t the end of an undergraduate course I taught that explored the archival turn in rhetoric and composition studies, one student compared the work of the course to what she perceived as traditional research assignments, which she characterized as “roughly the equivalent of going to IAmRight.com and rephrasing the same idea for seven pages.” Another student described his new research methodology as “just reading.” While before he had conducted research focusing on results and trying to prove a particular point, he noted that “in just reading the materials I was presented with, I found myself not looking to pin any particular question together, but rather draw connections and create a story more organically this way.” These students’ evaluations of the course point toward revision of common ideas undergraduate students may have about research: that it’s about the results, can involve very little “just reading,” and will prove that they are “right.” Both the fields of rhetoric and composition and library science have struggled against these types of views, with compositionist Jennie Nelson describing a student who believes “Since it’s a research paper, I will barely write anything of my own so it is basically an organization process” (qtd in Nelson 7). Nelson observed how that student produced “a coherent thirteen-hundred-word paper in which eleven hundred words were carefully documented direct quotes from her sources; that means that she lifted large passages from her sources and reproduced them verbatim, then filled in between these long quotes with a few transitional sentences to glue it all together” (8). Librarians find this method of research common and perhaps even reinforced by


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assignments that stress the mechanics of research—how many sources to include and from where—over the purpose and content of academic research (Head and Eisenberg 2). These entrenched views are often challenged through assignments focusing on primary research because they force students to analyze and interpret materials themselves rather than through what others have done (Fansler and Yun 23). Lynée Gaillet and Michelle Eble summarize the benefits of assigning undergraduate primary research: “They never cut and paste information from somebody else’s published work into their papers. Instead of quoting experts, they become the experts on the topics in which they are vested” (xix). The archival turn in rhetoric and composition studies has provided the opportunity and the methods to engage students in primary research and help them redefine the purpose of research—and thus the purpose of their undergraduate education.

Graduate programs in rhetoric and composition often offer courses that include archival methods and methodologies in response to Linda Ferreira-Buckley’s call for training in the “tools of the historian’s trade” (582). Jonathan Buehl, Tamar Chute, and Anne Fields remind us that even for graduate students who are not planning to pursue historical research, training in archives yields benefits such as patience in research, the development and revision of research questions, and the collaboration Jane Donawerth emphasizes as a key methodology of archival research (Buehl et al. 278–9; Donawerth and Zimmerelli 6). Recently scholars in rhetoric and composition have recognized these opportunities for undergraduate research and expanded archival research pedagogies to undergraduate students, inspiring us to think about the many ways we can incorporate archives into undergraduate instruction and what the goals in such projects should be.

This essay further explores the varied ways of teaching with archives by first reviewing pedagogical uses of archives in undergraduate rhetoric and composition courses, which range from having students work closely with selected archival materials to develop close reading and information literacy skills to challenging students to perform archival research themselves, whether in physical or digital archives. It then describes how a course focusing on the archival turn in rhetoric and composition studies can make use of these assignment models. Through these assignments, teachers can enact feminist pedagogy in focusing on local histories as well as creating collaborative relationships with students. Through the feminist research strategies of recovering lost voices, (re)reading the archive as a source of public memory, and creating archives themselves, students learn the feminist value of archival research and its feminist values. These assignments not only reveal and reinforce the goals, values, and benefits of archival research in rhetoric and composition studies but also the goals, values, and benefits of academic study in any area or discipline.
Pedagogies incorporating archival research and archival materials support an inquiry-based model of education. Primary research in archives requires students to adopt a more nuanced approach to information literacy. Synthesizing these primary sources into a coherent narrative involves further development of that nuanced approach. Student engagement in such projects often increases, and they learn valuable skills they could not in a traditional research project. As a result, more fields are assigning archival research to undergraduates, such as in art, art history, theater, and women’s studies (Coates and Dean; Mulligan; Devos et al.; Till; Weber et al.). Archivists are collaborating with disciplinary faculty to develop effective archival research assignments, such as the Brooklyn Historical Society’s TeachArchives.org, a project that engaged 1100 undergraduate students in 65 courses taught by 18 different faculty members in working with archival materials (Golia and Katz). Faculty and archivists involved in these projects cite improved information literacy, increased student engagement, and the development of close reading skills as key benefits of assigning archival research to undergraduate students.

Literature professors teaching with archives see improvement in both close reading skills and understanding of historical contexts of literature. Joanne Diaz, for example, assigns students to compare Norton editions of a text to different Early English Books Online versions of the same text in a sophomore-level literature course. For Diaz, this assignment leads to a more critical understanding of what close reading is for the students and points them toward how they can say something new about a literary text (428). Similarly, Christopher Hanlon’s assignment in an American Realism course utilized OCR archival databases such as American Periodicals, American Memory, and Making of America to enable students to develop “interesting” topics about literature that no scholar had previously written about, rather than rehash existing scholarship (99–100). All of the students mentioned in these articles produced work that show enhanced skills of close reading and analysis and illustrate how a major benefit to assigning this type of research to undergraduate students is its invitation to students to produce more meaningful scholarship that makes a contribution to an academic field of study.

