Perspective

Integrating Archival Management and the ARCHIVES Listserv in the Classroom: A Case Study

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Abstract: Introducing technological tools into credit instruction in archival management is a relatively new field of exploration. In fall 1993, Penn State University's Archival Management/History 490 team instructors and students took a step forward by integrating traditional classroom instruction with the often volatile and highly interactive ARCHIVES Listserv. The results of their experiment are detailed in this article.

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OPEN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN student and teacher, which often leads to a more fertile learning environment, is a goal common to most instructors. Credit instruction in archival management has traditionally offered its instructors many challenges and lessons as they struggle to find the formula that encourages this interaction. Add to that formula the element of a listserv, and the results are dynamic. The instructors—in this case, the authors—began to write the syllabus and prepare for the first class by reviewing qualifications, knowledge, skills, and talents. We reviewed and studied subject areas, made preparations for the challenging questions, and analyzed topics for discussion. We found that an assessment of curricular objectives linked to team teaching and the skills necessary to capture and hold the students' attention for an entire semester were integral to beginning the journey into the classroom. We defined course objectives and drew upon creative ideas in order to present the subject matter, but we also considered students' interests and concerns in the development of the entire syllabus package.

These were some of the issues and questions we explored as we prepared the course syllabus for a team-taught version of Archival Administration/History 490 for Fall Semester 1993. We both had a variety of experiences in teaching classes, workshops, and seminars in archives and records management, but neither of us had ever taught a credit instruction course in that area. Teaching experience in other disciplines did prove exceedingly helpful. Together we reviewed our respective qualifications and knowledge bases and matched those skills with the weekly lesson plan.

The Archives Management/History 490 (a cross-listed history and library studies course) was created in 1979 by University archivist Leon J. Stout. Its stated purpose is to

introduce students to archival and manuscript repository administration. Practical experience in the arrangement and description of collections, and simple preservation techniques is provided . . . . Students will become familiar with the archival literature through the readings and learn the "jargon" of the field.[1]

Students voice two reasons for taking this class: as a primer for those interested in a possible career in archives and as an expanded course on the use and treatment of primary source materials. Students have the option of completing an additional three- to six-credit independent study/practicum and many have taken advantage of this opportunity. The practicum usually takes place within Penn State's Special Collections units, but some students have conducted their independent study at another approved site. Supervised internships have taken place at the Pennsylvania State Archives and the Lycoming and Huntingdon County Historical Societies, to name a few cooperative institutions.

Fall semester 1993 provided a different outlook for the course in more ways than just a change in instructors. As a team, our initial criteria for the course was to incorporate a few innovations into elements of the existing structure and syllabus. The course, listed as an introduction to the principles and procedures in the management of archives and historical manuscripts, covers the full gamut of theory and practice.[2] We planned our syllabus so that each class or sometimes the entire week was devoted to one particular subject area, such as collection development, automation, processing, preservation, reference, outreach, donor

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[1] LST/HST 490 Syllabus, Purpose Statement, Fall 1993.
[2] Discussions are currently under way to expand the course into a multicourse curriculum at the Pennsylvania State University.

agreements, legal issues and many more similar archival management topics.

From the outset we agreed that the course needed a balance between the theoretical base for archival administration and practical applications. We provided the students with an extensive reading list and bibliography selected to complement each week's topical assignments. In addition, we required each student to arrange and describe a small collection (four to five cubic feet) and to submit as a project paper the biographical sketch or administrative history, a scope and content note, and an arrangement scheme for his or her collection. The students produced the project papers in phases, which enabled us to provide consistent feedback on performance.

To complement the lectures, readings, and processing experiences, one of our teaching goals was to introduce students to current discourse in the discipline and discussion on the topics to which they were being exposed in the classroom. To accomplish this goal, we delineated issues and concerns in the formal lecture and exposed them to the daily interaction of ideas conducted on the ARCHIVES Listserv. The ARCHIVES Listserv, founded in 1989 by John Harlan, University of Miami, Ohio, facilitates discussion between and among more than 1,600 archivists, records managers, historians, and enthusiasts worldwide.[3]

The ARCHIVES Listserv is intended primarily to serve the needs of professionals involved in the day-to-day administration of archival and manuscript collections who have the technology to access the server. The interaction is often lively and provides a learning environment for all levels of participants and lurkers. Why not, we wondered, use the medium to expose students to both the technology and the current spate of practical applications of archival theories and philosophies? The course requirement read:

