research as inquiry*, and *searching as strategic exploration*. I discuss each of these with respect to three interdisciplinary courses I have either guest lectured or co-taught. In the courses for which I have guest lectured, I offer a case study of learning through virtual primary sources in information literacy sessions. Co-teaching a semester-long course offers more opportunities to go deeper with the information literacy frames and designing assignments that help students meet one or more of the dispositions that demonstrate achievement of multiple

frames. I explore how information literacy is essential to place-based learning and to interdisciplinary learning.

Whether teaching towards information literacy in my role as a guest lecturer or as a classroom instructor, I rely on a few essential instructional design principles, including active learning and a constructivist approach that acknowledges students' lived experiences, prior knowledge and experience. I believe in recognizing the learner beyond the college experience – lifelong learning – and approach learning as situated, or place-aware, drawing upon civic resources such as public libraries and free, open scholarly resources such as subject repositories.

Most undergraduates learn about libraries and their resources through what is commonly referred to as the one-shot, meaning a one-off workshop during which a librarian demonstrates library search tools and introduces search strategies intended to help students locate information for an assignment. Recent criticism of the one-shot questions its relevance to information literacy. Teaching to impart information literacy is not solely the domain of librarians. As a librarian who inhabits multiple roles: that of classroom instructor, one-shot leader, and workshop facilitator, I see from multiple viewpoints how the one-shot can familiarize students with research concepts and prepare them for the information literacy journey, not least by easing their library anxiety. Yet it if the one-shot is not timed to coincide with students' research needs, or if the classroom instructor has not explained in advance the value of library sources for the research assignment, it can be a mystifying and abstract waste of time for all, though perhaps the visit to the physical library has value. Assignments grounded in an understanding of place depend on students' ability to make sense of a range of primary sources.

Literature Review

The answers to the most stimulating questions about place-based learning and information literacy cross disciplines and praxes. The work of several archivists, librarians, and scholar-educators exploring ways to implement and improve virtual place-based learning and teaching, and using archives and special collections in teaching is a pleasure to explore, and a challenge to integrate. While the Framework does not delineate archival objects (whether physical, digitized, or born digital), other efforts to define primary source literacy and establish learning objectives speak to the acquisition of knowledge as well as the development of skills in a researcher who is gaining information literacy from archival sources. In an attempt to define information literacy outcomes for special collections, Carini explores what and how an information literate person should know and also offers a set of concepts for teaching with primary sources that include beginning, intermediate, and advanced abilities moving from simple to complex, or concrete to abstract. This suggests that acquiring primary source literacy is a process.[2] Similarly, the information literacy frames *searching as strategic exploration and research as inquiry* both indicate an iterative potentially non-linear process by which a learner acquires information literacy competency. Carini emphasizes a learner's acquiring of knowledge of historical context and historical thinking habits of mind while also acknowledging that archival and special collection research takes place across disciplines, not solely in the domain of history.[3] Because primary sources share few characteristics with textbooks, course packs, or other information sources that undergraduates are typically expected to learn from, The Society of American Archivists and the Rare Book and Manuscript Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries propose *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*.[4] These *Guidelines* articulate a scale of competencies, each of which builds on the previous, helping an instructor or librarian situate the scope and context of the lesson based on the learning objectives. The

Guidelines also introduce interrelated concepts – analytical, ethical, and theoretical – that the users of archives should grasp in order to make the best use of primary sources in their research; familiarity and practice yields increasing mastery of the concepts. Tritt and Carey document teaching with digitized archives in the undergraduate classroom, as do Schmiesing and Hollis, who also rightly recognize the significance of the form that information takes.[5] Proof of integration of information, whether it be primary or secondary sources, or original research and empirical observations, is the ongoing role of the classroom instructor and the librarian. Wagner and Smith's research on undergraduates' perceptions of archives and their users shows us that while students may be aware of archives, they have not usually used them, thinking of archives as loci for the more serious or advanced research efforts of faculty and graduate students. [6]

The Value of Archives and Special Collections

Even when the primary sources within the special collection or archive have been digitized, they still hold the place they originated, the place they are of, within them. Archives and special collections are inherently place-based. Archival objects, representing a wide range of media and typically unified by a theme (as in a local or regional history collection, which underscores the importance of place), are preserved and accessible together. Yet the creator of a nineteenth-century trade card advertising a local florist would never have conceived of that item sharing space, and contributing to meaning-making, alongside a 1960's-era flyer promoting a political protest. In the special collection that documents the history of a place, such as a historical society or local history/genealogy collection, both are presented as artifacts documenting the history of a place at different points in time.