Like archival research assignments in literature, archival research assignments in rhetoric and composition courses allow students to conduct meaningful and original research. Thus, these assignments emphasize the feminist research strategies and feminist pedagogies of collaboration and invitation. In so doing, the assignments invite students to participate in our scholarly conversations (Enoch et al.; Hayden), such as those on the methods and methodologies of
archival research (as found in Gold, “Remapping”; L’Eplattenier; L’Eplattenier and Mastrangelo; and Ramsey et al., for example), the local elements of archival research (Kirsch and Rohan; Donahue and Moon; Ostergaard and Wood), the recovery of marginalized voices (Agnew et al.), and the relationship between feminist and digital historiography (Enoch and Bessette; Enoch et al.). The assignments that focus on recovery foreground the feminist methods of cooperation and collaboration; the importance of an ethic of care toward research subjects; and an acknowledgment of—and reflection on—the connection between the researcher and her research subject (Donawerth and Zimmerelli; Enoch et al.; Royster and Kirsch; Sutherland). Many assignments go beyond the goal of recovery to have students question the nature of archives and apply that work by creating their own archives. These assignments thus aim toward the reasoning for and development of what Jessica Enoch and Pamela VanHaitsma call archival literacy. More specifically, students engage disciplinary values through assignments focused on recovery of lost voices, rereading/revaluing extant archives, and the creation of new archives. The survey below demonstrates the range of teaching practices that have engaged these three areas.

Recovery

In recovering lost voices through archival research, students learn more advanced and more creative research strategies. For example, at the University of Iowa, rhetoric professor Tom Keegan and librarian Kelly McElroy created the Archives Alive! project as a reaction to their frustration with the usual approach students take to research in first-year composition. Students in rhetoric and composition courses were assigned to transcribe a document from the archives for the DIY History Project, a crowdsourced transcription of archival letters; they then wrote blog posts about the letters that analyzed their rhetorical features and set them in historical context. Students then developed screencasts and presentations on their projects. The assignment met key outcomes of information literacy by helping students to go beyond what is called “one-stop shopping in research” (Golia and Katz) and to understand academic research as “an engaging and ongoing endeavor rather than a set number of citations” (Keegan and McElroy). Teaching students advanced methods of research and inquiry was also a goal of my own project in the Hunter College Archives, which I have assigned almost every semester since 2009 in a variety of upper-level undergraduate rhetoric courses. The project requires students to attend sessions with an archivist, find a document that interests them to connect to any of our class discussions, and write a blog post about the document that also details their research process. I have found that this recovery project illustrates the tensions, challenges, and opportunities
of feminist historiography in rhetoric, bridging theory and practice to recover the rich legacy of Hunter’s women and their various communities (Hayden).

In fact, locally based archival work tends to increase student engagement because they can connect their research to their own experiences and become invested in helping to recover local histories. Though access to digital archives expands the possibilities of teaching archival recovery projects, it risks taking students out of that localized scope of research. However, as compared to physical archives, which can begin in locally based contexts but can then be situated in global contexts (Carter and Conrad 100), digital archives can include more global contexts but also remain in locally based spaces (Graban et al. 234). Enoch and Bessette point out how the local aspect of many digital archives can maintain their compatibility with feminist historiographic aims (638)—and therefore feminist pedagogical aims.

Work with digital archives can also enable greater collaboration, as digital archives are often designed as more collaborative and inclusive spaces than their brick-and-mortar counterparts. We can define digital archives rather broadly, ranging from sites that contain digitized primary source archival documents, such as American Memory or the Women in Social Movements digital archive, to Thomas Miller and Melody Bowdon’s definition of the Web as “the most important archive ever created” (594). Many who teach with digital archives cite their democratic potential: students can not only search in those archives but also compose in those spaces. In fact, James Purdy argues that we should teach digital archives both as repositories and as writing spaces (44). Some digital archives allow users to annotate and create metadata for texts, such as the DIY History project Keegan and McElroy describe. As Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne observes, “[A]rchives 2.0 are less about physical spaces and physical contact and more about establishing various levels of connectivity: between user and archivist, between users and users, between users and multiple collections” (6).

Student engagement also increases when they present their recovery work to larger publics, whether through the Web (Enoch and Jack; Hayden), an existing digital archive (Keegan and McElroy; Vetter), academic journals like Young Scholars in Writing (Greer), or a physical showcase at a museum or archive (Greer and Grobman). Projects on recovery assigned to undergraduates are not limited to finding a lost voice or adding to an academic discussion. Students working with archives, whether physical or digital, often ask questions about what the archive contains, how it is organized, and what is left out—questions derived from their actual research experiences. Recovery projects in undergraduate work—as in feminist research—are never only about recovery. They are also about (re) reading the archive as a source of knowledge and public memory.
(Re)reading the Archive

Assignments that primarily focus on (re)reading the archive highlight what Charles Morris calls “the archive’s rhetorical (re)turn” (“Archival Turn” 115), where both archival materials and the rhetoricity of archives are topics of study. These assignments help students to understand the archive as more than a repository; they can understand the cultural significance and the activist nature of archival work (Enoch and Jack; Hayden). For example, Matthew Vetter observes his composition students shifting their expectations of academic research as a result of researching in physical archives and then creating or editing Wikipedia pages based on their research: “[T]he collaborative, cross-disciplinary conditions of the project allowed students to both participate in and observe the ways in which digital technologies are changing how information is produced, shared, and accessed in the twenty-first century” (49–50). Thus both their recovery work and their contributions to digital spaces illustrate for them the rhetorical nature of archives. Deborah Mutnick’s first-year composition students worked with primary documents from abolition, slavery, and civil rights at the Brooklyn Historical Society to situate these movements within local New York histories. As a result of their work, the students questioned the “partial story, fragmented and full of omissions, told by the archives.” The participatory nature of archives can lead to a rereading of archival work by both teachers and students, especially in viewing the Web and sites like Wikipedia as archives, as Purdy demonstrates.