> Students will be expected to routinely monitor the ARCHIVES LISTSERV. Arrangements have been made with the Center for Academic Computing to access this LISTSERV. A brief paper (approx. 5 pages) is required in which the student chooses an issue discussed on the list, delineates both positive and negative arguments, and reviews a minimum of five (5) bibliographic sources relating to the topic. This paper will demonstrate that the student understands the issue, its theoretical and practical base, and has reviewed the pertinent literature.[4]

In a recent article in *Educational Leadership* Kyle L. Peck and Denise Dorricott argue that "technological tools can foster students' abilities, revolutionize the way they work and think, and give them

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[3]A study of ARCHIVES Listserv membership (1,632 subscribers) conducted by J. Esposito included an analysis of e-mail addresses on 4 October 1994, revealed the following:

Subscribers	Percentage	Institutional Affiliation
1,152	70.6	Educational
106	6.5	Commercial/Businesses
12	0.7	Military
135	8.3	Government
78	4.8	Organization
149	9.1	Other/Affiliation Not Identifiable

An unrelated study conducted by Jill Tatem of Case Western Reserve University on 22 January 1994 compared the names of Society of American Archivists College and University (C&U) Section members with listserv subscribers. There were 561 section members and 1,164 listserv subscribers: the overlap was 171. Her results revealed that 30 percent of the C&U section members were listserv subscribers and 15 percent of subscribers were C&U section members. A summary of this study was published in the Spring 1994 issue of the *Academic Archivist*.

[4]LST/HST 490 Syllabus, Purpose Statement, Fall 1993.

new access to the world.''[5] This was the very concept we employed in adding the listserv experience to the course requirements. By providing the theoretical foundation and practical experience in archival management, we hoped that the students would learn something about the implications of collection management decisions, specifically decisions they made or planned to make regarding the arrangement and description of their project collections.

Archives Administration at Penn State is cross-listed as a 400-level course. It typically consists of upper-level undergraduates and graduate students majoring in history or American studies. Although Penn State does not offer a graduate degree in library science, occasionally the course attracts an M.L.S. student from another institution. The size of the class varies from year to year, but it rarely exceeds fifteen students. A smaller class size affords the instructor a greater opportunity to generate and encourage discussion and debate. The fall 1993 class consisted of eleven students: five upper-level history undergraduates; one upper-level undergraduate and one graduate in American studies; one upper-level undergraduate in general arts and sciences; two nondegree students; and one graduate in library science from another university.

The majority of the class had had very little exposure to primary source materials or the concepts involved in their care and preservation. We were prepared for such a limited knowledge base and had structured our lectures accordingly. We were not, however, adequately prepared for the students' low level of computer literacy. Almost to a student, the class was unfamiliar with the opportunities available to them on the local library on-line system (LIAS) or within the Internet. Most of the students

had utilized word processing software at home or in the university's computer labs but had not often broadened their access to other computer applications. One student questioned our decision to use the listserv as a teaching tool, arguing that this was a history/archives course, not a computer course. Further, he stated he had not expected to be exposed to automation when he registered for the course.

Thus, our innovative 1990s curriculum adjustment faced its first major challenge: the technological learning-curve. Students brought their own set of criteria, biases and attitudes into the classroom; each of these contributed positively or negatively to the learning environment. The students' general lack of familiarity with computer applications and our miscalculation about their computer experience and enthusiasm led to a frustrating introduction to the listserv. Penn State students are offered the opportunity to access electronic services such as e-mail, gophers, and listservs over the LIAS backbone. There are more than twenty student computer labs on campus to facilitate access to these services. Students registered for Archival Management had not afforded themselves of the benefits of these opportunities prior to the commencement of the class.

Often we had to repeat directions for connecting to the backbone, accessing services, and utilizing databases. Dr. Gerald M. Santoro at Penn State's Center for Academic Computing provided the class with a summary entitled ''Simple Introduction to LISTSERV Conferencing,'' which he had developed for student and staff training purposes. Dr. Santoro's introduction included the following sections:

> What is LISTSERV?
> How does LISTSERV work?
> What LISTSERV Conferences are available?
> About the Internet Information Disk

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[5]Kyle L. Peck and Denise Dorricott, ''Why Use Technology?,'' *Educational Leadership* 51 (April 1994): 11.