Learning from primary sources is inherently an interdisciplinary experience, as these sources embody a range of cultural, historical, and social artifacts of human experiences without a filter or an interpretation. Virtual research environments enhance student engagement with the research process and yield integration of higher-quality research resources into student work (more historical primary sources such as photographs, maps, and datasets, fewer weak web-based content curation sites such as BuzzFeed or Bustle). Virtual research environments allow access to an enormous corpus of primary sources, all accessible through a web browser. This is fundamentally different from physical environments, where catalogs, finding aids, and descriptive materials that organize and index physical primary sources exist in a range of physical locations. The physical locations of archives and special collections themselves present multiple access issues. Some collections require institutional admission fees, as for a museum; all post rules about interacting with the objects and some even enforce unspoken codes of conduct. All have limited hours of operation and limits to what one person can experience in a single visit. Punzalan and Caswell propose important directions for archives to foreground social justice in their policies and collections, becoming more inclusive and thereby more just.[7] One physical, analog archival object cannot occupy multiple locations simultaneously, yet the virtual version of the same object certainly can appear in infinite browser tabs simultaneously. This is useful for classroom explorations and interrogations and allows for learners to return to the object for further study, either independently or in the classroom setting. Initial explorations in archives and special collections may take on attributes of a fishing expedition, yet the overall experience highlights students' authentic reactions to and interpretations of archival objects.

Introduction to Language and Technology: Situating Information Literacy

As a guest lecturer in the interdisciplinary course Introduction to Language and Technology, I prepare and teach a workshop – more of an active learning experience than a passive lecture – in advanced library research methods. Students learn not only how to use filters in the library's discovery layer and databases productively, but also why to use them; in effect, why information in various formats acquires the status it has. Students can immediately apply the lesson to the research components of two assignments, the annotated bibliography and the research paper. In the library lesson, we do not virtually move off-campus to explore digitized primary sources; instead, students learn about research as an iterative process, in which continuous refining of the search strategy yields ever-more-relevant search results. The workshop begins with an interactive exploration into the characteristics of reliable information sources and concludes with some practical strategies for reading peer-reviewed journal articles. Using Poll Everywhere to gather and display students' responses to a prompt asking for their thoughts and opinions about the characteristics of reliable information sources, we then apply these criteria to live searches in the library's collection. One student's response to the prompt about the characteristics of a reliable information source, "footnotes," indicates an awareness of scholarly communication styles and the importance of documentation of sources, both of which are knowledge practices of someone achieving information literacy.[8] The information literacy frames *information has value* and *research as inquiry* guide the interactive evaluation activity. Students' research into the quality of online information leads them to develop a habit of mind to query, even interrogate, the authenticity and comprehensiveness of any information source. To develop fluency with r*esearch as inquiry*, we use OneSearch, a discovery layer search interface that retrieves results from the library's print resources (print and eBooks) and databases (articles) simultaneously. A typical list of results retrieved is not the end of the process or the goal of the

lesson; rather, it is the starting point for the application of the frame *research as inquiry*. I guide students through the use of filters and facets to narrow down a potentially overwhelming set of results in a range of media. As students apply filters and facets to their results, and even experience search as an iterative process if they start over or refine their search keywords and strategies, they are developing knowledge practices pertinent to the frame *research as inquiry.*[9] We discuss the importance of the date of publication, the format, the audience, the domain of knowledge, and other aspects of articles, books and other media retrieved. In addition, the frame *information has value* becomes clear almost as soon as students begin refining results using the facets of the search interface; not every library provides access to every piece of information, and the reasons for this are almost always economic.

In teaching students about reading scholarly articles, I encourage them to seek out the author's peer community of scholars through a citation database to determine how, how frequently, and how recently the author's peers have cited the work in question. Who has cited the work in question, and what influence do they have? Can we find proof of author's authority on the topic by investigating how their other works have been cited? This evidence of scholarly communication allows students to see themselves as beginner participants in scholarly communication. As a result, generating a Works Cited or References list, rather than an onerous task to rush through after writing the paper, is a means to participate in scholarly communication. By citing, they are assigning value to the articles and other sources they have selected. In this workshop, I use examples from my own experience as a researcher and scholar to illustrate scholarly communication strategies and show how scholarly communication – acknowledgement and citation – exemplifies *information has value.* Autobiographical approaches to modeling research behavior are effective. I encourage other guest lecturers to tell their own research stories

that illustrate the moment that a solution to a research problem became clear to them, or when they became aware that they had leveled up with their own process of research and were able to conduct research more effectively, articulate more relevant research questions, or even write or communicate better. To model academic research behavior for students can powerfully orient them to the scholarly communication norms of their chosen disciplines and majors.

