# "Let Me Tell You What I Learned": Primary Source Literacy and Student Employment in Archives and Special Collections

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## ABSTRACT

In academic libraries, information literacy traditionally focuses on instruction sessions and classes, activities in library learning spaces, and interactions with librarians. Often overlooked but equally as important to augmenting the student experience is employment in academic libraries and its relationship to the development of information and other literacies. This is particularly true concerning the contribution of special collections and archives, as most scholarship associated with primary source literacy focuses on instruction. This article begins to fill this gap by reporting the results of a series of qualitative interviews with student employees who worked directly with special collections and archives. More specifically, this article reports on interviews conducted with students who provided self-perceptions on how the *SAA-ACRL/RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* integrated with their work in an academic library. Students evaluated their experiences and connected most strongly to the learning outcome around historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical materials. Archivists need to engage students more often about their work experiences and use this information to communicate the impact archivists have on student learning. This article offers insights into expanding how the archives profession values and connects students to primary source literacy skills through employment experiences and into ways to integrate primary source literacy standards into archives and library evaluation and assessment.

## KEY WORDS

Academic libraries, Students, Archival employment, Primary sources, Archival literacy, Standards, College and university archives, Information literacy

As is true for many professional archivists, archives have played a large role in my life, ever since I was an undergraduate history major. As a student, I worked at the state historical society, which exposed me to rare books and archival collections for the first time. My experience there, along with numerous other work and volunteer experiences in archival settings over the past sixteen years, connects directly to the same learning outcome emphasized in this study: historical curiosity and empathy about the past. I take a student-centered approach rooted in my own experiences interacting with archival materials as a student, researcher, and archivist. I have often wondered if students I have worked with are inspired and engaged with the historical materials and projects in the same manner I was. My interest in this topic, as well as my experience as a white female department head, are the inspiration for and the lens through which this research project was generated.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) published a report in 2017 that identifies priorities for academic libraries to develop programs, collections, and spaces dedicated to student learning and success. The report focuses on "a rapidly growing need to document the contributions academic libraries make to the missions of their institutions . . . in response to the general environment and because . . . demonstrating and communicating the value of academic libraries was and remains a top issue facing the profession."[1] Because archives and special collections held in academic institutions are part of the academic library at large, these departments face the same challenges and need to capture how they contribute to student learning.

One of the pertinent areas where academic libraries can communicate their impact on student learning is archival interaction with undergraduate, graduate, and K–12 students. While instruction is part of many archivists' position descriptions, managing and supervising student employees and interns is also a common part of the job. Many times the number of hours that archivists spend working directly with student employees exceeds typical interactions with students encountered in instructional efforts. Therefore, it is worth reframing student employment around a measure of how archives and special collections teach students important lifelong skills. In addition to archives departments communicating their impact on student learning, this study captured students' perspectives on how they view the importance of their work and the skills they actually learned, and how they anticipate their skills transferring to other jobs after graduation.

Building on the idea that many academic libraries have mapped their instructional learning goals to ACRL's Information Literacy Standards[2] (and now the Framework[3]), I used the first draft of the *SAA-ACRL/RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*[4] to provide a preliminary map of the core concepts taught in student library positions and to understand how they relate directly to primary source literacy. As acknowledged in the SAA-ACRL/RBMS final document,

Primary source literacy intersects with other "literacies," including information literacy, visual literacy, and digital literacy, and concepts like collective memory, cultural heritage, and individual/cultural perspectives. Thus, users of primary sources, including students working in special collections and archives and archivists who train students in the use of archives are not working in isolation from other skills and disciplines.[5]

This study of eight semistructured qualitative interviews addresses the overarching question: *how do student employment experiences in special collections and archives contribute to primary source literacy and lifelong learning?* The interviews included open-ended questions about working in an academic library and self-perceptions using the ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education[6] and the first draft of the *SAA-ACRL/RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*.[7] This article focuses specifically on student self-evaluation using the *SAA-ACRL/RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*. These interviews incorporate the intersection of primary source literacy, visual literacy, and digital literacy by capturing student narratives of their experiences working with unique collections. The interviews reveal how working with primary sources personally touched students' lives, and elicited enthusiastic responses around one particular learning outcome—historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical materials and actors. The findings are discussed through the lens of each category found in the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*.

## Literature Review

### Student Employment Experience

Throughout my career at universities of different sizes, managing student employees has been a fulfilling and integral part of my job. While the number of student employees varies by department and institution, student workers are filling more positions in academic libraries.[8] Firozehl Logan states that students receive valuable work experience and develop skills that could lead to full-time professional opportunities.[9] Heather Jacobson and Kristen Shuyler surveyed students at Seattle University in 2013 regarding their perceptions about how university library employment affected their lives. Two main themes emerged: student employment and their contributions were worth assessing, and the library and students could better communicate their overall value to the university community.[10]

Documenting and communicating the development of skills from the library or archives perspective is not enough; it is just as important to understand the value of working in a library or archives from the student perspective. In 2017,

Leslin Charles, Megan Lotts, and Lily Todorinova explored the overall impact of academic libraries on the undergraduate experience of library student workers through a questionnaire that considered the value of working in an academic library and whether such employment promotes student success. The authors argue, "Libraries must first recognize the contributions that their students bring to the organization and provide their student employees with tools so that they may better understand their own value to the organization and provide a voice so that they may better communicate that value in the workplace and beyond."[11] One tool that may assist with gathering this type of information for students working with primary sources is the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*.

