



Exploration 9: Digging into Archives

CODE 123: Research and Systems Thinking

- **Due Dates:** 3/25, 3/26 and 3/29
- **Details:** Submit a copy to Bb and upload at least one “artifact” as evidence of your goals to your ePortfolio.
- **Time commitment:** 60 minutes (on-site) during week 12 archives visit.

Overview

Archival research helps us to understand the lived experiences of people in the past, collect historical data, and identify change and continuity over time. Even if your research question isn't explicitly historical, that information provides essential context to framing how the phenomenon you're studying came to be.

Archives can be complicated! They offer us a partial record of the past, and systemic bias often privileges some voices over others in deciding what gets preserved. In this exploration, you'll learn how to navigate the archive, identify useful materials, and make sense of what you find.

Instructions

Phase 1 (Pre-Visit Prep):

Complete this before we arrive at the archives so you can hit the ground running.

For this activity, you'll work in groups with materials selected by SIUE's archivist, Zack Palitzsch. To prepare for your visit, take a look at the finding aid description of the materials you'll be looking at. Answer the following questions in your notes to prepare:

Step 1: The Big question: What are you curious about today that relates to your research question? (“I want to know about....”)

Step 2: “Finding aid”: Use it like a map, find 1 folder name that sounds interesting. This tells you what's inside, so you don't have to dig blindly.

Link here: <https://findingaids.siue.edu/repositories/resources>

- Sometimes, they're very descriptive, down to the folder or even the individual document! Other times, they might only be a list of collection titles.

Step 3: Prediction: What is one “thing” (photo, letter, map) you hope is in your box?: Since not all documents have been preserved, sometimes we have to think creatively about how to use the archives for a given topic. Based on the finding aid, how do you anticipate these materials might help you answer your research question?

Phase 2: Working in the Archives* (Due THUR 3/26 end of class)

*Archives serve as living records of how a community remembers and tells its story. Unlike a textbook or website, archives are not going to give you a polished historical narrative. Instead, they provide artifacts, fragments of history in the form of primary resources – letters, meeting minutes, photographs, maps, reports, etc. You will have to interpret these artifacts on your own to piece together a narrative. **As a group**, your job is to find one or two pieces and tell their stories.*

Quick Rules: **Pencils only**  | **Clean hands:** No Snacks | **Phone ready:** flash **OFF** 

Pick ONE item from your folder and fill this out:

1. **Where is it? Box #:** _____ **Folder Title:** _____
2. **What is it? (Circle one):** Photo/Letter/Map/Meeting Notes/ Other:
3. **Creator/Audience:** Who created this work? Who might have been its original audience?
4. **Tone/Vibe:** What emotions, values, or ideas seem to be conveyed? (serious, happy, angry, etc.)
5. **Inventory:** Identify and list at least two different *types* of archival materials in the folder (e.g., photographs, correspondence, meeting minutes, reports, newsletters, etc.).
6. **Gap:** Who is **not** mentioned or seen in this item?

Connection: Taking turns, each member in your group should share how they relate the materials in the folder back to their research question.

Artifact task: Take one high-quality photo of an item to upload to your ePortfolio. Ensure there is no glare and the text is readable.

* Adapted from Zack Palitzsch

Phase 3: Reflection (Due SUN 3/29 at 1159 PM)

Submit about 250 words to Bb and (eventually your ePortfolio), answering the following prompts

- **3 Things I found:** List three specific facts or names you saw today.
- **2 people missing:** Name two groups of people who weren't represented in your folder?
- **1 big change:** How did seeing these real papers change your research question?
- **Collaboration:** My teammate [name] noticed _____, which I missed because _____
- **Representation** (whose voices were loudest? Who was missing? If the folder is about students, are minoritized or commuter students included?)

- **Sentence Starter:** While this folder tells us a lot about (Subject A), it is completely silent on (Subject B), which suggests that...”

Grading Rubric for Reflection

Criteria	A Proficient Exploration Will...	A Developing Exploration Will...	An Exploration Still in Need of Work...
Content & Representation Analysis	Clearly connect each artifact to the research question and identify archival limitations.	Connect artifacts to research question, with little to no critical analysis of the archive's limitations and/or biases (silenced and missing voices).	Does not make a connection between artifact and research question; does not identify and analyze archive's limitations and biases.
Collaboration	Reflect meaningfully on how group discussion challenged or expanded initial understanding; includes and discusses specific examples and alternative perspectives.	Mention group discussion; offer minimal insight into how it impacted initial understanding; includes vague and generic examples and perspectives.	Does not mention collaboration efforts.
Formatting/ Submission	Upload relevant artifact to Bb ePortfolio; meet 250-word reflection requirement.	Upload reflection without artifact to Bb ePortfolio; fall below 250-word requirement.	Does not submit reflection to Bb or ePortfolio.