Black New York: Interdisciplinary Interrogations & Sharing Virtual Space

Black New York is an upper-level interdisciplinary course in which students trace the Africana experience in New York City through primary source research, visits to cultural institutions throughout the city, guest lectures from a range of disciplinary perspectives, and cross-disciplinary readings and discussions. When I was invited to guest lecture in Black New York, I facilitated a virtual class visit to digitized special collections and archives. Although students did not get the off-campus experience of visiting a cultural institution in real time and space, the library session made the most of a 60- to 90-minute class meeting. In the classroom, students worked in small groups to work with digitized archival objects that I selected based on course readings. Students interrogated archival photographs, musical scores, manuscripts, and newspaper articles to learn about the information they contain, and to consider why and how these particular archival items were preserved and distributed. Working in groups, they studied an assigned digitized archival object and responded to several prompts:

- Can you describe the speaker, writer, photographer, or narrator's point of view?

- Who is the intended audience of this piece?

- How has your view of the Black experience in New York City been shaped by encountering this primary source?

- Identify a question, contradiction, or cultural or political tension suggested or embodied in this work. How does it contribute to or complicate a particular viewpoint or perspective on the Black experience of and in New York City?

Each group reported back to the class and the discussion exemplified the knowledge practices of information literacy frame a*uthority is constructed and contextual*.[10] With this in mind, students later became authors and information curators as they created an online map of cultural institutions in New York to display their research projects.

As a first-time guest lecturer in Black New York, I designed and taught a 90-minute class to lead students on a critical tour of digitized archival objects and primary sources that connect to the New York City places and people they study. My initial guest lecture in this course is the first time I applied the concept of virtuality to teaching and learning about archival primary sources. To prepare for the activity, I searched digitized archives and special collections such as the Digital Public Library of America (dp.la) and the digital collections of the New York Public Library to identify primary sources that were referenced in course readings, highlighted the Black experience in areas of New York students studied, or aligned with recent or upcoming class field research visits. I emphasized the free access to these and similar collections; the user need not authenticate nor pay to retrieve virtual primary sources through these and similar research portals; they exist for the public good. The digitized objects I selected were only revealed at the time of the workshop; with more time or an additional workshop, I would task students with the search for relevant archival objects. One group of students interrogated a digitized photograph depicting a Black multigenerational group at home, created in the 1930's as part of the Federal Art Project. The students were disappointed to learn that the photographer was not black as well; the identity of the author or creator was just as important as the subject to

them. In this case, students showed me I still had plenty to learn about the frame *authority is constructed and contextual.*

The second time I was invited to guest lecture in Black New York, I inhabited the identity of embedded librarian,[11] meeting with the class several times. I built upon my original 90-minute introduction to digitized archival objects and primary sources, helping students with the next phase of their research: documenting and geolocating their place-based research projects onto shared digital maps through a commercial mapping platform familiar to many, Google Maps. This particular virtual geographic tool is not intended for educational use or for group projects, so delivery of a complex multi-authored project encountered a few impediments. At the time I led students in this project, free (or freemium) digitized mapping tools that we could realistically master were rather underdeveloped, and we lacked technical assistance or support. With more time and support, I would choose StoryMap, MyHistro, Omeka, or another platform that enables students to group curate their work, tell their stories visually with digital media, document their sources thoroughly and ethically, and make their work available to the public. Throughout the project, I supported student research through the creation of a research guide[12] where students could resume the research task in the virtual special collections and archives we explored, apply the search strategies and tools we used to other virtual archives and special collections, and connect to library subscription databases and electronic resources.

Interdisciplinary teaching and learning affords opportunities to bring a critical perspective on information production and to put students in the role of information producer, curator, and evaluator. Wide interest in digital humanities has helped cultural institutions with digitized, virtual collections integrate their collections into undergraduate teaching. We all benefit from growing recognition that virtual primary sources engage students in learning about place, history,

and culture. The primary sources research activity meets two types of course learning outcomes: content learning outcomes and general education learning outcomes. Among several course content learning outcomes, the following directly speak to information literacy competencies:

- Use different sources from history, literature, the arts, politics and sociology to understand the experiences of Africana people in New York City.