## Primary Source Literacy and Archival Instruction

The development of primary source literacy standards trails behind those associated with information literacy in the library profession. A 1989 report used the term "information literacy" and defined an information-literate person; this led to the development of the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education and most recently the Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education in 2015.[12] In 2016, Peter Carini stated that while librarians have discussed and worked on information literacy for more than twenty-five years, archival literature has only discussed primary source literacy directly for about the last twelve.[13] One of the earliest mentions of primary source literacy came in 2004, when Elizabeth Yakel addressed educators using primary sources as a way to teach critical thinking skills from kindergarten through undergraduate level and posited that basic competencies for information literacy for primary sources had yet to be clearly defined.[14]

The archival profession and literature typically discuss primary source literacy within the context of the abilities of researchers and classroom instruction. Gordon Daines and Cory Nimer published a thorough literature review in 2015 that defines the term "primary source" (providing firsthand testimony or direct evidence concerning a topic under investigation) and discusses the different perspectives that inform how to define primary source literacy.[15] They cite an article by Trudi Jacobson and Lijuan Xu that declares, "Libraries teach information literacy in a variety of ways, including course-related instruction, drop-in sessions, first-year experience programs/learning communities, and credit-bearing courses."[16] Absent from this list is teaching that occurs through student library employment.

In their seminal article, "AI: Archival Intelligence and User Experience," Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah Torres interviewed twenty-eight individuals to address what characteristics denote an expert user of archives. The authors identify three distinct forms of knowledge required to work effectively with

primary sources: domain (subject) knowledge, artifactual literacy, and archival intelligence,[17] defined as the ability to interpret and analyze primary sources. Daines and Nimer remark, "While recognizing the value of artifactual literacy to archival research, Yakel and Torres described it as being tied to general pedagogical approaches for teaching critical thinking skills and in that way not necessarily specific to primary source literacy."[18]

In 2009, Peter Carini outlined a list of fifteen concepts related to archival instruction, which Daines and Nimer summarize as the inclusion of "basic information literacy skills, such as distinguishing between primary and secondary sources, and more complex artifactual literacy skills, such as historical contextualization and evaluating the physical characteristics of source materials."[19] Carini later discussed concepts to create a framework for teaching with primary source materials and to establish undergraduate students as expert users. Carini provides three reasons why teaching with primary sources requires a common set of standards: to provide a collection of goals for planning class sessions; to help shape conversations with faculty about fitting into curriculum; and to better assess the work that archivists and librarians conduct in their class sessions.[20] This research study suggests a fourth reason primary source literacy standards are needed: they can help archivists and librarians who employ student workers or interns (i.e., students who receive hands-on training outside of the classroom) assess student employee learning and provide stronger links to college and university learning goals.

Anne Bahde, Heather Smedberg, and Mattie Taormina filled a gap in the literature surrounding teaching with primary sources with a book of instructional exercises backed by pedagogy. They suggest assessment measures meant to be shared and further adapted. Published in 2014, the authors designed these exercises as single sessions, typically thirty to ninety minutes spent with a specific class. The authors acknowledge that "primary source literacy not only blends a range of other literacies—visual, cultural, historical, media, digital, and information—to create a transliteracy that shares characteristics of others, but also possesses unique features that reflect the complexity of research using historical materials and the materials themselves."[21] Students who work with special collections and archival materials are immersed in this transliteracy concept in a different, yet complementary, way from how they are in the classroom.

Another concept related to archival instruction and primary source literacy is Magia Krause's 2010 study introducing an analytic rubric as an assessment tool to evaluate archival instruction for undergraduate students. This study articulates the value of formal assessment in archival instruction. Krause states, "Educators are already convinced of the benefits of using primary sources in the classroom. Yet most of the literature overlooks the potential research skills students can

learn directly from archives professionals."[22] Because student employees who work with archival collections interact with archives professionals on a regular basis, this is an area for the archives profession to consider more thoroughly.

Current literature indicates the needs for primary source literacy and its assessment but does not include the experiences of students working in an archival setting. This study illuminates the intersection of primary source literacy development within archival student workers and acts as a first step to bring to light the experiences, stories, and voices of student workers and the impact special collections have on their learning and artifactual literacy.

## SAA-ACRL/RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy

In the past ten years, archives professionals have advocated for the development of primary source literacy standards. The SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on Developing Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy began in response to the SAA Reference, Access, and Outreach (RAO) Section's 2013 survey results, which noted the profession would benefit from a framework to undergird the work of teaching with primary sources.[23] A joint task force emerged in 2015 charged with considering broader perspectives on primary source literacy outside the direct environment of special collections and archives and with drafting guidelines applicable in multiple primary source learning situations with diverse instructor roles, audiences, and purposes.[24] Over the course of two years, the joint task force wrote two drafts of the guidelines and gathered public comments and feedback through both organizations. The ACRL Executive Board and SAA Council received the final version for consideration of adoption in the summer of 2017.