Troubling public memory can also be the intention of many archival research assignments, such as those described by Jessica Enoch and Jordynn Jack. Their pedagogical model turns the focus of undergraduate recovery projects from inclusion of lost voices to analysis of public memory and public forgetting (518–9). Jane Greer and Laurie Grobman’s analysis of the contributions to their 2016 collection, Pedagogies of Public Memory: Teaching Writing and Rhetoric at Museums, Archives, and Memorials, shows how focusing assignments on public memory emphasizes public memory as a process, one that “unfold[s] within networks of material, cultural, social, and affective constraints while also opening up new lines of inquiry about the fluidity of our shared memories” (2–3). In these assignments, students can understand archives as “rhetorical producers of public memory about women” (Enoch, “Releasing” 66). Questioning archival omissions and recovering underrepresented voices then become feminist acts, as in Jane Greer’s assignment to add the voices of girls to discussions about women’s rhetoric and activism.

Assignments focusing on (re)reading the archive help us to foreground the analysis of the rhetorical features of archives, what Enoch and VanHaitsma call archival literacy (218). Assignments focused on archival literacy as an outcome en-
courage students to question the role of the archivist in the stories these archives document and the attention archivists draw to specific subjects through their organization. Archival literacy also draws attention to the user experience: how archives initiate or reflect collaborations through their crowdsourced contributions and their role in identity formation for both individuals and communities (Enoch and VanHaitsma 220–33). Undergraduate students can then apply these insights when they “identify their own rhetorical power as critically literate users of and potential contributors to digital archives” (Enoch and VanHaitsma 235).

Archival Creation

Many assignments move students from analyzing public memory to creating it. For example, students create exhibits for or guides to local community archives and museums (Lettner-Rust et al.; Grobman, “Keepers of Memory”), produce institutional digital and multimedia archives (Kennedy and Walker), and become part of their institution’s public memory through producing histories of student–centered spaces like writing centers (Wilde et al.). Creating an archive can also aid students in relating historiography to contemporary issues. Pamela VanHaitsma’s assignment in a first-year writing course had students working with nineteenth-century manuals focusing on the romantic letter genre and then creating their own digital archives of what they felt were these manuals’ contemporary equivalents. VanHaitsma demonstrates how this project meets the goals of undergraduate education—particularly in its emphasis on scholarly inquiry—while also connecting the materials to the students’ own lives (36).

Creating an archive reveals to students the many choices archivists have to make. For example, Julie Bokser’s course on Chicago Women Rhetors begins with studying local activism, moves to questioning the absence of voices of Chicago women, and assigns students to work with museums and archives to find those voices. Students then create their own public memorial of a Chicago woman rhetor (Bokser 153–4). Students from Tammie Kennedy’s courses at the University of Nebraska at Omaha undertake historical research in physical archives to create the digital UNO Women’s Archive. Students in both Kennedy’s and Bokser’s courses must confront and critically examine the ethics of the choices they make in creating their archives, such as what to do with materials the subject’s family would rather not make known (Kennedy and Walker; Bokser 153–4). Finally, an assignment at Florida State forefronts the rhetorical nature of the choices students make at every stage: students work with a collection of historical postcards, curate that collection by entering the postcards into a database, enact rhetorical choices in archival organization and metadata, and finally create exhibits within that database on topics of their own choosing (Neal et al.). The digital archives produced and curated by undergraduate
researchers serve as a rich resource for those wanting to incorporate their own archival assignment as part of encouraging further undergraduate research. They can create a “networked archive,” to adopt Tarez Graban and Shirley K. Rose’s model, where different undergraduate scholars can weigh in on previous students’ archival findings in collections like the UNO Women’s Archive Project—or even collections of blogs about archival findings—with a recovery project of their own.

These assignments show the influence of feminist methods on the field and how feminist values—collaboration, invitation, and activism—have become integrated into the field of rhetoric and composition’s research and teaching methods, so much so that they do not always seem to be described as feminist. When students recover lost voices, they join scholarly conversations on both feminist histories and the researcher’s role in creating those histories. When they analyze the rhetorical features of archives, they can recognize the archive’s gendered features. And when they create their own archives, they not only apply these lessons but also become feminist teachers to the audience of their archive.

**Teaching a Course on the Archival Turn**

These pedagogical models make assigning archival work to undergraduates a more widespread possibility, as do the proliferation of accessible digital archives, the interest in the field on archival methods as documented by texts like *Working in the Archives* (Ramsey et al.) and *Landmark Essays on Archival Research* (Galliet et al.), and now the advice on methods with undergraduates as an audience, such as Gaillet and Eble’s *Primary Research: People, Places, and Spaces*. Whether the focus is on recovering, rereading, or creating an archive, all three of these elements are present in all of the archival research assignments previously discussed to some degree. The extent of their incorporation depends on one of the impediments to incorporating archival work in undergraduate courses: time. What can we expect undergraduates—and ourselves—to accomplish in a single semester? When archival work is not the topic of the course, we may only focus on one of these areas, though I would argue elements of all three will occur in any assignment that engages undergraduates in archival research. We are often able to accomplish more than we think, even if archival work is only a single unit of a class.