- Use archival and field research to trace the movement and activities of Africana people New York City and through its neighborhoods.

Course content learning outcomes specifically address reckoning with different kinds of primary sources, in a range of research settings including archives and special collections. The general education learning outcomes refer to developing the habits of mind needed to analyze course material from research visits both virtual and physical. General Education learning outcomes and means of assessment include skills development by "acquir[ing] and us[ing] the tools needed for communication, inquiry, analysis, and productive work," assessed in part by curating and analyzing research materials. Integration of knowledge from across disciplines is assessed by evaluating primary and secondary sources from across disciplines, as well as analyzing materials from cultural and research institutions, both physical and virtual.[13] Both categories of learning outcomes represent the acquisition of information literacy dispositions, as a student who is learning to think critically about sources gathered from field research and archival research progresses towards the information literacy disposition of "recognizing that authority may be conferred or manifested in unexpected ways."[14] In addition to supporting students' independent investigations into the virtual research environments I introduced, the research guide housed collaborative map-making efforts, the visualized evidence of their place-based research.

Learning Places: Physical and Virtual Interdisciplinary Environments

I co-teach a semester-long interdisciplinary course, Learning Places: Understanding the City, in collaboration with a colleague from another department, most often the Department of Architectural Technology. In the course, we use a case study approach to learn about a particular New York City place from multiple disciplinary lenses. Students learn about the place selected for study through repeated visits to the site to observe, sketch, photograph it, written assignments that document the experience of visiting the site, and through visits to special collections and archives to learn about historical primary sources. To meet learning outcomes adjacent to information literacy, I facilitate several research visits to local special collections and archives held in museums and public libraries where students can browse, search for, and discover a range of historical primary sources and integrate them into their pursuit of an answer to the research questions they posit. These visits lead to a site report that informs the development of a research question or topic that they explore throughout the semester. Through the archives visit, students learn about the process of information creation and gain comfort with the sometimes-non-linear journey of searching and browsing to discover and research. Searching for archival objects that tell the story of the location chosen for the case study demands that students develop research strategies, which emerge as they pursue background research, study secondary sources, and undertake site visits to gain familiarity with the place. In addition to learning about a place virtually, through archival objects, the students explore the frame *searching as strategic exploration* quite literally as they embark on in-person explorations of the site chosen for study as well as virtual explorations facilitated through historic and contemporary digitized maps. It is in Learning Places that the interrogation of digitized archival objects really converges. In Learning Places, the students encounter primary sources in their analog, curated habitat – the

special collection and archive – and then later visit their digitized, virtual versions as often as needed. We make use of the rich, unparalleled collections of our city's public libraries, yet there is still an essence of the high temple of learning, and all its exclusivity, in the process of visiting, observing, recording observations, and writing conclusions/reflections. The simple search tools that facilitate access to virtual objects shed exclusivity; students quickly gain comfort with searching. These virtual visits to the primary sources introduce students to metadata, as they need to develop a vocabulary to build keywords. Since students are required to document and cite all information they use in their research projects, they learn to interpret metadata. No longer is an image, newspaper article, video, a low-hanging virtual fruit to right-click, download, and paste into one's work. The origin, preservation, creator, and subject must be considered and acknowledged. This leads students to consider critical questions about special collections. Who is represented by, and in, the collections? Who are the collections for? Why are these archival objects and primary sources preserved? By what process are some objects selected for digital preservation and released into the virtual world? The information literacy frame *authority is constructed and contextual* guides this interrogation, as students begin to consider not only what is included in a special collection as well as the cultural, political, and social forces that bear on institutions' decisions about preserving and digitizing the past. Using simple search strategies – for example, searching with the name of a street or a neighborhood to locate primary sources about a specific place – students uncover complex, even difficult, primary sources. An example of a particularly complex primary source is a digitized historical fire insurance map. The collections we made use of are especially rich in these types of maps, so students' research inquiries over time and space facilitate repeated engagement with these virtual representations of place. Developed in the nineteenth century to help insurance companies determine the risk of

insuring buildings against fire loss in American cities, they reveal details about the built environment at a specific moment in time, including building composition, purpose, and ownership, as well as transportation and utilities infrastructure. Since the fire insurance companies regularly updated these maps, they enable temporal comparisons and help those who view them understand change over a specific period of time. Our class research visits to special collections allowed students to view and study physical maps before learning how to find their virtual counterparts. Maps are abstractions of physical places, yet the experience of using physical and then virtual maps to compare historical and contemporary conditions makes the places studied seem more real, mutable, and changing over time.