The final version of the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* outlines core ideas and learning objectives in four categories: conceptualize; find and access; read, understand, and summarize; and interpret, analyze, and evaluate.[25] Each category included three to six separate learning outlines; the instructor teaching primary source literacy may choose to use any of these objectives and to teach the individual objectives at any level of mastery that fits the needs of the users.[26] While the premise of these standards relates to teaching and instruction, the standards are also useful for assessing students employed in archives and special and digital collections. Supervisors can use the standards to consider the skill sets and abilities they hope students working with primary sources will obtain. This study emphasizes the work that many archivists and special collections librarians engage with on a daily basis: providing hands-on work experience with archival materials in a teaching environment outside of the classroom that builds on the learning outcomes found in the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*.

## Methodology

When researching how primary source literacy standards embed in educational experiences outside the classroom through student employment, I was interested in learning about experiences that students value and how that transfers to other contexts. While the small number of responses may make it difficult to extract generalizations of statistical significance, one of the goals of the study was to start a conversation about how to use primary source standards outside of the classroom. Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario Ramirez describe how "Using semistructured qualitative interviews is a well-established method in archival studies . . . the goal of such research is to generate a 'thick description' of a particular phenomenon in a single setting."[27]

I received approval from the University of Idaho Institutional Review Board in 2016 to conduct semistructured qualitative interviews with student employees from the University of Idaho Library. Students must have worked with primary sources in special collections, archives, or digital initiatives. These student positions incorporate a range of projects and responsibilities, including but not limited to scanning archival materials, creating metadata for digital objects, coding oral histories, researching information to include with finding aids and digital collections, processing collections, and creating online exhibits. I recruited participants through email and in-person conversations. Over the course of a year, I conducted eight interviews with students who had between one and six semesters of experience working with primary sources. I conducted seven interviews in person and one interview over the phone.

I designed ten open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) to explore students' experiences working in an academic library and two questions asking students to self-evaluate their skills on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 using preselected learning outcomes identified from the ACRL Visual Literacy Standards and the first draft of the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*.[28] I explained each standard verbally to students, gave them a copy of the learning outcomes to follow along with during the interview, and answered any questions they had. Students were asked to rate themselves to determine whether they felt they had developed skills in specific areas during the time of their employment. A rating of 1 was the lowest and represented no growth; a rating of 5 represented immense growth and understanding in a certain standard. There were two exceptions to this Likert scale: when a respondent provided a range instead of a specific number, I gave a numeric score directly in between (for example, "between 3 and 4" would generate 3.5). One student provided an answer of "a high 3"; I used a numeric score of halfway between those two numbers (e.g., score of 3.75). Students could also state that

a learning outcome was "not applicable" to their work, as students work on different types of projects. I also asked students to provide an example for each learning outcome when they felt it appropriate.

All interviews were recorded with permission and later transcribed using an online transcription service[29] to save time and aid in accuracy. I uploaded the transcripts into Dedoose,[30] an online qualitative data analysis software, to analyze across interviews. I developed categories and a coding scheme (see Appendix B), tested it on the uploaded transcripts, coded all transcripts, checked for consistency and adjusted codes three times, and exported coded answers and text into Microsoft Excel for further analysis. I identified student quotes that highlighted specific experiences with primary sources and marked them for further analysis.

## Findings

### Demographics

Eight undergraduate students with a range of academic backgrounds and years of experience participated in the semistructured qualitative interviews conducted over one year (September 2016–September 2017). Of the 8 students interviewed, 75% (6) were female and 25% (2) were male. The number of semesters worked ranged from 1 to 6 (one-half to 3 years). One student interviewed worked in the library through an unpaid internship. Students worked an average of 10 hours per week. The students represented 14 different majors and minors across academic disciplines and colleges. Demographics not collected as part of this study included race and socioeconomic factors. To ensure confidentiality and ease of reporting, I used pseudonyms in place of actual student names.

Most students did not apply to work at the library specifically to work with archives and special collections. Reasons included that they viewed it as a

| ID | Pseudonym | Gender | Year in school | Major(s) | Position | Semesters worked in library |
|----|-----------|--------|----------------|----------|----------|----------------------------|
| 1 | John | Male | Senior | Computer Science, Mathematics | Paid student employee | 4 |
| 2 | Emily | Female | Junior | Exercise Science, Psychology | Paid student employee | 4 |
| 3 | Ingrid | Female | Recent graduate | English/Creative Writing, Virtual Technology Design | Paid student employee | 6 |
| 4 | Katie | Female | Recent graduate | Wildlife Resources | Paid student employee | 4 |
| 5 | Chloe | Female | Junior | Anthropology | Academic credit intern | 1 |
| 6 | Anna | Female | Sophomore | Human Resources | Paid student employee | 1 |
| 7 | Chris | Male | Junior | Journalism, History | Paid student employee | 1 |
| 8 | Amber | Female | Senior | Interdisciplinary Studies, English, Virtual Technology Design | Paid student employee | 1 |

**FIGURE 1.** Student demographic data

job in an appealing environment (75%) or that it was their first job (25%). Only 2 out of 8 students (25%) directly stated interest in working with local history or special collections. When students were asked, "What skills or experience did you hope to receive while employed at the library," only 2 students (25%) responded with an answer directly related to local history or primary sources. Students expressed improving existing skills or learning new ones on the job in separate semistructured interview questions. All respondents agreed that they improved old skills or learned new ones that would be helpful to them in school and after graduation.

To form a clearer picture of the student experience, I analyzed one learning outcome from each category found in the *Guidelines to Primary Source Literacy*. Each representative learning outcome is described in detail as part of the results and highlighted with excerpts from the student interviews. The learning outcome language comes directly from the first draft of the standards.

