Teaching Archival Research Methods through Projects in Ethnohistory

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ABSTRACT

During the spring semester of 2015 and the fall semester of 2016, two cohorts of students at the University of Alaska Anchorage learned archival research skills as part of their methodological training in the course, Ethnohistory of Alaska Natives, which subsequently led to the development of further individual research projects. As part of the course, students provided metadata to folders within an archival collection. This article explores the semester long projects, including the hardships of finding and using culturally appropriate metadata, lessons learned, and the impact the project had on students, the archivist, and instructor.

Introduction

Archival research skills are necessary for students and those who intend to use archival materials throughout their career. Students who are taught the theory and practice of archives tend to make for better researchers in the future.[1] Most students and researchers are faced with the challenge of learning how to use archives when already in the process of conducting a specific project that requires working with an archival collection. This paper presents an alternative method that was successfully used to build students' knowledge of analyzing and understanding primary sources, furthering their confidence when working with archival materials. Two cohorts of students learned archival research skills as part of their methodological training in the course Ethnohistory of Alaska Natives at the University of Alaska Anchorage

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1.   Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah Torres, "AI: Archival Intelligence and User Expertise," *The American Archivist* 66, no. 1 (2003): 51-78.

(UAA), which subsequently led to the development of further individual research projects. As part of the course, students provided metadata to folders within an archival collection, the Charles V. Lucier papers within the University of Alaska Anchorage/Alaska Pacific University (UAA/APU) Archives and Special Collections. This strategy was developed to help students better understand the nature of archival material, the structure of archives and finding aids, the communities archives serve, and the type of information that can be gleaned from archival sources. This approach, in conjunction with previously acquired research and writing skills, guided students in acquiring and internalizing archival research methods that were subsequently used to develop a focused, small-scale research project. The project prompted students to synthesize and contextualize one aspect of the material located in the archival collection used for the course. Students also used these skills to apply metadata that made the collection more discoverable while also adding Iñupiaq (pl. Iñupiat) terminology and furthered the description of Iñupiaq culture and beliefs within the finding aid.

The following discussion presents perspectives from all participants—archivist, instructor, and students—in order to demonstrate the multilayered collaborations and learning opportunities this experience provided to all participants. Moreover, it is argued that a guided experiential learning and community-engaged exercise can be successful in allowing students to develop solid archival research skills on their own terms, even if one does not have a specific research question at the onset, but rather allows for research questions to form organically as part of the learning experience.

At the time of developing the course, the goal was to create an engaged learning experience that provided opportunities for students to succeed in learning to do both archival and ethnohistorical research. While it was planned to produce research articles with the graduate students as lead authors and the undergraduate students as co-authors analyzing the rich ethnohistorical data in the Lucier collection, there were no plans to present or publish on the teaching and learning process. For these reasons, an IRB review was not completed at the time of teaching the course. Consequently, any type of information or data that falls under IRB regulations and review will not be discussed. In this particular instance, we are focusing only on publicly available information on student presentations that were listed, advertised, and delivered at conference venues and which directly acknowledged the course as a source of information and catalyst for the papers presented. Additional information on student experiences will follow in the perspective section.

Literature Review

For a number of years preceding this project, the UAA/APU Archives, as well as the archival profession, were looking at new ways to engage undergraduate researchers. This was evidenced by the creation of the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task

Force on Primary Source Literacy in 2015.[2] Additionally, the SAA series Trends in the Archives recognized primary source literacy and archival instruction as a major trend in 2016.[3] Teaching faculty have also been looking for new and innovative ways to engage students. Collaborations between teaching faculty and archivists at academic institutions can help bring more undergraduate students into the archives, which can help develop students' writing, research, and critical thinking skills.[4] Learning how to evaluate primary sources and to do archival research can also help develop skills students will use outside their undergraduate careers.[5]

Chris Marino wrote of an experimental study completed at UC Berkeley which assessed the impact that two different types of archival instruction sessions, show-and-tell vs. inquiry-based learning, had on undergraduate students. The study suggests that the students who participated in the inquiry-based instruction session had a more positive experience than the students who participated in the show-and-tell session.[6] However, Marino's study was based on one-time instruction sessions.

In her case study "Scaffolding Primary Source Research and Analysis in an Undergraduate History Research Methods Course," Kara Flynn asserts that students' ability to evaluate and summarize primary sources increased with the length of time students spent with archival records.[7] Flynn writes that having the students attend two instruction sessions rather than the traditional one-shot instruction session better prepared the students for their class project, which required them to utilize archival materials and helped them gain a "solid background in doing research with primary sources."[8] However, Flynn also described that even two sessions limited the time students had to analyze and discuss primary sources.[9]

2. Society of American Archivists, "SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on Primary Source Literacy," accessed July 19, 2021, https://www2.archivists.org/groups/saa-acrlrbms-joint-task-force-on-primary-source-literacy.

3. Matthew Strandmark, "The Undergraduate Feedback Loop: Summarizing, Analyzing, and Acting on Qualitative Student Feedback in Special Collections and Archives Education Programs," *Archival Issues* 39, no. 2 (2019): 7-21.

4. Courtney Chartier, Gabrielle M. Dudley, and Donna Troka, "Archivists and Faculty Collaborative Course Development," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 33, no. 2 (2016): 75-92.

5. Julia Stringfellow, "Teaching an Introduction to Archives Course to Undergraduates: A New Experience for the Archivist and the Students," *Journal of Western Archives* 10, no. 2 (2019): 2-20, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol10/iss2/8.

6. Chris Marino, "Inquiry-based Archival Instruction: An Exploratory Study of Affective Impact," *The American Archivist* 81, no. 2 (2018): 483-512.

7. Kara Flynn, "Scaffolding Primary Source Research and Analysis in an Undergraduate History Research Methods Course," *Case Studies on Teaching with Primary Sources*, Society of American Archivists, published March 2020, accessed July 19, 2021, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/TWPSCase_12_Scaffolding_Primary_Source_Research_0.pdf.

8. Ibid, 7.

9. Ibid.

In the 2013 article, "Collaborative Education between Classroom and Workplace for Archival Arrangement and Description: Aiming for Sustainable Professional Education," Donghee Sinn describes how semester-long archival projects for students taking the Archival Representation course at the University at Albany enhanced the students' learning experience.[10] While these students were studying information science, the same theory could be used for students taking courses and majoring in other disciplines. Learning outside of the classroom, whether it be field experience or in the archives, not only increases the students' engagement with the class material, but also their motivation, self-confidence, and initiative.[11]

If students from a course are going to use the archives, it can be necessary to select a collection relevant to that course.[12] This does not always need to be the case as students can learn primary source evaluation from a variety of subjects; however, for this project at the University of Alaska Anchorage, it was necessary given that it was a collection that contained Alaska Native materials. Because the project contained Indigenous materials, it was important to have the students in the class understand the complexities of the metadata and Iñupiaq terminology. As this was a course that satisfied requirements in anthropology and Alaska Native Studies, and was offered to upper level undergraduate and graduate students with a pre-requisite course in Alaska Native Studies, it was expected that students had a basic understanding of Indigenous cultures and regions of Alaska, including terminology, languages, environments, and sociocultural landscapes.

Anthropological records contain an abundance of information, not only for researchers but also for origin and descendant communities. However, many of these collections are held by non-Indigenous institutions (including the UAA/APU Archives) and contain postcolonial legacies in their descriptions that favor non-Indigenous perspectives and de-contextualize Indigenous knowledge.[13] Collections that contain Indigenous materials are often described using the national language (i.e., English), and ignore the Indigenous epistemologies and local language ideologies.