Students encounter information via various means during their virtual visits to special collections and archives: searching using keywords, browsing by scrolling through a thematically arranged collection, or using a combination of both to retrieve relevant primary sources and serendipitously discover much more. Whatever the means to locating a particular relevant primary source, the virtual browsing or searching tends to flatten out the experience, although it is usually a more efficient means to find information. A real-time visit in physical space affords the opportunity to observe other users engaged in the same activities or using the physical space for other purposes. Undoubtedly, the virtual visit saves time and effort of the researcher, both precious resources in undergraduate teaching and learning. Yet a strong and active concept of place is still essential in this virtual exploration of historical primary sources. In the case of one student's search for a photograph illustrating transportation modes from the past, the location where the photograph was made became essential. Any photograph depicting a horse-drawn cart was insufficient; the metadata of the image had to specify a location relevant to her research, and the student searched until this metadata requirement was satisfied. Successful citation and

documentation of digitized primary sources requires developing a careful habit of mind: considering what is important to one's scholarly community, what to do when there is no personal author, or when the metadata do not provide enough information to fulfil the norms of citation. Given that the holding institution or library did not create the primary source, or that the creating institution may no longer exist, who then is the creator, the author? This intersects with the information literacy frame *authority is constructed and contextual.* Students become authorities when they locate and select digitized archival objects that help them respond to a research question or problem. Students also become authorities as they generate, write, document and curate primary sources in the form of field observations and data collection, an important interdisciplinary aspect of work in this course. Since their works are archived on the institutional learning platform, the possibility exists that they are the authors of primary sources of the future, just as the letter writers, cartographers, photographers, newspaper reporters, graphic designers and others whose work is captured and digitized in the archives and special collections that we use.

Conclusions & Directions for Further Research

The frames from the Framework for Information Literacy that I have explored with students are just a few inroads or thresholds towards information literacy that amplify the learning affordances of virtual environments. Virtual primary sources have much to offer those in the process of becoming information literate (an ongoing process for all of us). Encouraging students to consider which voices and experiences have been excluded, to imagine what primary sources could have been preserved and digitized, and how that would allow a writing of human experience from a wide, inclusive, multi-voiced perspective induces interdisciplinary learning as

students integrate a range of perspectives. Special collections and archives also benefit from integration into undergraduate teaching and learning. Digitized, network-distributed, and virtual primary sources can be infinitely studied, interpreted, and interrogated, even as the analog object may be physically preserved away from physical contact, or less accessible because of institutional protocol in place intended to protect it from damage.

Future praxis puts students more firmly in the role of authors. They may more actively participate as documentarians, even as oral history subjects, as enlightened and progressive institutions seek to fill in gaps and silences and interact with a broad base of their constituents to preserve inclusively. Interdisciplinary learning experiences foster the future of interdisciplinary thinking.

In Black New York, students explore *authority is constructed and contextual* when they interrogate digitized archival objects, questioning the artistic and institutional decisions that led to that object's preservation. In a digital mapping exercise, students engage with the frame *searching as strategic exploration* as they first select and research a place and add it to a collaborative digital map, then encourage viewers of the map to explore a place in New York, virtually, through the research annotations they embed into the map. The frames *information has value* and *research as inquiry* guide the evaluation game, as students' research into the quality of online information leads them to a habit of mind of querying the authenticity and comprehensiveness of any information source. Finally, *searching as strategic exploration* informs the process of virtual archival research in Learning Places, as students search with their questions in mind, but without advance knowledge of the existence of a single archival object that will answer these questions. They synthesize the evidence they find that is distributed among multiple objects to create new knowledge of the place-based problems they investigate.

Virtual archives and special collections enrich the experience of learning from primary sources. Quotidian objects have value as introductions to the study of a place and the forces of how that place changed over time. As institutions and their archives and special collections redevelop their practices that foster inclusion and diversity, the users, both physical and virtual, see themselves reflected in the collections, which in turn stimulates more use by a more diverse user group. Many special collections consider public accessibility to be a preservation strategy, rather than a liability that may lead to theft, loss, or damage; this is yet another reason to support and engage with virtual archival objects and primary sources. Many groups and individuals may not presently see their experiences reflected in the visual and text-based primary sources preserved within special collections and archives. As institutions come to terms with their exclusionary past practices and move forward to build diverse and inclusive collections, these collections of primary sources will reflect the physical world and its inhabitants. Our shared cultural heritage will be far richer as a result.

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