*"Being able to peel away the layers and discover which one is accurate and reliable . . ." (Katie)*

In the first category, *Conceptualize*, learning outcome D ("distinguish primary from secondary and tertiary sources for the question[s] being investigated and the disciplines that frame them") emphasizes an important element found in most of the student positions: the importance of understanding the differences between sources and why the library uses certain sources depending on the project. The overall total average for all student responses was 4.53 out of 5.0, showing that students believe they had greatly improved since beginning their employment.

Katie, who worked in the library for four semesters, described understanding how to evaluate conflicting or supplementary descriptive information provided on the back of a photograph verses metadata provided by an

| I. | Conceptualize | D. | Distinguish primary from secondary and tertiary sources for the question(s) being investigated and the disciplines which frame them. |
| II. | Find | D. | Understand that collections of primary source materials are often impacted by selectivity and mediation, and that databases, aggregators, and physical repositories may demonstrate biases and limitations that affect the content they provide. |
| III. | Interpret, Analyze, Evaluate | G. | Demonstrate historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical materials and actors. |
| IV. | Use and Incorporate | A. | Convey information found in primary sources, including summarizing the content of the source and identifying and reporting key components such as author, date, etc. |

**FIGURE 2.** Learning outcomes from first draft of the *SAA-ACRL/RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* (2016)
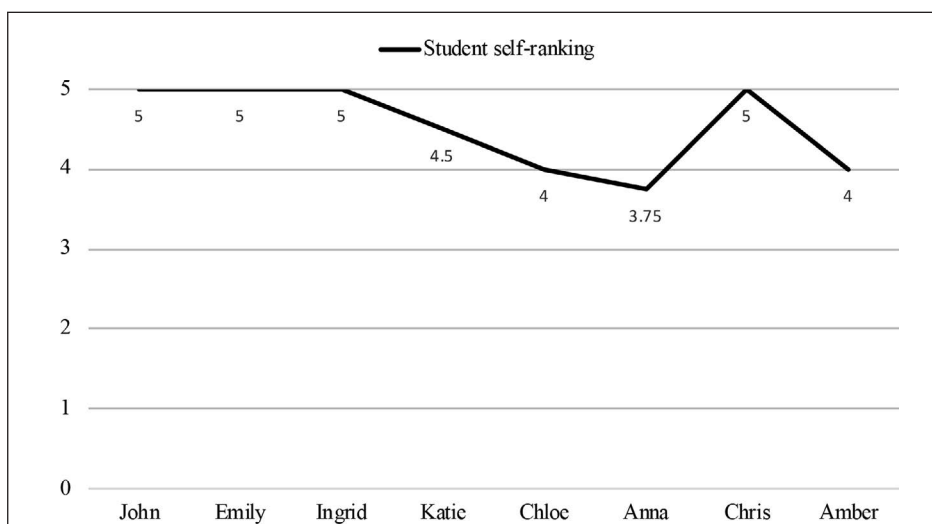
**FIGURE 3.** Learning outcome I.D.

institution about the photograph: "Some of the stuff I have gotten had the original caption and the museum's caption, and sometimes they do not match . . . being able to peel away the layers and discover which one is accurate, and which resources that I use online that are reliable, I always have to double check."

Answers provided by students with less experience demonstrate how academic disciplines may affect their understanding of sources. For example, both Chris (majoring in history and journalism) and Anna (majoring in human resources management) worked in the library for one semester but gave very different examples of this learning outcome. Chris explained,

> I understand the difference . . . a good example is I listen to an audio inter-view . . . it was an interview with an old forester from Northern Idaho, gosh, I think he died just like a year after the interview happened. . . . Then I read his biography that he wrote while he was stationed as a CCC worker in the 1930s and 1940s as a forester . . . he was talking about a lot of the same things that he already referenced. But it was interesting because the [biography] had more information that was really important because it was from his own words; it was while he was living it.

Chris's experience illustrates the complexity of how primary, secondary, and tertiary sources may interrelate and demonstrates a deeper understanding of this learning goal. On the other hand, Anna commented, "There are definitely things like articles that can change information . . . and people could interpret this differently. It makes me more aware of what I am typing and what I am putting into the digital information." Anna's experience suggests that she is

aware of the importance of accuracy and representation as an agent creating secondary and tertiary sources.

Often students did not use the exact terminology provided in the learning outcome ("primary, secondary, and tertiary sources") in their reflections, but could still talk about sources in a way that demonstrates that they understand the difference and the need to incorporate multiple types of sources when writing metadata and descriptions for archival collections and digital objects. Self-ranking and examples provided by students interviewed for this learning outcome could reflect the amount of time and exposure to this directive while working in the library, but analyzing scores by length of time worked in the library showed that it could also reflect students' academic disciplines and previous exposure to these disciplines.