There are also ethical dimensions to this unequal power-structure, and it's important to recognize the need to include localized knowledge organization

10. Donghee Sinn, "Collaborative Education between Classroom and Workplace for Archival Arrangement and Description: Aiming for Sustainable Professional Education," *The American Archivist* 76, no. 1 (2013): 237-262.

11. Ibid, 244.

12. Sonia Yaco, Caroline Brown, and Lee Konrad, "Linking Special Collections to Classrooms: A Curriculum-Collection Crosswalk," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 2 (2016): 417-437.

13. Taylor R. Genovese, "Decolonizing Archival Methodology: Combating Hegemony and Moving towards a Collaborative Archival Environment," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 12, no. 1 (2016): 32-42.

systems.[14] In her article, "Indigenous Knowledge and Archives: Accessing Hidden History and Understandings," Lynette Russell writes of her experience while working on the project "Indigenous Understandings of Weather and Climate." Russell discusses how the Australian Bureau of Meteorology's webpage describes the *Wantangka* season of the *Walabunnba* people of central Australia. The website used the terms "October to March" to describe the markers of the beginning and end of the *Wantangka* "season." However, *Wantangka* "begins when it begins, and ends when it ends, at different times every cycle."[15] The website is trying to set a strict parameter on a season that does not reflect the Indigenous approach and therefore is inaccurate.

In the United States, the Library of Congress Subject Headings tend to lack vocabulary that provides an authentic representation of Indigenous peoples, and it can take years for appropriate terminology to be added to the classification system. The term "Alaska Natives" was not approved by the Library of Congress until 2009.[16] "Dena'ina Indians" is the authorized heading for the Dena'ina of Alaska, yet "Aleut" is the authorized heading for the Unangan, when the people's name for themselves is Unangan and not Aleut. When describing collections, institutions that hold Indigenous materials could create their own complementing thesaurus of descriptive standards that do not ignore, or leave out, Indigenous terms. The National Indian Law Library is one example of an institution that revised subject headings and created their own internal supplemental thesaurus to the Library of Congress Subject Headings.[17] It was with this in mind, that the students and the archivists at UAA moved forward with the project, understanding the need to remove Euro-American terminologies and expand upon the Indigenous context within the collection by using the words and phrases used in the contents of the folders.

The Project

Overview

In fall 2014, one of the anthropology professors at UAA, Medeia Csoba DeHass, approached archivist Veronica Denison at the UAA/APU Archives and Special Collections to discuss the possibility of bringing her spring 2015 class, Ethnohistory of Alaska Natives, to work in the archives. Subsequently, they met to discuss which

14. Maria Montenegro, "Subverting the Universality of Metadata Standards: The TK Labels as a Tool to Promote Indigenous Data Sovereignty," *Journal of Documentation* 75, no. 4 (2019): 731-749.

15. Lynette Russell, "Indigenous Knowledge and Archives: Accessing Hidden History and Understandings," *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 36, no. 2 (2005): 161-171.

16. Library of Congress, "Library of Congress Subject Headings Weekly List 31, August 5, 2009," accessed July 19, 2021, https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/wls09/awls0931.html.

17. M. Martens, "Creating a Supplemental Thesaurus to LCSH for a Specialized Collection: The Experience of the National Indian Law Library," *Law Library Journal* 98, no. 2 (2006): 287-297.

collections the students could utilize and agreed to develop an immersive learning experience that provided students with project-based learning opportunities that also benefit the archives. The challenge was to identify a collection that could benefit from more description, was easy for students to work in, and provided information relative to the ethnohistory of Alaska Native cultures and peoples. After some discussion, they settled on using the Charles V. Lucier papers for the class. Charles V. Lucier was an Alaskan anthropologist and archaeologist whose work focused on Iñupiaq culture, specifically in the Bering Strait and Seward Peninsula regions.

After discussion, Denison and Csoba DeHass both agreed one main goal of the project was to make information from the Lucier collection more discoverable, not only to the Alaska Native communities Lucier worked and kept in contact with, but also to people outside those communities seeking to research the collection. This aligned with course learning outcomes on teaching students ethnohistorical methods and contextualizing ethnohistorical data, as well as providing opportunities to discuss ethical principles governing ethnohistorical research and their relevance to various stakeholders. Denison also hoped the students would learn about the complexities of archival description, the work of archivists, and how to conduct archival research and think critically about primary sources. Based on the course rationale and learning outcomes outlined in the course syllabus, students could expect to learn more about conducting research in the archives, integrating archival sources into their research projects, Lucier's ethnographic work with Alaska Native communities, and to contribute to the expansion of the Lucier collection finding aid.

The archival component of the course proved successful, and therefore when Ethnohistory of Alaska Natives was offered again in the fall of 2016, Csoba DeHass and Denison decided to have the second cohort continue where the first left off.

Collection Description

Charles V. Lucier received his B.A. in biology in 1949 from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. From 1950 to 1952, Lucier assisted and worked with anthropologists Helge Larsen, Ivar Skarland, and J.L. Giddings Jr. on an archaeological survey on the Seward Peninsula in Alaska. He also documented traditional Iñupiaq knowledge, recorded music, and conducted studies on the culture of the Noatak Iñupiat. Following the archaeological survey, he taught in schools in Talkeetna and Karluk. In the 1950s, he married Grace Nagozruk, daughter of early Iñupiaq educator Arthur Nagozruk, Sr. The Luciers moved to Anchorage, AK in 1959, and Charles Lucier began working for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as a game biologist, retiring in 1979. The Luciers were founding members of Urban Natives United, which was a traditional Iñupiaq and Yup'ik, dance group. Charlies Lucier continued to study Iñupiaq culture and recorded oral traditions of the Iñupiat on the Seward Peninsula, Norton Sound, and Kotzebue Sound. He died in 2013.

The Lucier papers held at the UAA/APU Archives contain materials relating to his anthropological and archaeological work, personal and family papers and correspondence, photographs and slides, and audio recordings. The anthropology

and archaeology papers include ethnohistorical data, notes, lists, drawings, maps, articles, oral history transcripts, and photographs. The audio recordings include Iñupiaq songs and dances; stories and interviews with John Kakaruk, an Iñupiaq reindeer herder; interviews with Della Keats, a well-known traditional Iñupiaq healer; and the biography of Iñupiaq artist Robert Mayokok. The correspondence contains letters from archaeologists and anthropologists, friends, and relatives.[18] Lucier worked closely with Iñupiaq people, and many of the collection's contents, particularly the stories, were dictated by an Iñupiaq to an Iñupiaq.

At the time of the classes, the Lucier papers were divided into two parts. The first part, which was also further divided into series, contains materials given to Archives and Special Collections by Charles Lucier. He began donating his papers in 1984, with additions made periodically until 2012. During his lifetime, Lucier sent many of his records to his colleague and fellow anthropologist Earnest S. "Tiger" Burch, Jr. When Burch died in 2011, his estate sent those records to the UAA/APU Archives and Special Collections. The second part of the Lucier collection contains materials received from the Burch estate and is arranged in the order in which it arrived at UAA.

Metadata

It was determined that the students would describe folders in the collection by including the subjects of each folder, as well as the places, people, and corporate institutions mentioned. If a folder contained items in Iñupiaq, that was noted as well. By adding people and place names along with additional descriptions of the materials in the collection, students would provide users with greater insight into the collection's contents. While many collections could likely benefit from this type of description, the Charles V. Lucier papers, in particular, have Indigenous content that is important to share with origin communities.