The chance to immerse students in archival work throughout the semester can amplify the benefits. An upper-level undergraduate seminar on the archival turn in rhetoric and composition studies with English, education, and political science majors provided that immersion opportunity as I attempted to incorporate many of the aspects of the archival assignments surveyed above. In
planning this class, I considered the range and scope of topics and materials I could include and contemplated what I could realistically expect to accomplish in one semester. My ultimate decision was to survey the field’s archival turn and then throw everything I could into the course to see what happened. Assignments included searching in both digital and physical archives and analyzing those experiences; reflecting on readings, guest speakers, and archive visits; and developing a final project expanding earlier research or reflections. I originally described the course learning outcomes as not only researching rhetorical traditions but also as exploring the rhetorical and personal nature of that research. As students’ end-of-semester reflections demonstrated, what happened was that the central question and focus that emerged from the course was the nature of academic study as a personalized inquiry and how undergraduate scholars are central to that inquiry.

The course included collaboration—a critical element of the archival literacy, feminist research, and academic inquiry discussed above—as a foundational principle. Such collaboration was not just among students but cross-institutional: Librarian Iris Finkel, formerly an assistant in the Hunter Archives who currently focuses on digital humanities, adapted the embedded librarian model by attending most of the class sessions, serving as a resource for the students, and participating in our discussions, while also adding her own digital component to that model by commenting on blogs, suggesting additional digital archives or secondary sources, conferencing with students on final projects, and suggesting digital tools for them to build their own archives. I also consider the guest speakers I invited as collaborators, as they helped to connect academic archival research to other contexts, whether it was by sharing their own experiences in the Hunter Archives as undergraduate students, graduate students, or senior scholars; by illuminating the process by which archival items become digitized; or by introducing the field of digital asset management. Archivists around the city also became collaborators. At the Hunter Archives, Louise Sherby presented materials in the archives, explained how to use a finding aid, engaged the students in a discussion of Hunter history, and worked with them on developing research topics and questions. At the Berg Collection, a collection of manuscripts and other ephemera from English and American literature, curator Isaac Gerwitz presented some of the manuscripts, focusing on how we can observe the revision process of these writers through study of notes and changes on manuscripts, such as Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. We also went to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, where students examined original letters, manuscripts, and records, including a ledger from one of the insurance companies that insured slaves. At these visits, the archivists discussed with students the acquisition and selection of materials, with Miranda Mims, Tiana Taliep,
and Alexandra Mitchell at the Schomburg Center emphasizing their archive’s mission to integrate the surrounding community of Harlem. The archivists we worked with, the guest speakers, and the students all became “agents” in the archive, to use Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch’s framework. Indeed, Glenn and Enoch themselves also became agents in our work, since their framework also positions “scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition whose work enables their fellow researchers to ask new and different historiographic questions” as agents as well (328). In this class, then, archives were not only about documents; the students had a variety of agents and actual faces to make their work a truly collaborative endeavor.

Students were challenged in the first assignment for the class: a blog post detailing their exploration of a digital archive. Iris and I provided a list of digital archives that included the Brooklyn Historical Society, African American Women and Civil War Women from Duke Digital Collections, Digital Schomburg, Lesbian Herstory Archives, and the UNO Women’s Archive Project. Students were then able to choose a digital archive to research based on their own interests, such as African American history or political science. Their blogs recounted their research methods and provoked a discussion on how the accessibility of digital archives can allow researchers to skip the important step of having a foundation of knowledge to build on. They found digital archives even more overwhelming than physical ones because of the depth of research available at their fingertips. Student Andre Perez called his experience with digital archives on African American history “knowledge overload.” Their work also led to analysis of the construction of digital archives and the ease and politics of working with metadata and archival organization. Many compared their experiences with metadata to the challenges Cara Finnegan faced in the categorization of pictures, where she and the organizer of the collection had different ideas on how something might be categorized. Students analyzed these experiences and attempted to find a narrative across different digital archives through their discussions with each other on the blog. Their frustrations confirm Purdy’s assessment of the task of researching in digital archives where “researchers do not have to work as hard to find relevant materials; instead they have to work hard to determine which available materials are useful” (30). Overall, they discussed in their blogs how they found digital archives less engaging and harder to navigate than physical archives, though they conceded the importance of digital archives and their democratization of archival research. The challenges of the digital archives turned into opportunities for the students to engage in the archival literacy Enoch and VanHaitsma define, as the students had to be judicious about materials to focus on and as they understood the role of both the researcher and the archivist as rhetorical.
This archival literacy was applied in the assignment to work in the physical archives at the college and the next assignment to explore any question they had about archival research. Students developed questions derived from their experiences with digital and physical archives, such as, How are archives indicative of the permeating effect of power structures? How do those power dynamics shape the process of the archivist-researcher? How do we complicate the idea(lism) of archives as a source for primary knowledge? How can students use archives as a tool of exploration? How is archival research social and collaborative? What does it mean to be objective in research? How is space a factor in the subjectivity of archives? What counts as “recovery” in feminist rhetorical research, and how is that complicated by digital archives and accessibility?