*"There is a bias involved in almost everything you look at, especially when it comes to history." (Chris)*

In the second category, *Find*, learning outcome D ("understand that collections of primary source materials are often impacted by selectivity and mediation, and that databases, aggregators, and physical repositories may demonstrate biases and limitations that affect the content they provide") emphasizes an important skill for student workers that involves work with primary sources: mainly, how digital collections are created from archival materials acquired and curated to reflect the perspective of a donor or a research topic. The overall total average for all student responses was 4.44 out of 5.0, showing that students believe they had significantly improved in this area since beginning their employment.
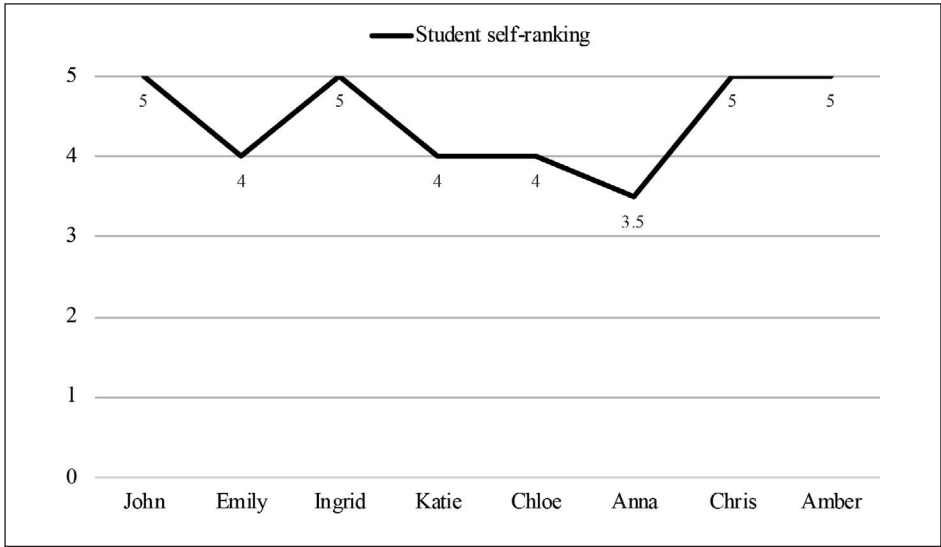


**FIGURE 4.** Learning outcome II. D.

Katie highlighted an example she faced while working to digitize photographs from a manuscript collection that referenced understanding how photographs taken for hire are different from others and how the audience matters:

> Sometimes I get collections that have already had that happen to them [selectivity and mediation]. There was a water carnival that happened in McCall in like 1933 or 1934. They must have hired somebody to do professional photos because there are scenes of people diving off a dock and in a boxing ring. I was going through photos from a different collection much later like six or seven months after I had done that first one . . . in this other collection were a couple extra photos of the water races, and it also had a photo of this guy, with the camera in a canoe. He was probably the guy taking the photos, so that was kind of cool, that this existed. . . . Even in the course of taking the photos . . . they are obviously going to leave things out, they do not want people to see.

This example shows that Katie might be more conscious of how information is constructed in the future. These types of skills may transfer to other contexts after she has finished working in the library when she needs to gather information, integrate multiple sources, and make decisions, both personally and professionally.

Anna provided a different perspective taken from her work digitizing historical photographs, assigning spatial locations, and creating metadata for historical photographs and a finding aid. She explained:

> I definitely think that it is very applicable in my work because Potlatch was definitely a very white community and there are a lot of things that I can see and things that are worded about them. . . . I am very aware of how things have changed especially because we are in north Idaho and I guess that gets a bad rap. . . .It is also a neat dynamic to see a town run entirely by one company, because that is definitely a dynamic that you see people trying to achieve, but they fail usually. But Potlatch made it happen, so, it is interesting to see the dynamic of how everyone worked there.

For Anna, being able to communicate how bias may be presented through numerous sources or how selectivity may affect people's understanding of a historical event or place demonstrates a practical understanding that she developed through her experience working with primary sources in the library. This example also shows that sophisticated experiences occur at work that are worth capturing and communicating.

A common thread throughout the student interviews is that academic background and training assists with student understanding of primary sources, including understanding bias and selectivity. Chris talked about the importance of identifying and acknowledging bias that he learned about in classes before taking the job:

> The classes that I have taken to here have really helped with that. You have to understand that almost everything you look at there is some kind of bias

especially when it comes to history. Because you have to think of who took the photo, who wrote the story. Because every single person has a bias like one way or another. . . . You go into it with a clean slate sort of, just without anything. What is it trying to say, like what is this photograph saying?

Interrogating sources from photographs to historical documents to news stories will serve students as a valuable skill beyond their academic experience.

*"I want to see it with my real eyes and tell other people about it—let me tell you what I learned." (Katie)*

