

Paul C. Campbell and Stacey Lavender

Approaching freshman library one-shots in an unconventional way

Using archival materials to connect students to the university and their major

Instructional librarians are commonly asked to provide library instruction to freshman courses without an assignment that directly connects to the instruction. This type of request presents a quandary for librarians who do not think it is an effective way to teach library skills but still want to connect the library to incoming freshmen while building relationships with instructors.¹ This article presents the way in which a social science librarian and a special collections librarian worked to include their library's unique archival materials within a freshman psychology course in an unconventional way. Thinking about this type of instruction request in a different light provided us an opportunity to creatively use the library's archival collections to connect psychology students to the rich history of their major and to the local community.

Ohio University has a first-year course intended to connect incoming freshmen with their selected major and to the larger university community. This course also serves to teach students how to adjust to college life, including an introduction to the many university offices and services. This course is offered primarily in the fall through the University College and is called UC 1900: Exploring the Major. Due to the large number of sections of the UC 1900 course, the University Libraries has created a train-the-trainer LibGuide for UC 1900 instructors to introduce the library to their students. However, subject librarians still regularly get individual requests to teach library one-shots within some sections of this course.

In fall 2018, we started a multiyear collaboration using a collection of archival documents from the Athens Mental Health Center (AMHC) in UC 1900 classes for students planning to major in psychology. Originally named the Athens Lunatic Asylum, AMHC was a local mental health institution that housed patients from 1874 to the mid-1990s. Throughout its history, AMHC maintained strong connections to the community and Ohio University. It was a major employer for many years, and Ohio University students often explored AMHC's picturesque grounds and participated in volunteer programs.

The Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections at Ohio University holds a collection of approximately 75 linear feet of materials spanning the history of the organization, including patient inquest of lunacy records from the years 1874 through 1911.² These records are official court documents that accompanied patients to AHMC, legally declaring their insanity and often containing brief case histories and possible diagnoses. Records for patients who have been deceased for more than 50 years are open to the public and are an exciting classroom

Paul C. Campbell is subject librarian for the Social Sciences at Ohio University, email: campbep1@ohio.edu, and Stacey Lavender, formerly of Ohio University, is now project processing archivist at the University of Virginia, email: sl8fw@virginia.edu

© 2021 Paul C. Campbell and Stacey Lavender

tool, as they highlight stories of real people from the local region. They also provide glimpses into the history of psychology that frequently surprise students, including archaic diagnoses like “menstrual derangement” and the small amount of evidence required to have people institutionalized in the past.

Lesson plan development

With 80 minutes scheduled for each section of UC 1900, our goal was to create a lesson plan that not only integrated the inquest of lunacy records but also had students take what they learned from these records to explore a modern-day article database. We identified the three ACRL frames that our sessions would focus on: Research as Inquiry, Searching as Strategic Exploration, and Authority is Contextual and Constructed.³ We divided the class into two parts, focusing on the Research as Inquiry frame for the first half and Searching as Strategic Exploration in the second half. We used the Authority frame in both parts of the lesson plan, which provided a connecting thread between both halves while allowing each of us to teach different aspects of authority.

In the first half of each session, we focused on Research as Inquiry. We had the students pair up and examine two inquest records, instructing each group to organize their pairing of records by identifying which record described a mental illness that we would recognize today and which one they found bizarre, unexpected, or even shocking. Students soon realized that the inquest records depict a practice of psychology that differs radically from today, and that the information these documents provide often raises more questions than answers. This initial analysis of these records taught students that the research process begins by organizing the information we have and then formulating questions intended to fill information gaps.

To help explore these information gaps, we handed each student a worksheet with open-ended questions prompting them to think critically about how engaging with these records changed their perceptions of mental illness, the history of psychology, their major, and their connections to the local community. After completing the worksheets, we held a class

discussion during which each group described their records along with what elements they found interesting or unexpected and was able to ask the special collections librarian any questions raised by the records.

For the second part of the class, we focused on Searching as Strategic Exploration by having students take what they learned from the inquest records to explore the article database PsycINFO. First, we had students identify current terminology used for the ailment described in their record of a recognizable mental illness. Having students build this keyword bank of related terms established the foundations in developing an effective search strategy. We then asked where they would search for current literature reviews on the treatment for this illness. This question quickly demonstrated that students did not know where to find such information and provided an opportunity to demonstrate how experts are strategic in exploring sources that fill their gaps in knowledge. Then, after explaining the strategies for using PsycINFO effectively, we had students search for current literature reviews. Each student needed to select a literature review that was somehow interesting to them and share it with the rest of the class.

Connecting each half of the lesson with the Authority frame allowed us to demonstrate that there are many different types of authority. We had students address how the authority of information is constructed by thinking critically about why and by whom different kinds of documents are created. For the inquest records, the authority is constructed because of the societal position that the court system, local judges, and doctors had in deciding the mental state of an individual. Whereas the literature reviews were authoritative because of the education and experience of the psychologists synthesizing current research on treatment practices. Both documents have authority, but for very different reasons. This discussion exemplified the need for authoritative sources like PsycINFO over simple Google searches.

Assessment

To assess students’ experiences in these classes, we developed a survey to be administered at the

beginning and end of each session and had it approved by the university's institutional review board. The survey consisted of ten statements for students to respond to using a seven-point Likert scale. The statements were designed to measure the student's enthusiasm for their major, the class session, and different library resources. There were also statements intended to gauge the students' confidence in performing research and evaluating information.