The course was documented on two blog sites, one focusing on recovery of the activities of Hunter women, which includes the project in all of my courses from 2012 to present, and the other site for only this course. Students pointed out how the course blog became an archive itself, where readers can learn about student research and discoveries in institutional and digital archives, observe their research processes, and join their conversations. The blogs tell the stories of the students’ excitement over the materials viewed at each of their archive visits as well as their spirited conversations, such as the connection between the personal style of the archivists and their archive and a debate on why the Berg Collection contains Charles Dickens’s letter opener that incorporates his cat’s paw (one blog entry is titled “Dickens Was a Creepy Cat Lover, and Other Lessons Learned at the Archives” and another “Dead White Man’s Dead Cat’s Paw”). Discussions such as the one about Dickens’s extraordinary love for his cat promoted archival literacy in their focus on why certain materials merit inclusion in archives while others do not.

These questions and conversations on the blogs led to their final projects for the course, where students could expand any of their initial explorations of physical or digital archives, expand their exploration of a question about archival study, or create digital exhibits of their work—essentially, projects focused on either recovering lost voices, (re)reading the archive, or creating their own archive, depending on their interests. Students who chose to revise and expand work they did in physical and digital archives wrote final papers focusing on topics such as the activism of student groups at Hunter and an analysis of introductions to slave narratives from digital archives. Some projects further explored questions such as how digital archives change the nature of research. Several students created archives; Janice Johnson, for example, expanded her work on the Returning Woman newsletter from the Hunter Archives to include video interviews and oral histories of other returning women students, as well as her own experiences. She updated a newsletter published from 1981 through
1998 that focused on the importance of creating community among women into a twenty-first century, multimedia, and interactive format. Julie Sorokurs, a student in the class who worked as an assistant in the Hunter Archives, decided to process a collection for her final project. She created a finding aid for the collection and reflected on the choices she made in organizing the finding aid and the story she attempted to tell through it. Several students created website exhibits on their topic that included primary texts from both physical and digital archives; one student, Elyse Orecchio, recorded herself performing nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century speeches by actresses that she had found through archival research and posted them on her website exhibit along with the texts of those speeches. Finally, Melissa Hutton decided on a synthesis project based on discussions we had in class and on the course blog: she used the course blogs as a primary text to explore questions surrounding the legitimacy of both digital research and undergraduate publishing. Her presentation of this work to the class led to a conversation on the students’ writing practices and the differences they experienced with digital writing assignments. Their discussion also provoked the question of whether the writing on the blogs would be considered valuable primary sources if they were a stack of papers in the institutional archives. In blog form, are they just another insignificant site for coursework without value to an actual audience? Such discussion brought together students’ archival activities with their own rhetorical practice.

Such blogging supported the feminist goals of the course. Indeed, what the course emphasized in its collaborative foundation led to one of the goals Enoch, Bessette, and VanHaitsma identify in “Feminist Invitations to Digital Historiography” as central to feminist historiography: invitation to others to converse with and expand our research (Enoch et al). The invitational aspects of the course illustrated for students what academic scholarship is. They not only learned to think beyond a “one-stop shop” for research assignments, but they also understood how academics ask and pursue questions in their discipline, which, in one student’s view, provided a new understanding of academia and academics. She realized the value of both inquiry and student voices in that inquiry. They began to see their own work as part of a scholarly community.

Students also found the activist side to academic work when they connected academic and personal interests and concerns. They questioned the origin of artwork at their places of work, inspired by Sarah Ward’s lecture to the class, which related how her question about the artwork on the walls of the library was revealed through her archival research to be an important collection of Puerto Rican prints left neglected for many years. They conversed about “whether our own homes can be considered personal archives, telling a narrative and account of who were are and our interests,” as student Andrew Valentin pondered in a blog
post. And they expanded these conversations to thinking about how to research and construct their family archives or to extend the work of the class into digital publishing to preserve voices not often heard. Janice Johnson’s choice to create a *Returning Woman* video archive not only preserves these women’s voices as they celebrate their accomplishments and detail the challenges of women with children returning to college but also advocates for resources based on what these women need to succeed in college. Thus, the course embedded feminist principles as it engaged students in discussions of feminist historiography. In doing so, it invited students to understand how academic research can become both a personalized and politicized endeavor.

**Pedagogy and/of Uncertainty**

In the end, students reflected in their final blog posts and course evaluations that the course had allowed them to develop their voices as academics and their passion for their work, two goals that helped them redefine their academic pursuits as inquiry and knowledge production rather than only as knowledge accumulation. The nature of undergraduate archival research is an explanation for the shifts they documented. Students had to confront uncertainty at every step in the course. Any maps or plans they initially had shifted or went away completely in the course of their research, and I built this possibility into the assignments by asking them to document every stage, even if it led to nothing. While this produced a lot of questions that, in their view, went nowhere, their documentation of that dead-end question and the collections they viewed when attempting to answer it can help future students. For example, several students in past classes have attempted to research the experiences of black students at the college at a time when most colleges were segregated; this popular question has led to a variety of different approaches documented on the *Rhetorical Reflections* blog that are not always successful. I negotiated similar uncertainty. The act of throwing everything I could think of into the course could have been a failure. That uncertainty led me to allow for shifts in the focus and guiding questions of the course, which turned into opportunities to discuss the variety and purpose of academic endeavors and undergraduate education.