In the third category, *Interpret, Analyze, and Evaluate*, learning outcome G ("demonstrate historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical materials and actors") elicited the most genuine and enthusiastic responses from the interviewees. Students scored themselves the highest on this learning outcome, often exclaiming "definitely a 5." It was also the only learning outcome for which every student provided a reflection along with a numerical score.
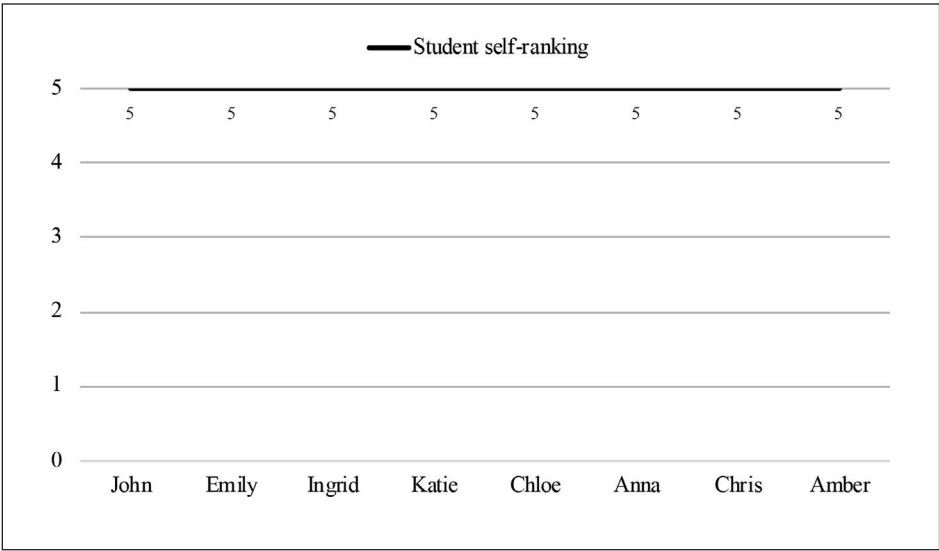


**FIGURE 5.** Learning outcome III. G.

While some students mentioned their enjoyment in working with specific formats (photographs) or projects (oral histories), others provided more personalized examples of how working with primary sources has touched their lives. Ingrid described her experience with scanning and creating descriptions for campus photographs as being

Really cool seeing the construction and growth of the campus, especially since I have like the strong personal ties to the university with all my family going there, it was really cool to see that. Just to see the whole evolution of the

> University of Idaho history. It is something that you are really proud of, like people say we are proud of that history but you rarely get to see firsthand the actual recorded history of it.

Ingrid's response demonstrates the potential for developing deeper connections to her college experience and campus as a result of working in special collections.

Katie described an emotional connection to her work as well as the importance and influence of working with local history materials:

> Yes, definitely a five. I have always liked history as a general rule, World War II London is my favorite, but appreciating Idaho history has led me to explore. Last summer, I went on a camping trip to Camp Heyburn specifically because I knew it was a CCC camp. Also like a month ago, we went to Laird Park. Specifically, because I knew that there had been CCC activities there, we went and saw the dam that they had built. I really like it, I want to see it with my real eyes, and tell other people about it because I have worked on it for so long. They ask me about my work, I do not just tell them, "I did scanning, and I did metadata." It is like "let me tell you what I learned."

Katie's story demonstrates the impact her library position has had on her life, increasing her curiosity about the past, connecting her to others, and contributing to her lifelong learning.

Anna discussed the emotions she felt while working with primary sources:

> It is interesting how much I have felt for people I have recorded data about. I even remember one day I had to follow this whole story of this farmer and he had passed away and I had to fill out [information from] the obituary. I was sad; I got connected to this old man. He had such a fulfilling life just being a farmer and then he gets killed by his tractor, it was a devastating morning for me. Yeah, just like wow, this is sad. . . . It is kind of interesting how this entire year I am just slowly growing more and more interested in the past and how they have lived their lives.

Anna discussed her growing empathy for and appreciation of people from the past; both of these perspectives are important life lessons that are not direct learning objectives of the position, but skills that we hope students take with them after they conclude their library work.

Chris directly mentioned historical empathy as a reason why he enjoys his job:

> Curiosity about the past and appreciation for historical materials; now that is just a five, that is what I love, that is my favorite. Historical empathy, yeah . . . definitely a five. That was one of the main reasons I started, I wanted to work here because I knew I will be looking at these primary sources depicting all this old stuff. I just I love the old days. I love history.

I initially chose students to report on this learning outcome because it is rather an important part of the process of working with primary source

materials. Historical empathy is a learning outcome students can attain regardless of the length of employment; all students can develop a deep connection or emotional reaction to their work with primary sources. As Katie stated, this learning outcome was, "Definitely a solid, solid, five, if not a six, on that one. That is probably my favorite part about this job, definitely."

*"That's my job . . . I am simultaneously learning about everything that I am putting in there." (Chris)*

In the fourth category, *Use and Incorporate*, learning outcome A ("convey information found in primary sources, including summarizing the content of the source and identifying and reporting key components such as author, date, etc.") references skills incorporated into every student position in special or digital collections: summarizing information for different purposes and audiences and learning how to create key metadata.

The overall total average for all student responses was 4.88 out of 5.0, showing that students believe they had significantly improved in this area since beginning their employment. This particular question elicited the second highest self-scoring, with 7 participants (88%) providing a score of 5. Amber, the student with the least amount of experience and rather new to working in the digital lab, stated she still received help from staff with this learning outcome.