It was decided that the Library of Congress Thesaurus for Graphic Materials (TGM), the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), and the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) would be used for metadata since that is what the UAA/APU Archives uses for metadata within Alaska's Digital Archives. GNIS was mostly used for reference purposes, but not every place was recognized in the Library of Congress Authorities or GNIS. The students were given links to the Library of Congress Authority Files, TGM (and a version was printed out due to Wi-Fi issues in the archives' research room), and GNIS.

Some of the required terms did not work for the project so the students and archivists worked together to determine a more appropriate word. For example, TGM requires one to use "Heaven" for "Afterlife", which is inaccurate for many religions and cultures. Additionally, the LCSH authorized heading for "Beluga" is "White

18.   Veronica Denison and Jeffrey Sinnott, "Guide to the Charles V. Lucier Papers, 1903-2009," Archives and Special Collections at the UAA/APU Consortium Library, accessed July 19, 2021, https://archives.consortiumlibrary.org/collections/specialcollections/hmc-0165/.

whale". TGM only has "Whales". In the Lucier papers, there are many references to "Beluga hunting". Due to its cultural significance and the fact that this is how the origin community described the subject, it was decided it would be best and culturally appropriate to keep "Beluga" and "Beluga hunting" in the description, instead of using the LCSH or TGM requirements. This was the same for place names mentioned within the folders. Many of the place names are Iñupiaq traditional names and are not officially recognized place names outside of the Iñupiaq culture. Having metadata that accurately reflects local communities adds to a more meaningful description and honors the community in which it describes. So, while there were many cases in which TGM and LSCH worked, there were many others where it did not.

Cohort One

The first cohort of the course came into the archives in the spring of 2015. The students were expected to work in the archives for about 3 hours per week during the spring semester, although, because of their own interests, some came in more than required. The first class visit included an archival instruction session which consisted of an introduction to archives (types of material, researcher rules, finding aid review), a tour of the UAA Archive's vault so students could understand how archival collections are stored and the volume of the holdings, a primary source evaluation where the students looked at different types of records (a letter, a photograph, and a document) and discussed the biases and context, and a brief overview of metadata and what to include in the finding aid. The second class visit began with more information regarding how to create metadata for the collection, and then for the second half of this class and subsequent class visits, students worked within the Lucier papers.

For this cohort, the collection was divided into the following categories for the students to work in: field notes and journals, ethnographic notes, general and personal correspondence, stories, genealogy and obituaries, business papers and education, and photographs and slides. This was loosely based on the organizational series in part one of the collection. Each student was expected to bring their own computer, check one out from the library, or use an available one in the archives. The students were given a metadata template (both paper and digital depending on preference) which included folder information and rows for the metadata fields they were expected to provide—subjects, geographic places, corporate names (businesses and organizations), and people, as well as a summary of what was in each folder. They were to copy and paste, from the finding aid, the folder information they were working in, and then add metadata to specific columns. When the project began, students started writing item-level descriptions, specifically for the correspondence. This quickly proved to be too long of a process as some folders had few items while others were completely full; therefore, it was determined that only the students who worked on photographs would continue with this level of detail since Lucier captioned and described each photograph anyway, and the rest of the class took a broader approach when describing the folders. By the end of the semester, most

students had stopped using the templates, because depending on the folder they were describing, some columns would be incredibly long and many preferred to just type the information in Microsoft Word or Apple Pages.

There were 14 students in cohort one; 1-3 students worked on each category. During their combined 233 hours in the archives, they were able to describe 85 of 674 folders in the collection. During the class periods, Denison walked around and individually helped the students. She also sat at the main reference desk so they could speak with her when they needed clarification or help. The students sent their metadata templates or documents to grad student, Alyssa Willett (a co-author on this paper), who added the completed metadata to a copy of the finding aid. This later became an issue, which we addressed for cohort two, because it was difficult to track any metadata errors while they were happening. Sometimes it would take a couple weeks to be able to see what the students had entered due to the sheer amount of data and Willett having to condense the information. After Willett added the metadata to the finding aid, Denison would further edit for typos, grammar, or incorrect metadata terms used.

Cohort Two

Cohort two came into the archives one class period a week for six weeks during the fall of 2016. Their first visit to the archives included the same introductory information as the previous cohort, except there was more focus on explaining metadata. There were 22 students in this class who spent a combined total of 325 hours in the archives. Instead of assigning the students their work based on series, Csoba DeHass, as the instructor, chose a span of folders within a specific box for each student. This allowed them to become acquainted with a variety of subject materials. This was especially true for those students who worked within part two of the Lucier collection, which is arranged in the order it arrived to the archives and not in series like part one, and meant folder spans included different types of materials. The cohort, in total, added metadata to 189 folders.

To alleviate some of the metadata issues experienced with cohort one, the second class entered their work into a shared copy of the finding aid stored in a Google document instead of a template or their own Word or Apple documents. This allowed Csoba DeHass and Denison to monitor the student's work in "real time" and to catch and address any errors right away. Because the students were not using a template, another Google doc was created that included the links to TGM, GNIS, and LCSH, and had example metadata fields. The students also were able to reference the type of metadata the previous cohort had done.

While the Google doc allowed for the students' work to all be in one place and gave them shared responsibility to edit a copy of the existing finding aid with the information they were collecting, by the end of the class the document became so large (nearly 200 pages) that it would take about 10 minutes to load. The document would also "jump around," that is, it would spontaneously move on one student depending on how much metadata another student was adding.

Finding Aid Results

Due to the nature of storing and organizing archival collections, some folders had more materials than others, while some folders took longer to work through than others. The ethnographic journals and field notes took the longest to process, as students had to decipher Lucier's handwriting. Getting used to reading a person's handwriting is always a taxing aspect of archival work, but in this case it was particularly challenging. As Lucier noted in a transcription he made for one of his fieldwork journals years after the original was created, he even had trouble deciphering his own handwriting. In addition to adapting to reading Lucier's handwriting, students had to provide a 2-3 sentence summary and make note of the subjects, people, and places mentioned in the folder. The first line in the description of each folder was kept from the original finding aid as they were predominantly retained from Lucier's own folder descriptions. The metadata the students added was organized and included underneath the original description. Upon surveying the emerging folder description updates, it was determined that not every folder needed separate subject headings.

For example, the description for the first folder in the collection, under Series 1: Field journals and notes, previously read:

"Field journal and transcription: College and Port Clarence, Alaska."

Today, after incorporating the students' work, the description for the first folder under Series 1: Field journals and notes reads:

Field journal and transcription: College and Port Clarence, Alaska

Field notes recording: Alaska Natives—Northern Alaska—Iñupiaq; Archaeological sites; Mounds (Burials); Ivory carving; Ivory; Rock art; Influenza; and Tuberculosis. Larsen and Lucier talk with many Native informants who help them find sites. Lucier describes the first time he encounters human burials.