Reflecting on the transformative nature of undergraduate archival research, I return to the question of how we can achieve so much in so little time to incorporate key principles of assignment models for teaching with archives—collaboration, invitation, locally-based research, and activism—to produce outcomes of recovery, rereading the archives as a source of knowledge and public memory, and archival creation by students. These types of projects create opportunities for a nuanced approach to information literacy, archival literacy, and scholarly
work as conversation that could be integrated into other courses not focused specifically on archival work. Including explorations of digital archives seems easiest from a logistical standpoint, but students often respond better to the physical experience of the archives. The exploratory assignments and reflection exercises could be incorporated into any course, as could smaller archive projects that can yield similar benefits, especially in students’ recognition of the tenets of academic study. When incorporating smaller units on archives into other courses I teach (as documented on the Rhetorical Reflections blog), I find students produce better writing in the blogs than in previous analytic paper assignments that can sound stilted in their attempts to meet what they feel are the expectations of the genre. In their blogs, students are more conversational and creative because of the nature of the research they describe and the genre of the blog. We then discuss how to apply the type of writing and creative thinking they display in the archival research blogs into more traditional rhetorical analysis papers. They learn to develop and trust their own voices in scholarly work.

In terms of timing, we can also think about other aspects undergraduate archival research assignments have in common that help to redefine students’ experiences of academic study as a personalized process. First, we can encourage students to see their work in a course as a draft of a larger project, even the “final” projects they submit. The archives create this opportunity in their lack of closure; students often will be unable to find closure through their research (Wells; Hayden). The scope of archival work also leads to projects that are bigger than one semester (Donawerth and Zimmerelli 5). Thus, they don’t have to think of a final project for a course as “final” or finished. Instead, they can reflect on how it is one small part of a larger project that they could choose to continue in another class or not. Though encouraging a lack of finality may seem to create problems in differentiating unfinished projects by engaged students from apathetic ones, the quality of the unfinished work makes it easy to tell the difference. Describing their work as polished but unfinished helps them to understand the distinction as well. I also encourage students to use projects they completed in their previous coursework to expand in my courses (with permission and version of the project with track changes enabled). Doing so takes one of the important tenets of graduate study—the focus on becoming an expert in a student-identified smaller area of interest culminating in a final project demonstrating this expertise gleaned from research in different courses and contexts—to undergraduate study. As a result, instead of playing it safe, they remark how they have the “wiggle room,” in student Melissa Hutton’s words, that encourages more creativity and risk-taking in their writing and allows them to explore their own scholarly voices. They redefine their purpose in academic study as inquiry, as student Jeanne Franco pointed out when she characterized her work in the course as process rather than product.
The nature of the scholarship in our field on archival research also illustrates for them the kinds of conversations scholars have with each other. Though many first-year composition readers include themed readings on topics where writers may refer to other essays included in the volume, these readers do not always demonstrate an explicit conversation on a topic (if they do, it’s more debate than conversation), nor are they usually depicting academic conversations on a topic (usually pieces from The Atlantic and The New York Times). The scholarship on archival work in rhetoric and composition studies, however, presents an explicit academic conversation. Students remarked on how every article we read for the course cited every other article we read, causing one student to characterize it as an “incestuous” field of study. And the manner of citations and acknowledgment of scholarship in the readings also prompted discussion. Students identified what they felt was a culture of respect in how scholars in the field treated each other in their work and characterized citations as more “cooperative” and “invitational” than other fields. Student Andrew Valentin characterized the difference he saw:

I think this dichotomy is what separates [this field] from [other] fields of academia because many attempts to re-align the purpose of these canons (i.e., political science, literary studies, history, etc.) have been socialized for so long to view the academic conversation as adversarial or oppositional, and subsequently, we come to view our own scholastic contributions in these fields as needing to achieve the same purpose.

The self-awareness and cooperative view of research that students saw theorized in Christine Mason Sutherland’s “Feminist Historiography: Research Methods in Rhetoric” and practiced in all of the readings of the course illustrated for them, as Andrew noted, “the human element to academia.”

Furthermore, the course emphasized for students that research and scholarship are about people. Like Kennedy’s students working on the UNO Women’s Archive (Kennedy and Walker), they had to confront the ethics of writing about actual people rather than only about texts. Jeanne Franco, an education major, described her work in our institutional archives in ways that reinforced the readings on the ethics of archival research and on the personalized connection of scholars with their research subjects: “As I looked through [educator] Muriel Farrell’s papers, I learned about this woman’s personality through her doodles on her notes, and the various extracurricular activities she took part in (even though that wasn’t part of my original research question).” It led to Jeanne questioning how the documents preserved in the archive represent a person’s life. She wanted to know more about Muriel Farrell and felt that being unable to look at everything in the collection did a disservice to her research subject. Building from her professional interests, Jeanne ended up preserving the voices of teachers she knew in a digital Web exhibit that built on her connection to
Farrell. Students appreciated the opportunity to apply their previous academic study to a new topic and to their own lives, a central component of the pedagogy VanHaitsma describes. The personalized nature of research is readily apparent in the scholarship on archival research (Donawerth and Zimmerelli; Kirsch and Rohan), which helped to show how academic study is a personalized endeavor. Furthermore, they saw through our scholarship how they could put themselves into their academic writing, reversing what they characterized as previous admonitions to take themselves out of it.