Some students, such as John, mentioned increasing their skills of identifying and gathering information found in photographs and attached to documents. Katie went so far as to say, "I have definitely improved with this, and I have made it an art." Ingrid took the learning outcome a step further and
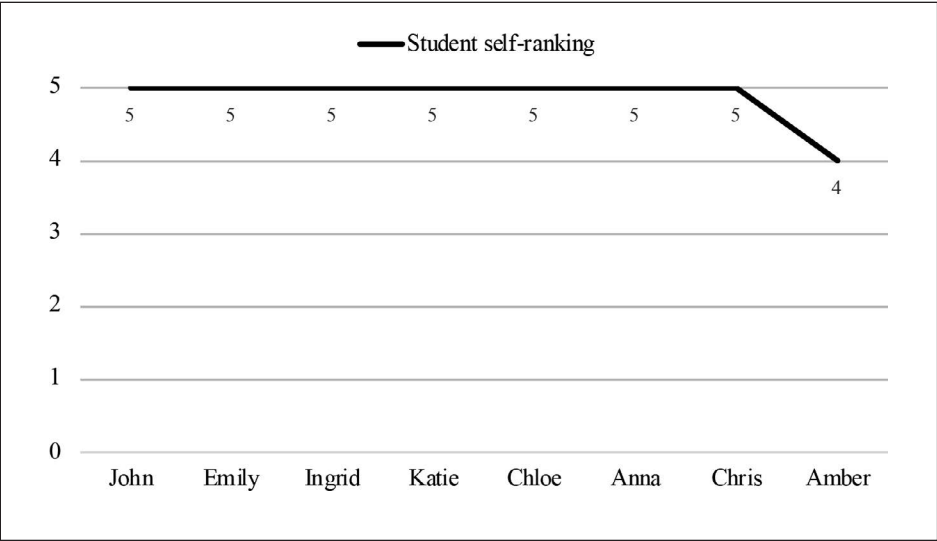


**FIGURE 6.** Learning outcome IV. A.

described her process for finding and analyzing missing information in primary sources:

> I would probably say a five for this because I remember a lot of the events, the organizations; there were two main studios where the photos came out or whom we were hired to photograph, and then I always saw the same alumni, or locals who donated the photos and their name always came up too. . . . If I did not have a date for one item, if I recognized the name, I had an idea what time period that might have been.

Ingrid mentioned that her deduction skills improved over time, skills that map to other campus learning outcomes, such as critical thinking and logical reasoning that can transfer to other academic arenas or work environments.

Chris pointed out that conveying common pieces of information found in primary sources is a major component of his job. He stated, "That's my job right there . . . going through each source, title, description, summary, keywords, what is most important about this, who submitted it and who took the pictures and where it was. . . . I am putting them in there for other people to learn about, and I am simultaneously learning about everything that I am putting in there." Chris acknowledged the cycle of information gathering, analysis, and reuse taught him more skills that will be helpful far beyond this particular archives job.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study relied on students who worked with primary sources, only a small pool of whom exist in one library. While its scale was small and arguably unique, this sample of responses represents a larger population of student employees across college and university archives and special collections and illuminates an area of the archives profession that calls for further attention and assessment. A second limitation of the study is the subjectivity of creating coding schemes. To reduce subjectivity and fully analyze, organize, and group similar attributes across eight interviews, I coded interviews three separate times to maximize accuracy and refinement across generated codes. A third limitation is the use of self-reported data by students; I obtained these responses through the lens of students, not through their supervisors or through testing that could confirm or deny the results.

This study looks at the potential value of applying primary source literacy standards to student employment; future research might assess or evaluate whether students acquire primary source literacy through a standardized measure. At the time of article submission, the ACRL Board of Directors had approved the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* at the 2018 ALA Midwinter

Meeting; SAA Council approval the document in June 2018 while I completed final revisions.[31] Standardized measures may be forthcoming after the passing of the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*.

## Conclusion

I undertook this study hoping to motivate archivists, special collections librarians, and administrators to emphasize the learning that takes place for student employees at work, especially those interacting regularly with primary source materials. Archivists who teach student employees have a larger impact than we may realize or are communicating. This study shows that regardless of academic discipline or profession, student employees who work with special collections and archives express "the cultivation of historical imagination, development of historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical materials, skills necessary for understanding and participating in the present world."[32]

Yakel and Torres determined, "Expertise cannot be fostered through a single class. Archival intelligence is something that needs to be imparted over time and is a continuous process, even for longstanding and repeat users of primary sources."[33] Student employment in archives and special collections can provide an avenue for students to continue learning and applying knowledge around primary sources. Peter Carini states, "Assessment should be tied to some extent to the level of expertise of the students. The outcomes expected from a session given to an introductory writing class should be different from those of a senior seminar. These assessments are meant as a tool to inform archivists' and librarians' teaching and to help them create more meaningful sessions that will result in better-educated users."[34] This same sentiment can be expressed toward assessing learning outcomes for student library employees, and the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* can act as a tool to evaluate whether students are learning the skills supervisors choose to emphasize. Adding to Carini's reasons why primary source literacy standards are needed,[35] this study suggests a fourth reason to help assess student employee learning and provide stronger links to college and university learning goals and assessment.

As archives and special collections connect these literacy frameworks to departments that employ student workers, departments can strategically communicate impacts on student learning. Mapping student job descriptions and responsibilities against multiple literacies (information, primary source, visual, digital) as well as aligning positions with department, library, and campus learning goals will help communicate the archival impact on student learning to stakeholders at all levels. Further conversation around the value of student self-evaluation while employed, along with describing student positions

using learning outcomes from the archives profession, will allow archivists to better communicate contributions to student learning outside the classroom and provide real-world experience and lifelong learning skills. As Elizabeth Yakel notes, "Archives can help fulfill the mission of a larger institution, such as the university, to create a generation of students who have at least been exposed to archives and manuscripts"[36] and can take important outcomes such as historical empathy and appreciation for historical materials into their lives after graduation. This research study confirms Yakel's conclusions and shows how archivists need to talk with student employees more often, capturing their learning at work. The archives profession can learn from students to make their work significant as well as useful. In the end, archivists want to create meaningful experiences for students and impart skills that they can transfer to other academic, workplace, and lifelong learning contexts. Investing in a semiformal interview process that archivists periodically complete with student employees is one way to capture these narratives and demonstrate the impact the profession has on students' lifelong learning, encouraging historical empathy and curiosity, and practical application through primary source literacy.