People: Larsen, Helge; Rainey, Froelich; Komok, Joe; Picnalook, James; Alexander, Ralph; Holtved, Erik; Rye, Owen; Bullock, Jack; Eakan, Burt; Olana family

Place names: College; Port Clarence; Seward Peninsula; Nome; Point Hope

Another example is from Box 7, Folders 43 and 44, located in part two of the collection. Originally, the description for these two folders was simply: "Stories." There was no indication of whose stories these were, whether or not they were traditional Iñupiaq stories, what the names of the stories were, who and what their subjects were, or who told the stories. Now the description in these folders is more

detailed, reading:

Stories

Folder 43: Ralph Gallahorn stories, translated by Judith Bailey:

Story titles: Cottonwood Tree; Alagaciag; Kupqaq; Rags to Riches; Killer Whales and Wolves; The Blind Young Man and The Loon; Burned Hillside; Spotted Wolverine; Raven Attacks; Raven and A Human Being; The First Box Drum

Folder 44: Jenny Mitchell stories, translated by Della Keats; stories narrated and translated by Gordon Mitchell, Sr.; stories narrated by Mark Mitchell (Misigag) and translated by Della Keats; stories narrated by Della Keats, stories translated and narrated by Yiyuk Harris, with some Iñupiaq translations provided by Grace Lucier, stories narrated and translated by Frank Glover, and a story narrated by Mary Howard, translated by Helen Farqhuar

Stories and description: The Creature in the Lake; Muga's Boat Meets Giant; Kununnuaka: Dangerous Man-like Sea Creature; Walrus Dog; Sea Weasel; Boy's First Kill Observances; Girls' Puberty Observances/initiation rites; Shamans and Missionaries in 1898; Igat: Bouncing Creatures; Raven Brings Flaker; Girls' Lives and Puberty Observances in the Upper Kobuk River Area, around 1890; Unseen Monsters in Lake; Eclipse; Youth Injured by Mother Walrus, 1952; He saw a Giant Bird; Della Keats discusses in 'Fragmentary genealogy' and documents the genealogy of the people Lucier came into contact with. Avanaluk; Crack Man; Old Man and Puffin; Mink and Raven

People: Muha; Allen, Charley; Mitchell, Gordon, Sr.; Mitchell, Mark; Mitchell, Jenny; Keats, Della; Napaktumuit; Harris, Yiyuk; Gallahorn, Ralph; Farqhuar, Helen; Howard, Mary; Bailey, Judith; Gallahorn, Ralph; Glover, Frank

Place names: Noatak River; Point Barrow; Kotzebue Island; Lockhart Point; Point Hope; Kobuk River; Napaktuktuak

Languages: English; Iñupiaq

One last example of how the metadata the students added to the collection guide provided further information is Folder 7 in Box 1. The original description for that folder read: "Kotzebue Sound ethnic origins notebook, No. 13." After the updates, the folder is described as follows:

Kotzebue Sound ethnic origins notebook, No. 13 (includes wordlist of Cape Nome dialect)

Pages 1-16 contain translations from Cape Nome Iñupiaq. Lucier describes Iñupiaq winter food storage and housing. He also notes seasonal rounds and

community harvest practices. In June, Beluga whale hunting begins and seal hunters travel to trade. There are descriptions of cultural items and practices including the Blanket Toss and Native dancing

People: Hadley, John

Place names: Buckland; Kaluwaco'k; Mikiyeok; Sealing Point; Cape Espenberg; Deering; Kotzebue; Noatak; Point Hope; Koyukuk Station; Nulato

Perspectives

In the following sections, instructor Medeia Csoba DeHass, archivist Veronica Denison, and students Alyssa Willet (from cohort one) and Alex Taitt (from cohort two) share their experiences on working with the collection in collaboration with the archives.

Ethnohistory Instructor's Perspective

Ethnohistory in the Americas brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners from a variety of academic disciplines as well as Knowledge Holders from Indigenous communities. An ethnohistorical approach combines both historical and ethnographic sources and methods in analyzing and interpreting Indigenous lifeways of the Americas, to "create a more inclusive picture of the histories of native" communities.[19] The development of ethnohistorical research methods are profoundly tied to the Indian Land Claims in the United States and the legal process that generated the first ethnohistorical studies for the Indian Claims Commission. As such, ethnohistory draws on multiple disciplines and knowledge systems while privileging Indigenous perspectives in interpreting the history of Native Nations to deconstruct colonial paradigms and to meaningfully engage with post-colonial legacies.

Teaching ethnohistory is a rewarding experience, as it provides clear feedback on the progress of students acquiring new research skills by producing research results. For the most part, taking an ethnohistory course gives most students their first hands -on research experience in archives and with archival material. It is particularly rewarding to see students going from hesitantly reviewing archival material to confidently and successfully engaging with archival collections as potential data sources. Teaching ethnohistory involves an educational trajectory that guides students in becoming familiar with a new research methodology and, an often-overlooked research resource, archival collections.

At the same time, teaching ethnohistory is also challenging due to the complexity of the material that needs to be carefully balanced to deliver a coherent learning

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19.　"About," American Society for Ethnohistory, accessed July 23, 2021, https://ethnohistory.org/about/.

experience. Using archival collections for research is a skill that is difficult and time-consuming to teach and which requires the incorporation of ample experiential learning opportunities. Teaching archival research method novices how to do research in an unknowable database with no specific research outcomes is daunting to say the least. Yet, it is not impossible as long as we have clear and realistic expectations regarding the learning outcomes and the amount of research students can successfully accomplish.

The challenge for the instructor lies in developing a teaching method that both guides students through specific research methods and gives them opportunities to build a level of confidence that will allow them to intuitively shift focus as they become increasingly familiar with the nature of archives and archival research. In order to do ethnohistorical research, anthropology students need to be able to do archival research. However, it is difficult to learn how to do archival research without a clearly defined research project. This is where using the metadata tagging approach became particularly helpful. It allowed me, as the instructor, to first focus on teaching students about ethnohistory while they became familiar with how archives work and as they learned to recognize different types of archival data.

It was, in some ways, akin to using backward research design. Students did not set out to answer specific research questions; rather, they first became familiar with the unknowable and eclectic nature of archival collections. They also learned to extract concrete information from the collection through the metadata tags that they were then able to relate back to the Alaska Native material we covered in class discussions and readings. As the archival sessions went on, and as they accumulated metadata, they were encouraged to look for patterns and connections within the collection. This created a learning continuum that allowed each student to shift from purely metadata tagging to executing data analysis and research at their own pace. While this is not how ethnohistorical research is normally designed and conducted, it was an effective approach to teaching archival research skills that can be merged with ethnographic ones.

Course Design

While there are certain elements of teaching a course on ethnohistory that always need to be addressed, it also continually needs to be re-designed based on the preparation of the students taking the course. For example, on the one hand, it is always necessary to explain the transdisciplinary nature of ethnohistory as an approach that combines both ethnology and historiography as well as ethnographic and historical methods. On the other hand, designing a course on ethnohistory for history majors, who are already familiar with working with primary sources found in archives, is going to be different from one that is designed for anthropology majors already trained in ethnographic methods and sources. The former will mostly focus on discussing anthropological theory and developing skills in ethnographic methods, while the latter will focus on understanding historiography and learning archival research skills to understand and analyze primary source collections.

In our specific case, I designed the course for anthropology majors focusing on Alaska Native communities and archival materials. While Alaska Native Studies have been particularly rich in producing ethnohistorical studies and using ethnohistorical strategies in exploring a variety of Alaska Native experiences and issues, focusing on Alaska Native material had to be carefully balanced with non-Alaska Native material-based secondary sources and studies exploring different aspects of ethnohistory. In this sense, using *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History,* co-edited by Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, in conjunction with Sonja Luehrmann's *Alutiiq Villages under Russian and U.S. Rule*, as well as selected readings discussing the development and praxis of ethnohistory, was particularly helpful.[20, 21] These texts gave hands-on guidance to students as well as an overview of non-Alaska Native case studies, which then could be compared and contrasted with Alaska Native issues and examples.