They also put their peers into their own writing. The nature of digital archives as writing spaces and the more interactive component of digital assignments helps encourage students to quote each other’s blogs, reading responses, and reflections. As a result, students can begin to see each other as a scholarly research community, which helps to produce a model for the sometimes very intimidating advice for them to enter a scholarly conversation with their work. As one student remarked in a blog, “This class has prompted me to value my classmates’ work more than I ever have in the past.” When undergraduate Esra Padgett, the author of an article published in Young Scholars in Writing, visited the class to discuss both the process of publishing scholarship in peer-reviewed journals and the feminist theory she elaborated in her article, students were excited to follow in her footsteps by contemplating publishing their own work, by creating their own theories of rhetoric and research, and by viewing each paper they write as undergraduates as potentially part of a larger project.

Finally, thinking about themselves as scholars in the field redefined for them the possibilities of academic study. That undergraduates can contribute to the scholarly inquiry of a discipline was new to them. To achieve this goal in our courses, we can assign readings about students but also assign readings authored by students. The conversation in the field about research strategies already includes student voices, whether through journals like Young Scholars in Writing or through texts cowritten by undergraduates and senior scholars (such as Jack and Massagee or Kennedy and Walker, for example).

We also might think beyond the traditional scholarly essay as a framework for both the types of readings we assign and the types of projects students produce. When we talk about undergraduate research, too often we may mean a more traditional scholarly paper by undergraduates published in a scholarly journal such as Young Scholars in Writing. Multimedia projects also have a venue in the peer-reviewed academic journal JUMP: The Journal of Undergraduate Multimedia Projects. Many of the assignment models discussed in this essay have students publish their work online, and these projects do not always result in a more scholarly paper but a digital collection or exhibit, for example. The Wikipedia articles produced by Purdy’s and Vetter’s students are also a form of
undergraduate research with a much wider audience than scholarly journals that publish undergraduate work. Whether through a more traditional or digital form of publishing, students are contributing to our disciplinary knowledge (Robillard 254), leading to what Laurie Grobman characterizes as a “paradigm shift, one that considers all student writers, including those in [first-year composition], to be authors” (“Student Scholar” 188).

**Conclusion**

Undergraduate archival research assignments can create this paradigm shift for the discipline, for the students undertaking undergraduate research, and for the teachers assigning it. The 2017 *CCCC Statement on Undergraduate Research in Writing: Principles and Best Practices* elaborates the “unique, discipline specific” contributions of assigning undergraduate research:

> Students who become undergraduate writing researchers obtain knowledge of writing that can be learned only through direct participation in full-fledged creative or critical inquiries. As undergraduate writing researchers, students also have the unique experience of contributing actively as subject experts to one or more communities (e.g., department or program, campus, discipline). Likewise, faculty, staff, and graduate students who teach and mentor undergraduate writing researchers gain distinctive opportunities for student-centered instruction, collaboration (e.g., coresearch, coauthorship), and professional development.

The assignments I reviewed earlier in this essay, which inspired the design of the archival turn course, provide such opportunities. These assignments can prompt students to redefine their academic work as both personal and political. This shift can thus be considered an inherently feminist undertaking that allows for the key concepts of strategic contemplation, critical imagination, and social circulation encouraged by Jacqueline Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s model of feminist research and by Graban and Rose’s definition of “feminist histories and feminist methodologies as things that are distributed, studied, and shared” (6) to cross the boundaries between our research, its methods and methodologies, and our pedagogies. As Jane Greer has said, “As they share their work in wider venues, students are participating in the traditions of academic feminist activism by recovering and amplifying the voices of girls from the past, and they also empower themselves” (6). Undergraduate students then become co-researchers with us on issues of feminist historiography and feminist pedagogy. With that in mind, I end with the words of one of my students, rather than my own:

> [There were] many instances throughout the semester when I marveled at how easily and effectively an academic pursuit could become a project of love and genuine curiosity. . . . I think that the greatest thing these exercises, these blogs,
and these readings have accomplished is that they’ve taught me to incorporate, adapt, and consolidate my ideas with my experience and research. This is in complete opposition to what is typically encouraged in any task that requires research and reflection, which is roughly the equivalent of going to IAmRight.com and rephrasing the same idea for seven pages. Not only did I finally feel comfortable enough to not have a blueprint, to not know exactly what I need to research, prove, and write out until after I’ve considered the material I find, but I was also obliged to reflect on my actions, on my ideas and insights, and connect these experiences to the works of established rhetoricians. Research is not necessarily a means to an end anymore, rather, it is a reward in and of itself.—Julie Sorokurs

Notes

1. Student names are included if they checked that option on their IRB permission forms. Student names are omitted if they preferred to remain anonymous.

2. The blog *Rhetorical Reflections in the Hunter Archives: An Undergraduate Recovery Project*, which documents the project since 2013 (previous work on the project is not open to the public), can be found at rhetoricalreflectionshunterarchives.wordpress.com. The blog *Archival Research and Rhetoric: Undergraduate Reflections* (archivalresearchandrhetoric.wordpress.com) was the blog for the 2015 course Archival Research and Rhetorical Traditions.

Works Cited


Ostergaard, Lori, and Henrietta Rix Wood, editors. *In the Archives of Composition: Writing and Rhetoric in High Schools and Normal Schools*. Pittsburgh UP, 2015.