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1.  What year of school did you begin working/interning in the Digital Collections Lab or Special Collections and Archives?

2.  What are you studying in college?

3.  Why were you interested in working or interning at the UI Library?

4.  What skills or experience did you hope to receive while working or interning at the UI Library?

5.  How did your participation in specific projects effect your view of working or interning in a library?

6.  I have a few questions related to visual literacy skills... scaled answers using ACRL Visual Literacy Standards. *Self-rank for the following learning outcomes: 3.1.a-e; 3.2.a-f; 4.1.a-f; 4.3.a-c.*

7.  I have a few questions related to primary source literacy skills...scaled answers using SAA-ACRL/RBMS Primary Source Literacy Standards (first draft). *Self-rank for the following learning outcomes: I.D; II.A; II.D; III.C; III.D; III.G; IV.A; IV.D*

8.  What was your favorite project that you worked on and why?

9.  Do you think you increased existing or learned new skills that will help you in school?

10. Which skills specifically?

11. Do you have another job? If so, do you see any of these skills transferring?

12. Do you think you increased existing or learned new skills that will help you after graduation? Which skills specifically?

## Appendix B: Themes and Codes for Questions Reported in Article

| Question 3: Why were you interested in working or interning at the UI Library? | N=8 |
|---|---|
| Appealing environment | 6 |
| Flexible schedule | 3 |
| Personal recommendation | 2 |
| Previous library experience | 2 |
| Exposure to Special Collections through classroom instruction | 1 |
| Fantasy job | 1 |
| Good location | 1 |
| Internship in related field | 1 |
| Low stress level | 1 |
| Opportunity to work with others | 1 |
| Related experience (not in libraries) | 1 |
| School above work | 1 |
| University job | 1 |
| Working with primary sources | 1 |
| Question 4: What skills or experience did you hope to receive while working or interning at the UI Library? | N=8 |
| Computer skills | 5 |
| Communication skills | 3 |
| Idaho history | 3 |
| Work with archives, primary source materials | 3 |
| First job | 2 |
| Interact in workplace | 1 |
| Not sure what to expect | 1 |
| People skills | 1 |
| Preserve history | 1 |
| Understanding of working for a large institution | 1 |

NOTES

[1] Lynn Silipigni Connaway, William Harvey, Vanessa Kitzie, and Stephanie Mikitish, *Academic Library Impact: Improving Practice and Essential Areas to Research* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017), vii, http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/academiclib.pdf.

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[3] Association of College and Research Libraries, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

[4] Society of American Archivists, *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy Draft* (2016), https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/Guidelines%20for%20Primary%20Source%20Literacy%20-%20Draft%20for%20Feedback.pdf.

[5] Society of American Archivists, *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy Final Version* (2017), 2, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/Guidelines%20for%20Primary%20Souce%20Literacy%20-%20FinalVersion%20-%20Summer2017.pdf.

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[9] Logan, "Student Workers: Essential Partners in the Twenty-First Century Academic Library," 316–17.

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[12] Peter Carini, "Information Literacy for Archives and Special Collections: Defining Outcomes," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 16, no. 1 (2016): 193–94, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2016.0006.

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[14] Elizabeth Yakel, "Information Literacy for Primary Sources: Creating a New Paradigm for Archival Researcher Education," *OCLC Systems & Services: International Digital Library Perspectives* 20, no. 2 (2004): 61.

[15] J. Gordon Daines and Cory L. Nimer, "In Search of Primary Source Literacy: Opportunities and Challenges," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*, 16, no. 1 (2015): 19, https://rbm.acrl.org/index.php/rbm/article/view/433.

[16] Trudi E. Jacobson and Lijuan Xu, *Motivating Students in Information Literacy Classes* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2004), 11, quoted in Daines and Nimer, "In Search of Primary Source Literacy," 21.

[17] Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah Torres, "AI: Archival Intelligence and User Expertise," *American Archivist* 66, no. 1 (2003): 51, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.66.1.q022h85pn51n5800.

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[19] Peter Carini, "Archivists as Educators: Integrating Primary Sources into the Curriculum," *Journal of Archival Organization* 7, no. 1 (2009): 48, quoted in Daines and Nimer, "In Search of Primary Source Literacy," 25.

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[24] *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy Final Version, 19.*

[25] *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy Final Version*, 4.

[26] *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy Final Version*, 4.

[27] Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing": Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 65, https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.56.

[28] At the time of this study, only the first draft of the *SAA-ACRL Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* existed. I used the same version of the first draft in 2016 across interviewees for consistency.

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[32] Bahde, Smedberg, and Taormina, "Using Primary Sources," xx.

[33] Yakel and Torres, "AI: Archival Intelligence and User Expertise," 77.

[34] Carini, "Information Literacy for Archives and Special Collections," 197.

[35] Carini, "Information Literacy for Archives and Special Collections," 198.

[36] Yakel, "Information Literacy for Primary Sources," 62.

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