When teaching ethnohistory and archival research as part of ethnohistorical methods, it is important to spend time on learning culture-specific details so that the material can be interpreted within the culturally appropriate context. Even with a good understanding of culture-specific knowledge, it is plausible that different researchers provide different interpretations using the same archival collections, as the same collection can be analyzed from a variety of perspectives even when culture-specific Indigenous contextualization is consciously privileged. This is a particularly significant aspect of teaching ethnohistory and helps students become familiar with the need for flexibility in the process of doing archival research while also recognizing that finding aids are not static representations of the collection. As such, different perspectives can be emphasized or downplayed, and our responsibility as researchers includes seeking and incorporating feedback from, and collaboration with, Indigenous communities. This also includes keeping the Indigenous end user of our scholarly output in mind as we engage with the collection.

Using an ethnohistorical approach to studying Alaska Native cultures is a well-established tradition, partially due to the perspectives key researchers have applied to Alaska Native issues viewing history and anthropology as complementary methods of understanding the lived Alaska Native experience (for example, Lydia T. Black, Ernest S. Burch, Jr., Sergei Kan, Rachel Mason, Kenneth Pratt, Dorothy Jean Ray). Partly, it is also due to the fact that both Alaska Native historical and written ethnographic records reach back to the earliest part of the Russian colonial period. Prominent scholars of Alaska Native cultures and history instinctively used both historiographic and ethnographic methods to understand and interpret Alaska Native past and present as a continuum. This approach reflected a commitment to representing Alaska Native perspectives rather than limiting research methods to one discipline

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20. Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, ed., *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

21. Sonja Luehrmann, *Alutiiq Villages under Russian and U.S. Rule* (University of Alaska Press, 2008).

that would have resulted in a one-dimensional scholarship without taking Alaska Native experiences into account.

Even with such well-established practice, it was a challenge to balance all aspects of the course, namely: 1) teaching about the history of ethnohistory, 2) teaching the basics of doing ethnohistorical work, including ethical considerations, 3) providing a solid background on Alaska Native cultures and people in general, 4) sharing specific background on the Alaska Native communities whose archival records students worked with so that they understood the archival data, and 5) giving enough time to actually practice ethnohistory through extensive archival research, analysis, and synthesis of results. This was a lot of information and material to fit into a semester-long, 3-credit "stacked" course that included both advanced undergraduate and graduate students, despite the fact that most students already had a thorough background in doing anthropological work (ethnographic, museum, or archaeological) and an in-depth understanding of anthropological theory.

Course Organization

Due to the need to fit both theoretical and practical segments of the course into the 15-week 3-credit format, it was important to find a balance that provided sufficient introduction to ethnohistory and archival research while also creating a learning environment with ample time for hands-on practice. As students were new to archival research, the course design specifically included a strategy to guide and support students in developing an intuitive process for recognizing, documenting, and analyzing archival research data. Therefore, it was reasonable to expect that the focus would gradually shift from internalizing the process to increasingly producing research data as the semester went on. This turned out to be a correct assumption, yet it was unexpected to find that student interest in archival research intensified as the semester progressed and did not dissipate by the end of the 15 weeks.

I taught the course to two cohorts, once in two consecutive academic years and I used the same archival collections and the same required readings for both cohorts. When I first consulted with Denison on selecting a suitable collection for the course, we both knew the students would not be able to finish metadata tagging the entire collection. In preparation for the second cohort of students, we reviewed and re-assessed the metadata tagging approach. As a result, we decided to implement a few changes.

The first cohort of students completed 75 minutes of research once a week for 9 weeks starting on week 5 of the semester, and they also conducted an additional hour of research outside of the class meeting time each week. I taught the course twice a week and we used the first weekly meeting to discuss the assigned readings, with each student taking turns as discussion leaders. For the second cohort, I decided to change the format and teach the course for 150 minutes once a week so that students could have over 2 hours of uninterrupted research time in the archives. The new format also meant that I needed to front-load the course with readings and

discussions for the first 7 weeks, so that we could focus on archival research in the second half of the semester for 6 weeks.

For cohort one, we were experimenting with a variety of formats and strategies for creating a digital collaborative space that provided active, efficient, and consistent student engagement. I settled on the institution-sponsored WordPress platform for two reasons. First, I was quite comfortable with WordPress and was reasonably sure that I would be able to troubleshoot most problems. Second, using WordPress was a direct skill students could list on their CVs immediately after the semester had concluded. Each student had a WordPress page in a shared site, and they recorded their metadata tags on their page as invisible to the public. Alyssa Willett, whose reflections on the course from a student's perspective are discussed below, then collected data from each site, collated, and then summarized them. The institutional internet signal was very weak in the archives and we made several calls to IT to boost it. For this reason, students often had to take notes in a word document and post it later on their WordPress page when they had access to a more stable internet. We were able to get through the course and achieve our learning goals, but this was a clunky and fragmented data management system. It also required students to leave Blackboard, the institutional learning management system, that had the readings and assignments posted and to log into a WordPress to complete the archival tasks.

For the second cohort, Veronica suggested using a shared Google document so that students could directly input the data into the already formatted finding-aid outline in "suggestions" mode. We were hoping that this would also work better with the low internet signal, which, ultimately, it did. What we did not count on was the "virtual traffic jams" students experienced when working in the same Google document simultaneously during the archival sessions. On the plus side, entering the data cut down on clean-up and formatting issues and it also streamlined the process. Additionally, it made it possible for students to look at the entire finding aid and the data added by the cohort. This also allowed them to cross-reference their work with other sections of the collection and to seek out information that was tagged by fellow classmates and located in sections of the collection they did not directly work with, but which was relevant to their research project.

While both cohorts accomplished a remarkable amount of work in terms of metadata tagging and filling out the finding aid with details, I came to the conclusion that the research project expectations for the course were very challenging to accomplish. This was particularly true for the second cohort, where students had one less hour per week of research time than the first cohort's students. Teaching a research methods course that also includes substantial hands-on experience is akin to a 3-credit course that has an accompanying lab component for additional credit hours.

Both cohorts completed a class period (75 minutes) of introduction to archives module with Denison that included an overview of basic characteristics of archives, their differences from library collections, instructions on the Library of Congress Subject Headings and Thesaurus for Graphic Materials, the effective use of finding

aids, elementary archival research rules, and a brief review of the archival vault and selected collections. Additionally, both cohorts also completed a museum visit to learn more about the significance of ethnohistorical research in museum collections and an introductory session by the UAA/APU anthropology subject librarian on completing research in the library. The second cohort also had the opportunity to visit with additional experts in Alaska Native issues and ethnohistory during one class period. In both cohorts, the readings and the accompanying discussions were productive and ran on schedule as planned.