Sending Commands to a LIST-
SERV server
Important LISTSERV Commands
LISTSERV Conference owners
Getting more information about
LISTSERV.[6]

By the fourth week of the sixteen-
week semester, approximately 40 percent
of the class still had not subscribed to the
ARCHIVES Listserv. Other considerations
played into this problem: distrust of com-
puters, lack of initiative, and inconsistent
levels of assistance at the computer labs.
The delay in access to the listserv resulted
in a significant loss of class time as we
struggled to determine individual subscrip-
tion problems. An alternative solution to
these problems would be to schedule one
class in a computer lab and subscribe each
student to ARCHIVES Listserv during the
class. This would have reduced the initial
level of frustration and afforded the stu-
dents a more positive initial exposure to the
listserv environment.

Unfortunately, the learning-curve di-
lemma did not end with subscriptions. Stu-
dents reported problems understanding
system instructions and required extensive
listserv orientation. This included expla-
nations of language, behavior, and mail
content. At this point, time management
began to enter the equation. Since the
project required monitoring the listserv for
a period of time prior to consulting print
sources, the students had to allocate blocks
of time to review mail messages. The AR-
CHIVES Listserv is extremely active (20
to 40 messages per day), and students re-
ported needing to allocate as much as three
hours a week to poring over messages.

Isolating a particular archival manage-
ment issue and deleting all other messages

was an adequate solution to this particular
roadblock. By the sixth week, students be-
gan bringing questions to class culled from
their listserv readings—i.e., How many
one-person shops are there in the archival
community? Is there a discernible differ-
ence between European and American ar-
chives? Why is there so much discussion
about USMARC. AMC fields? As appro-
priate, we integrated these questions into
the general lecture and discussed sources
for additional reference materials. On this
level we felt vindicated that our experiment
was working. Students would have bene-
fited from selecting a topic early in their
exposure to the listserv and focusing on
discussions of those issues to the exclusion
of all other debates.

As the deadline for papers became im-
minent, we witnessed our second unex-
pected outcome from the requirement. The
students experienced a great deal of diffi-
culty in coordinating their topics to print
sources on the same subjects. Students de-
livered papers that identified and discussed
their topics adequately and detailed the
mandated five sources, but the papers con-
tained no substantial listserv acknowledg-
ment. The papers often appeared without
any commentary from the listserv other
than statements such as ''I chose this topic
because on 10/24 Mary Archivist discussed
it on the Listserv.'' The paper topics were
as varied as the students in class: one-per-
son shops, preservation of photographs, ar-
chival education, use of volunteers, Euro-
pean archival traditions, and electronic
records issues are just a few. At this junc-
ture, we returned the papers to students and
requested additional listserv comments or
expansion of concepts. Each student was
able to add details from the listserv obser-
vations on the second try, and some even
evaluated the listserv comments against the
print sources as requested, although only
one related the listserv topics to collection-
processing activities.

There were two superior papers, one on

[6]Gerald Santoro, ''Simple Introduction to LIST-
SERV Conferencing,'' unpublished summary, June
1993.

archival education and the other on volunteers. Each student addressed his or her topic in a completely different manner. The paper on archival education consisted of a strict point/counterpoint discussion. For example, A. Archivist on the listserv stated that education "sharpens and improves the way we do our archival tasks . . . and brings students into real working world relationships." The student compared this with Luciana Duranti's statement, "European archival theorists feel that an archival education is best when taught by archivists" from her article "The Archival Body of Knowledge: Archival Theory, Method, and Practice, and Graduate and Continuing Education."[7] The student followed this series of discussions with a conclusion about the level of education necessary to complete the duties of an archivist in the 1990s.

The second paper was a case study approach on volunteers in archival institutions. The student reviewed three published case studies in light of both positive and negative comments made on the listserv about the use of volunteers. This student then developed a four-point recommendation for using volunteers in archives. The recommendations included recruitment, orientation and training, level of work, and assimilation. More than any other student, this person understood the intent of the project: listen, reflect, and develop recommendations of your own. Encouraging the students to voice their own beliefs and concepts was more of a challenge than we anticipated.