Students were given approximately five minutes at both the beginning and the end of each session to complete the survey online. By collecting the survey responses twice, we hoped to see if their attitudes shifted after the in-class activities. We emphasized that the surveys were voluntary, anonymous, and in no way connected to the students' grade in the class. We also stressed that we were looking for honest feedback, in the hopes that they would answer frankly and not worry about hurting our feelings.

In the two years that we taught using this lesson plan, 131 students in nine sessions completed pre- and post-class surveys. Overall, the survey responses showed a general shift toward higher levels of enthusiasm for using library resources and interacting with primary sources in all class sessions. For example, in responding to the statement "I feel that library orientation is exciting," 29% of students placed themselves within the top three points of the Likert scale (somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree) before the class session. After the class session, 62% of students responded within the top three points of the scale. Similarly, for the statement "I feel excited about using archival resources related to my major," 59% of students placed themselves within the top three points on the scale in the pre-class survey, compared to 70% after the class.

We also saw increased levels of self-reported confidence in students' ability to use library resources. For the statement "I feel confident in my ability to find, access, and evaluate information," 63% of students responded with somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree before the class session, and 80% chose one of those three responses after class. Enthusiasm for the

psychology major tended to be high in both the pre- and post-tests, indicating that students came into the class already excited for their major. In some sessions, we did see a slight drop in the number of students completing the post-class survey as compared to the pre-class survey, which adds some complication to interpreting the results.

Conclusion

Requests for freshman library one-shot instruction without an assignment often place librarians in the difficult position of creating meaningful learning experiences for students without any relevance to their immediate informational needs. Instead of focusing on teaching specific skills that students are unlikely to retain without an assignment, we sought to rethink this type of one-shot instruction by focusing on connecting students to their major and to the larger university community through the lens of our unique collections. What we ended up with was an unconventional lesson plan that capitalized on students' enthusiasm for their major, increased enthusiasm for a variety of library resources, and reduced anxiety around finding and evaluating information.

Selecting three of the ACRL frames was essential in creating an active learning lesson plan that incorporated highly relevant archival and article database collections to teach information literacy. Applying keywords and ideas drawn from the archival documents to an article database helped demonstrate the research process as a whole. Connecting archival documents to modern article searching helped students see the larger arc of scholarly communication and begin to see themselves as active participants within the scholarly conversations happening within their field of study.

Having students critically examine archival documents highly relevant to their major has a "wow" effect that instruction centered on simple database demonstrations does not have. Handling these original records allows students to realize that these records represent real people in local history. This unintended outcome fostered student empathy for the lived experiences of patients in a local mental hospital and confronted stigmas surrounding mental

illness. This empathy is so often missed when conducting basic database demonstrations that are often clinical and even sterile.

While these inquest of lunacy records are unique to Ohio University, we hope that other universities may develop similar lesson plans using their own archival collections or by finding relevant materials through collaboration with a local history center, state library, or public library. What materials do you have that could connect your students to their university, town, or to the students who came before them? How do those materials intersect with specific areas of study? These questions can lead to a unique classroom experience geared directly toward introductory students anywhere, and with any specific subject area of interest.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities had to quickly shift focus to online learning pedagogies, and the value of instruction that could be adapted to a hybrid environment was more apparent than ever before. Even now, as a return to normalcy seems within reach, it is clear that hybrid and online learning environments are likely to remain a significant component of higher education. One challenge that arises from this increase in online learning is how to help students cultivate connections to

their major, institution, and local community despite not being physically on campus. The activity outlined in this article, when adapted to a virtual or hybrid environment by using digitized materials, either from a university's existing digital collections or from the digital collections of another local, regional, or even national repository, could serve as a pathway for students to develop connections to their major and the larger university community, regardless of their geographic location.

Notes

1. Nora Belzowski and Mark Robison, "Kill the one-shot: Using a collaborative rubric to liberate the librarian-instructor partnership," *Journal of Library Administration* 59, no. 3 (2019): 282–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2019.1583018>.

2. Inquest of Lunacy Records, 1874, MSS 263, Athens Mental Health Center Records, Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, Ohio University Libraries, <http://alice.library.ohio.edu/record=b4939502-S7>.

3. ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, February 9, 2015, <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>. *ZZ*

Statement of ownership and management

College & Research Libraries News is published 11 times a year (monthly, combining July/August) by the American Library Association, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1300, Chicago, IL 60601. American Library Association, owner; David Free, editor. Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois. Printed in the U.S.A. As a nonprofit organization authorized to mail at special rates (DMM Section 423.12), the purposes, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes, have not changed during the preceding 12 months.

Extent and nature of circulation. ("Average" figures denote the number of copies printed each issue during the preceding twelve months; "Actual" figures denote the number of copies of single issues published nearest to filing date.) Total number of copies (net press run): Average, 9,149 Actual, 8,931. Total paid/requested sub-

scriptions: Average, 8,569; Actual, 8,544. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other non-USPS paid distribution: not applicable. Other classes mailed through the USPS: not applicable. Total paid and/or requested circulation: Average, 8,569 Actual, 8,544. Free distribution by mail: Average, 92; Actual, 101. Free distribution outside the mail: Average, 0; Actual, 0. Total free distribution: Average, 92; Actual, 101. Total distribution: Average, 8,661; Actual, 8,645. Copies not distributed: Office use, leftover, spoiled: Average, 488; Actual, 286. Total (sum of previous entries): Average, 9,149 Actual, 8,931. Percent paid and/or requested circulation: Average, 98.9%; Actual, 98.8%.

Statement of ownership, management, and circulation (PS Form 3526, July 2014) for 2021 filed with the United States Postal Service, Postmaster in Chicago, Illinois, August 19, 2021.