The Feasibility of Teaching Ethnohistory

Applying an ethnohistorical approach in studying Alaska Native issues has somewhat diminished over the past decade. While advanced courses in ethnohistory have been periodically offered on all three main campuses of the University of Alaska (University of Alaska Southeast, University of Alaska Anchorage, and University of Alaska Fairbanks), an ethnohistorical approach is perhaps the exception and not the norm when it comes to teaching anthropology. Archival research skills are often difficult to teach and learn partially due to the "needle in the haystack" nature of archival research. It always takes up a lot more time than what was originally planned, there is no guarantee of finding any type of results pertaining to a specific research project, and there are plenty of opportunities to get side-tracked by stumbling on interesting, albeit unrelated, treasure troves of archival data. These realities, combined with the need to help students build an understanding of archives and a conceptual legitimacy of archival research, create a challenging teaching and learning environment despite the fact that archival data is becoming increasingly and globally available through open-access and digitization initiatives. This increased access to archival data alone could be used to justify teaching ethnohistory on a wider scale so that it can support community-engaged research projects that are built on decolonizing research approaches and the principles of Indigenous data sovereignty.[22]

Based on my experience teaching the course over two cohorts focusing on using the metadata tagging process to introduce students to archival research, my conclusion is that ethnohistory can be successfully taught within the confines of one semester-long, 3-credit course with the following caveat: while students will learn to do ethnohistorical and archival research, the ability to reach specific research goals will be limited, and producing a complete, full-fledged study will be almost certainly too ambitious. Although the course in general was successful, and there were student outcomes beyond the class in the form of conference presentations, there are a few key changes I would implement when teaching the course in the future.

First, it is crucial to have an approximately 50 percent time-split between learning about ethnohistory and doing archival work while also developing a process

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22. Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor, *Indigenous Data Sovereignty* (Australian National University Press, 2016).

that solicits brief research updates from students. I would consider using the first 10-15 minutes of each archival session to go around the room and ask each student to reflect on the material they have been working with. I realized the need for these shared updates during the final presentations when we found the numerous overlaps between various parts of the collection and students were able to discuss, connect, and even complete each other's data. One aspect of this lessons-learned process was the implementation of using Google docs in the second cohort based on the data-management challenges experienced with the first cohort. That being said, I would split the Google document into smaller, shared sections so that the online traffic does not overwhelm the system and slow students down.

Ethnohistory, due to its research-intensive foundation, lends itself to fostering students' professional development and guiding students to engage in impactful data dissemination that also actively builds their participation in professional networks. While I had publication and public outreach goals set out for the cohorts, due to time limitations, it was not possible to fully realize them. In the future, I would streamline the assignments that focus on the research outcomes portion of the course and design a heavily scaffolded assignment that would guide students to producing a solid, one-page length interpretive text on their specific section of the collection. This one-page text then could be used to build an online interactive digital exhibit, in this specific case using Omeka, which was already used by the UAA/APU Archives at the time. This would have guaranteed institutional longevity and sustained data sharing and management. For the same reason, I would also suggest instructors secure IRB clearance for the course results in advance, so that the outcomes can be discussed in detail and with specific metrics through an already established protocol. Lastly, the most important change I would make in teaching ethnohistory is offering it as a 3+ credit course. The learning curve involved in becoming familiar and comfortable with doing archival research, as well as the amount of archival work students need to complete to internalize the specific research skills and processes required for ethnohistorical research, are very similar to those taught in laboratory sections accompanying anthropology courses with substantial need for hands-on experience. Ideally, ethnohistory would be a 3+1 or 4-credit course that delivers a coherent learning experience both on the skills needed for doing, and the nature of, ethnohistorical research.

Archivist's Perspective

After re-writing the legacy description of the Charles V. Lucier papers, as well as adding and describing the materials that were donated by the Burch estate, I knew there was more within the collection that, if described further or expanded upon in the finding aid, would help make the collection more discoverable to researchers. The collection was originally described at the folder level but without any descriptions or elaborations. This type of folder-level detail is common when describing archival collections, especially at UAA, in order to reduce backlog and keep up with new collections being donated. For example, Folder 46 of Box 8 of the Lucier papers was described as "Ethnographic notes: Gordon Mitchell" but there was nothing else

describing the contents or subjects within the folder. Someone who originally looked at the collection guide to the Lucier papers would not have known what was specifically mentioned in his ethnographic and fieldwork journals, nor could they have gleaned detailed information regarding the photographs, the Alaska Native stories, and the people who shared them with Lucier. It would also not have been possible to identify which folders contained materials in Iñupiaq. Additionally, the fact that I had worked on and within (for reference requests) the collection in the past meant I had more knowledge of the Lucier papers than other anthropological collections at UAA, which could benefit the project and students.

Since the project spanned two different classes, there were two separate cohorts. While the initial archival project was the same, the classes differed in the amount of hours the students spent in the archives, how they kept track of their work, and which part of the collection the students worked on. Having two consecutive cohorts afforded us the opportunity to learn from the experience of the first course cohort and apply changes when designing the course material and archival assignments for the second cohort. Even with that, there are still certain things I would change.

Ideally, I would make more time for the initial instruction sessions. One session would cover strictly archives and primary sources, which would include discussing archives and what they collect, a tour of the vault, and evaluations of different types of records. This proposed session aligns closely with what was conducted for both cohorts. Then I would have a second, separate class period regarding metadata and description. I would also have required readings regarding archival theory and metadata between the two instruction sessions. Two examples would be "The Metadata is the Interface: Better Description for Better Discovery of Archives and Special Collections, Synthesized from User Studies" by Jennifer Schaffner and "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory" by John M. Schwartz and Terry Cook.[23, 24] Additionally, I would have the students look at *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS) so they better understand the description process and why our finding aids are set up the way they are. While I did go over the finding aids and the fields during the initial instruction session for both cohorts, having them actually look at DACS would be beneficial. In the second session, we would discuss the readings and go over the expectations for what they are expected to do in the archives.

While I did walk around the room and have one-on-one check-ins with students, and almost always made sure myself or a colleague was available to help the students, I would include a mid-project check-in session for the whole class. This would be a

23. Jennifer Schaffner, "The Metadata is the Interface. Better Description for Better Discovery of Archives and Special Collections: Synthesized from User Studies," Online Computer Library Center, published May 2009, accessed July 23, 2021, https://library.oclc.org/digital/collection/p267701coll27/id/444/.

24. Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1-19.

class session dedicated to discussing the students' thoughts and concerns, and any metadata questions. I feel as though the metadata was occasionally overwhelming for the students, since it is something most students never had to do before, and a mid-project group discussion could help rectify this and ease some concerns.

Additionally, I would create a thesaurus for the words or terms that we changed to better reflect Iñupiaq terminology, culture, and beliefs. For the course, we mostly used what we already decided was in the finding aid; however, I feel a thesaurus would be more effective. In the future, I would also recommend using multiple Google documents (or other file-sharing options) focused on a smaller portion of the collection so less people would be editing the same document at one time.

In the current finding aid, not every folder description is formatted the same way and that is because each student had different styles. I tried to make them as uniform as possible, formatting the description in the tables within the finding aid so that they were similar. I also noticed there were a couple uses of the word "interesting", indicating that the students' perspectives came through in the description as well, which is not useful to researchers. Other times, they would provide an excellent summary of the folder, but then continue the description by writing more about certain records in a folder, while leaving out others. I was able to cull their perspectives and interpretations from the finding aid, and left the broader descriptions, but there were times I had to pull the actual folder to double-check the appropriateness of the tags and descriptions provided.

Editing the students' work took a long time on my end. Because we had never done this type of project in the archives, we weren't sure what to expect. Many of the students did end up focusing on broad subject areas within each folder; however, their actual descriptions of the folders could be quite long because they felt they had to describe everything. There was also an instance when a couple of students described the same folder, but they described it differently. Their overall metadata was similar, but when they described the folder in more detail they each had a different focus.