At the end of the semester, we asked the students to evaluate this initial expedition into the electronic classroom. The early learning problems predominated the comments, followed closely by the time commitment necessary to complete the project. All of the students acknowledged that it was a worthwhile experience. They also agreed that the ARCHIVES Listserv was a wonderful learning tool. The opportunities for discussion and analysis were cited most frequently as valuable.

As instructors we felt it was important to evaluate this curriculum innovation as well. We addressed this by asking ourselves two questions: (1) what lessons did we learn? and (2) how did our experience compare with other academic experiences? The answer to the former question is detailed in the previous paragraphs; the answer to the latter was almost as enlightening as the classroom reality. In March 1994 we e-mailed several listservs (Archives, History, Artifact, and Higher Education, to name a few) and then asked "Are you using e-mail/listservs in the classroom? If you are, what applications are you using? How successful has your approach been?" The results were phenomenal. In a two-week period after posting the original message, we received more than thirty responses.[8]

The majority of respondents used e-mail to communicate with their students. That of Arthur Chandler, San Francisco State University, was typical: "I am currently teaching a brand new class this semester in the Humanities . . . I set up a class electronic list so folks could carry on class discussions before and after our once-a-week . . . sessions. The result = spectacular: over 140 posts in the first month."[9] A majority of respondents used e-mail to organize the classroom or conduct off-site question-and-answer sessions.[10]

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[7]Luciana Duranti, "The Archival Body of Knowledge: Archival Theory, Method, and Practice, and Graduate and Continuing Education," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 34 (Winter 1993): 17.

[8]The majority of respondents to our original e-mail query were women faculty members using e-mail in their classrooms.

[9]E-mail, Arthur Chandler, San Francisco State University, 13 March 1994.

[10]E-mail, John Merritt Unsworth, University of Virginia, 15 March 1994. Additional responses were received from Fred Kemp, Texas Tech; Wendy

A few e-mail correspondents used list-servs to generate topic papers in a slightly different fashion. For example, Mary Lynn Rice-Lively of the University of Texas reported: "I am currently teaching an upper division undergraduate course. . . . Students all have e-mail accounts on the GSLIS Unix cluster and have created class mailing lists . . . One particular set of assignments requires that each student subscribe and evaluate a listserv group. The product of that observation is a written README that provides subscription information, what is available in terms of indexes and options for searching, as well as a thumbnail sketch of the tone and purpose of the group."[11] Rice-Lively concludes by declaring the entire experience a success.

In retrospect, we consider our venture into the listserv classroom a limited success. The students were definitely challenged both electronically and intellectually. The discussions were lively and informative, although we spent a good deal of class time explaining list slang (flaming), professional jargon (acid migration), and common archival abbrevations (AAT). But overall the papers were disappointing. The students struggled to consolidate the written archival word with the practical applications discussed on the listserv. Perhaps this is not as much a curriculum problem as a professional issue. It is certainly a topic of much discussion on the listserv. Nevertheless, we believe the ARCHIVES Listserv can be used as an instructional tool in teaching archival management within detailed parameters.

Our evaluation of the listserv project has

led us to explore the possibility of expanding the single archival administration course into a multicourse curriculum. A comprehensive series of courses might encourage a more thoughtful use of the ARCHIVES Listserv by the students. It would certainly provide the students with more opportunities to understand the listserv language, participate in the listserv discussions, and evaluate its contribution to the development of the profession.

There are several practical considerations that should be addressed before introducing the listserv into a classroom setting. Initially, an instructor should assess the level of computer literacy among the students, becoming aware of each student's familiarity with automation and how it might contribute (positively or negatively) to the learning environment. If necessary, an instructor should devote a class to computer applications relating to listserv access. The instructor's understanding of the student procedure for connecting to the backbone and subscribing to the listserv should also be considered. The subscription process for students often differs from staff and faculty access, and it is important for the instructor to understand those differences. Finally, an instructor should conduct a thorough examination of the time commitment necessary to manage an electronic mail account and discuss this issue with the class. Students need to be educated about housekeeping options (i.e., delete, folders, digests) available through the listserv.

We found the ARCHIVES Listserv to be a useful tool for teaching about the theory and practice of archival management. It is our hope that future instructors profit from our experiences and explore the unchartered potential of the technology and virtually unlimited access to the great archival minds in our profession.

Woytasik, University of Windsor, and others (names available upon request).

[11]E-mail, Mary Lynn Rice-Lively, University of Texas, 21 March 1994.