Another issue, which was more theoretical, that my fellow archivists and I struggled with was that while the project would make the collection more discoverable, we feared it could take the discoverability out of the archival research on an individual researcher level. In the UAA/APU Archives, we tended to describe collections using minimal description—describing them to the needs of the collection so they can be accessed by researchers. Occasionally, we would re-describe, or add further description to collections that were originally minimally described, depending on researcher use. For example, we would add folder-level description to a collection that was originally described at the box level. However, if a collection is described at item-level, or has a very heavy, detailed description, some researchers tend to hyper-focus on specific folders, and not the context of the materials around it. More

description can lead researchers to believe that only certain folders have the information they are seeking. They may be less inclined to look at other folders in the collection, which could result in researchers overlooking information that could unexpectedly help in their research. I have had multiple researchers tell me they found what they were looking for, or the context to what they were searching for, in places they wouldn't have thought to look because they were initially only focused on a couple folders. Also, it's almost impossible to describe collections at the item level and make sure you describe everything that is represented within those items, while also leaving it as objective as possible. However, in the end, because of the content within the collection, we decided that having a more detailed finding aid would benefit our researchers rather than hinder them. Especially since the students were not describing at the item level and I was able to edit.

It is also important to note that we were working in and describing a collection that has Indigenous content. Since the Lucier papers did have a lot of materials written and collected by Iñupiaq community members, which were then given to Lucier (some by his Iñupiaq family), it was important to retain their descriptors and use their terminology for metadata whenever possible. In the case of materials created by Lucier, I made sure to see if similar terms were used elsewhere in the collection by an Iñupiaq Knowledge Holder. It was my hope to partner with Kawerak, Inc., the Alaska Native non-profit regional Tribal consortium for the Bering Strait region, after the student projects. Kawerak provides services to "residents of the Bering Strait Region, 75% of whom are Alaska Native Iñupiat, Yup'ik, and St. Lawrence Island Yupik peoples."[25] This partnership would have included mass digitization of the collection and partnering with others within the origin community to discuss the collection and its content. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, and myself leaving for another position, this never occurred.

It is my belief that the students in the class were able to learn more about the collection and the work of archivists than most other users of archives. Not only were they able to glimpse into the work of an archivist, they also gained knowledge regarding the Indigenous peoples of Alaska. The collection also benefited from the students' work incorporating the cultural context and Iñupiaq voices, which are prevalent in the collection, to the finding aid.

Cohort One Student's Perspective

My name is Alyssa Willett and I was a student in the first cohort of Ethnohistory of Alaska Natives ANTH A427/627. I took this course as a graduate student with the goal of learning more about how to use archival material in my thesis project. Undergraduate students worked throughout the week tagging metadata, which they would then add to the copy of the finding aid by Friday. My role was to go through the additions and condense them, making the entries more manageable for archivist Veronica Denison.

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25. "Who We Are," Kawerak Inc., accessed July 23, 2021, https://kawerak.org/about-us/who-we-are/.

When I began the class, I had never spent time in an archive. As an anthropology student, I understood the importance of trying to describe materials objectively, but I did not realize how difficult this would be. Often, multiple students would describe the same folder in different ways, highlighting the influence of student perspectives. A student with knowledge of Alaska Native traditions may include details missed by those less familiar with Alaska Native cultures. I experienced difficulties when trying to condense student notes because I did not feel comfortable making a judgement on what was important to be included in the finding aid. Stories and ethnographic field notes were where I struggled most. I am not Alaska Native, and these were not my stories, or stories I was familiar with hearing. I worried that I would unintentionally leave out, change, or minimize information that would have been helpful in guiding a user's search of the finding aid.

Although there were challenges, the experience I gained from the archival component of ANTH A627 enriched my time as a graduate student, providing me with ongoing professional opportunities. I was able to write a three-part blog post for the UAA Archives and Special Collections.[26] This was the first time I wrote a blog post, which was a bit intimidating because I was writing about archival materials that belong to Alaska Native peoples as a white graduate student. I knew that my understandings were based on academic experience, not lived experience. I wanted to highlight the project and the contents of the Charles V. Lucier papers in an informative and respectful way. Furthermore, I had the privilege of organizing and presenting a session, "Charles V. Lucier papers. Revisiting Archival Material," at the Alaska Native Studies Conference in 2016. Here, I was able to see firsthand stakeholders accessing and contributing to the finding aid.

My instructor, Medeia Csoba DeHass, suggested I search the Charles V. Lucier papers for information regarding Alaska Native dance, my MA thesis topic, which I was able to find rather quickly thanks to the work of Denison and our class. Additionally, exposure to the UAA/APU Archives and archival research gave me confidence to visit the Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives in New York City. Data collected from the UAA/APU Archives and the Jerome Robbins Dance Division Archives informed my thesis, "Movement and Pedagogy: Multiple Ways of Understanding Dance in Southcentral Alaska," from beginning to end.[27] A whole world of information opened when I learned how to access and use archival material in my research. I would highly recommend a course with an archival component for all social scientists, especially anthropologists.

26. Alyssa Willett, "Ethnohistory and Archives Part 1," Archives and Special Collections at UAA/APU Consortium Library, accessed July 19, 2021, https://archives.consortiumlibrary.org/2015/04/27/ethnohistory-and-archives-part-1/.

27. Alyssa Willett, "Movement and Pedagogy: Multiple Ways of Understanding Dance in Southcentral Alaska" (M.A. thesis: University of Alaska Anchorage, 2017), accessed July 19, 2021, https://www.proquest.com/docview/1978088547

Cohort Two Student's Perspective

My name is Alex Taitt, a graduate of the Anthropology Masters program at UAA, currently working at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center in Anchorage, Alaska as the Community & Curatorial Programs Coordinator. As a student in the second cohort of Ethnohistory of Alaska Natives in fall 2016, we had the opportunity to learn from some of the lessons discovered in the first cohort the year before. We began, similarly to the first cohort, by learning about the use and history of primary sources found in archival collections. The first seven weeks of the course consisted of a heavy reading load to understand the background and importance of ethnohistory and archival research, especially as it relates to Alaska. While this felt tedious, it was a perfect foundation as we prepared to enter the archives. Halfway through the semester, at the Archives and Special Collections at UAA/APU Consortium Library, we were tasked with continuing work on the Charles V. Lucier papers to flesh out the finding aid. Csoba DeHass thoughtfully selected our folders and boxes in an effort to connect archival data to our own graduate research projects.

Reading through the archival papers was both challenging and rewarding. Many of the documents were handwritten notes, sketches, and scribbles of ideas left for us to decipher and contextualize. The finding aid text was intended to be a succinct, yet detailed account of the contents, which was often easier said than done. We had to remove our own biases and be completely objective in our documentation of the material, being sure to include all the key details. This became a challenge when we weren't always aware of the background or questioned whether or not what we recorded was the most important thing to include in the finding aid. Since the ethnographic journals and much of Lucier's notes and data were direct reflections of Alaska Native life and culture through the lens of Lucier, it made me reflect on how my own interpretation of his notes would be further from the true representation of the stories and information shared. Documenting the knowledge for the finding aid became more than just a class assignment, but a genuine effort to avoid misrepresentation of the Indigenous knowledge.

My thesis, "The Next Dimension of Representation: The Role of Photogrammetric 3D Modeling in Digital Heritage Preservation of Indigenous Material Culture," focused on 3D modeling items of cultural heritage from the same areas in Alaska that Charles Lucier documented in his papers.[28] The folders I worked with were suspected of having some connection to pieces of cultural heritage. They were assigned to me to metadata tag so that I could potentially glean some information about artifacts I may encounter in museum collections. Inside these folders were diagrams of seal net gauges and drum construction, photographs, and descriptions of a mystical figure

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28. Alexandra Taitt, "The Next Dimension of Representation: The Role of Photogrammetric 3D Modeling in Digital Heritage Preservation of Indigenous Material Culture" (M.A. thesis: University of Alaska Anchorage, 2017), accessed July 19, 2021, https://search.proquest.com/openview/044ab6cd6f38d32bd3034528ee5e3bc1/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y.

known as a tupilak—all information that could be used to help contextualize many items found in museum collections. With so many pieces in museums stripped of their cultural and personal histories, it is important to utilize primary sources such as those found in archival collections to help fill in some of the information that was lost during the collection and collection management process.

In March 2017, I, with a fellow student in the class, presented a paper titled "Old Data, New Context: Making Arctic Archival Data Relevant" at the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (APECS) International Online Conference. Our presentation highlighted the three topics listed above: Iñupiaq drum making, the tupilak, and the construction and use of seal nets. As we were presenting to a group of mostly non-social scientists, we decided to discuss how archival research is a major component of ethnohistorical work, yet it can often be overlooked as a viable research method in other disciplines. By taking archival material outside the box and contextualizing it with other modes of Circumpolar research, we can open up the possibility for alternative interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to solving Arctic challenges both locally and globally.

The knowledge and skills learned in this class were incredibly valuable, and ones that I have used in my career as a museum professional. Reflecting on the course, the first half was rich in readings and background research with the second half working in the archive. This division was necessary, but top heavy. It may have been better to get into the archives earlier with more reading assignments scattered throughout. Denison did a wonderfully thorough job introducing us to the research process, and this mentorship could have been amplified even more with a mid-research metadata check-in after we had been exposed to the work and process in the archives. The wealth of knowledge tucked away in archival collections is vast, and by providing better access through finding aids and classes such as this, we can demonstrate their viability to researchers across all disciplines.

Conclusion

Although there were occasionally unexpected challenges along the way, for example the frustrations with the lack of Indigenous metadata available within the Library of Congress Subject Headings and Thesaurus of Graphic Materials, the class proved successful overall. Even with the students' initial difficulties, the metadata created by the students led to more researchers using the collection. Researchers searching for reindeer herding, shamanism, and different traditional Alaska Native stories were easily able to see what information was in the collection and where to locate it. The UAA/APU Archives also received reference requests for materials from family members of those mentioned in the updated finding aid. While reference requests regarding specific subjects tend to ebb and flow, the hope is more researchers will continue to use this collection and continue to benefit from the students' work.

Several students from the courses went on to produce papers and presentations using information they found in the collection. From the first cohort, Willett compiled information on the archival data being collected by the cohort and wrote a three-part blog series for the UAA/APU Consortium Library's Archives and Special Collections' blog. She also organized the conference session "Ethnohistory in the Archives: Making the Charles V. Lucier papers more discoverable" for the 2016 Alaska Native Studies Conference with papers presented by two more students and Denison representing the archival perspective. Additionally, Willett used information from the Lucier papers to help write her thesis. Two students from the second cohort presented a paper in a session of the 2017 Alaska Anthropological Association conference, and four students, including Taitt, co-presented two papers at the 2017 Association of Polar Early Career Scientists conference. This rich scholarship produced by the students outside of the course requirements reinforced the need for incorporating experiential learning opportunities into research methods courses in a way that allows students to internalize the course material on their own terms.

The goals of teaching ethnohistory and having students complete metadata tagging tasks for the purposes of the archives converge only to a certain point, and this should be discussed by future archivists and instructors planning to work together on teaching a similar course. The instructor's goal is that the students' experience in metadata tagging provides them with a foundation of archival research knowledge, helping them internalize the process as a new research method and methodology, while also helping them complete a specific research project. From the archivist's point of view, this change in perspective shifts the emphasis away from the accuracy of metadata tagging that serves the purpose of the archive as there is a natural switch, from objective tagging to somewhat independent research, embedded in the process. Based on the lessons learned during this collaboration, it is advised to balance the expected outcomes as they pertain to providing sufficient room for students to learn to do archival research while also learning about the archivist's perspective. Being exposed to both viewpoints will make students more successful researchers in the future, as they will develop a deep understanding of the structure, mission, and potential of archives as data repositories and data sources.

A similar course such as this could be taught in any discipline. While there are some changes that could be made, including further explanation of metadata and check-ins with the students, this class proved successful for the desired student learning outcomes. One challenge that was not sufficiently discussed during the course pertained to the possible negative impacts of extensive metadata tagging and future research use of the collection; in other words, how much metadata tagging can be done before it hinders researchers' ability to work effectively with the collection and the associated finding aid is difficult to pinpoint. At the same time, it is a topic worth discussing with students to demonstrate the nature, and quite possibly one of the pitfalls, of doing archival research. This would also help gauge the extent of the tagging that needs to be completed as well as likely reduce the amount of trial and error in the first few archival sessions spent with metadata tagging.

Another challenge stemmed from finding an effective approach to display the additional metadata within the collection's finding aid. In the end, this can also vary depending on the archive's website and/or collection management database. The UAA/APU Archives uses WordPress for their website, with the finding aids making up separate pages within. When printed, the Lucier finding aid is over 150 pages, which is incredibly long for a 12 cubic foot collection. The ability to keyword search the online finding aid is a must.

Additionally, it is important to match the collection to the learning goals of the course. The Lucier collection was rich in both content and details. It provided a variety of subjects and was large enough for students to simultaneously work on different folders and series. It also fit specifically into the course being taught at UAA and was easily incorporated into the course structure. Materials in the collection included stories and biographies of well-known Iñupiaq Knowledge Holders and anthropologists, which allowed students to connect with the collection through information learned in their previous courses as part of their degree requirements in anthropology.

In this class, students were able to learn and understand what some users of archives never do. They were able to have an in-depth look at the work of an archivist, and they developed an understanding of what an archival collection is and how it can be structured and organized. The students learned that doing archival research can be a tedious process and why most archives do not have the ability to item-level describe their collections. They recognized that the all-knowing archivist is a myth, especially in an archive that collects different types of materials, and now understand why most archivists are not subject specialists. They saw that in some archives, including the one at UAA, the archivist's job is to guide researchers to the collections that may be helpful in their search, to help if need be, but that the archivist is unable to do the research for them. The students were able to take the information they learned about archives and archival description with them as they continued their research in other archives.

Appendix

Ethnohistory of Alaska Natives Course Rationale

Ethnohistory often seems like an elusive concept borrowing methodologies and theoretical approaches from multiple disciplines such as anthropology, Native American studies, history, and museum studies. In this course, we will examine the historical factors that contributed to the emergence of ethnohistory in North America and the significance of the ethnohistorical approach to working with Native American and Indigenous cultures and people. We will do this by working with Alaska Native sources and analyzing them from an ethnohistorical perspective. Finally, we will engage in ethnohistorical research using methods learned in this course to create a detailed finding aid for the Charles V. Lucier manuscript collection through a collaborative project with Kawerak Inc., the Wells Fargo Museum, and the UAA/APU Archives.

Additional Learning Outcomes for This Particular Class

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Know how to effectively use a variety of research methods to interpret and evaluate archival and museum data, oral history sources, maps, and visual materials.

2. Use knowledge learned in this course to contextualize ethnohistorical data and organize research findings into a coherent and compelling argument.

3. Be confident in designing archival research, locating relevant data, using archival and museum collections, and knowing how to gain access to material holdings of institutions.

4. Understand ethical principles governing ethnohistorical research and their relevance to various stakeholders.

5. Use skills used in ethnohistorical research in other scholarly and applied projects.