APPENDIX

COURSE SYLLABUS: ARCHIVAL RESEARCH AND RHETORICAL TRADITIONS
Professor: Wendy Hayden
Email: whayden@hunter.cuny.edu

Course Description and Goals

The field of rhetoric has moved from, in the words of Thomas P. Miller, “The Rhetorical Tradition to the rhetoric of traditions.” Whose persuasive activities are considered important enough to preserve? How do we commemorate the rhetorical achievements of traditionally unrecognized groups? How have different groups left their mark on rhetorical theory, persuasion, activism, and education? Who gets their histories told? Whose voices get left out? These questions will be a starting point for us to explore the “archival turn” in rhetoric and writing studies.

As we will see, the “archival turn” necessitates not only questioning and revising rhetorical traditions but also questioning the archive itself. We will explore the definition of an archive, the rhetorical construction of archives, and, most importantly, the performance and formation of archival research methods and methodologies. Therefore, this class is about the rhetorical—and personal—nature of research as much as it is about rhetorical traditions.

In this class, students will
• explore questions on archival research and rhetorical traditions through a variety of readings;
• reflect on and develop their own research methods and methodologies;
• research in both physical and digital archives;
• observe how archives are organized and developed; and
• develop and refine their own research questions from the themes of the course and explore those questions through a traditional writing project or digital alternative.

Assignments

Each assignment in this course will build on the previous assignment. For example, the reflective research journal blog posts will incorporate ideas from the reading response discussions; the exploration paper will build on your reflective research journal blog posts; and blog posts will reflect on our guest speakers and archive visits.

Reflective Research Journal Blogs: You will write three brief reflective/research journal blogs explaining your research methods and insights from exploring a digital or physical archive, from a presentation about the archives from our guest speakers and archive visits, and from your overall impressions of the archival turn. These posts will reflect on how each experience confirms/challenges/changes your ideas about archival research. What have been the biggest challenges in exploring archival research? What have been the greatest opportunities? How does each collection or presentation define “archive”? Which archive and search methods yielded the most useful results? What research question did you begin with and what research question did you end with? How might you
further explore that question? What would you recommend (in terms of sites, methods, strategies, results) to other students doing archival research with these collections? What insights can you add to the scholarly conversation (as told in our readings) on archival research in rhetoric and composition studies? How has archival research changed/challenged/confirmed your ideas/methods about research in general? You will then develop your own questions about archival study for your exploration paper.

Hunter College Archives Recovery Project: You will also contribute to an ongoing recovery project using materials from the Hunter College Archives (http://library.hunter.cuny.edu/archives). We will be visiting the archives to discuss the history of the College and explore texts from their collections. From this visit, you will develop your own research question to pursue in additional visits on your own. You will explore that question through a text (or several) from the Archives that you can connect to any discussions we’ve had about rhetoric, rhetorical theory, or rhetorical traditions. The blog post will describe your contribution to the recovery project: What collections did you explore? What is the context of the document? Why is it significant (to Hunter College history or to any of our discussions of rhetoric, rhetorical theory, women’s rhetorical activities, rhetorical education, or rhetorical traditions)? What further questions (about rhetoric, activism, education, etc.) does the text bring up for you? Finally, relate your post to two other posts on the Rhetorical Reflections site 2012–2016 (and explicitly link to each). What does your text and the texts described in the other posts tell you about a tradition of rhetorical activities at Hunter College? How might we begin to discuss a rhetorical tradition situated at Hunter College?

You should not answer the questions in this order, but provide a narrative for outside readers. Give details about the text and your approaches to it. Tell a story. Remember, your audience will not have read the text or know anything about your course or the Hunter College Archives. Be descriptive and interesting. You must include a citation for your materials. See the handout from the archives on citing archival sources. Please tag your post with descriptions of the text, such as Lenox Hill, Kate Simon, rhetorical education, African American students, student clubs, etc. Use tags that encompass both your post and the two posts you are relating to. Use as many tags as you like.

Final Project: For your final project, you will have three choices on format: 1) to revise a paper you’ve already written for another course by including new primary, archival material; 2) to expand any other assignment in this course, such as expanding your exploration paper into a theoretical piece or expanding your blog on Hunter Archives with further research; and 3) to create your own archive, physical or digital. Final projects will include a proposal and a brief presentation to the class. Other digital alternatives can be explored.
### Schedule of Readings

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<th>Topic</th>
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| **Weeks 1–2: What is an archive? What are rhetorical traditions?** | 1. Bizzell, “Editing the Rhetorical Tradition”  
2. Enoch and Gold, “Seizing the Methodological Moment: The Digital Humanities and Historiography in Rhetoric and Composition”  
3. Miller and Bowden, “A Rhetorical Stance on the Archives of Civic Action”  
| **Week 3: Archives, archivists, and archival researchers** | 1. Gold, “The Accidental Archivist”  
3. Stuckey, “Presidential Secrecy: Keeping Archives Open”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| **Week 4: How do we research in archives?** | 1. Donawerth and Zimmerelli, “Dialoguing with Rhetorica”  
4. Tirabassi, “Journeying into the Archives: Exploring the Pragmatics of Archival Research”                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| **Weeks 5–6: What can we learn from archives?** | 1. Bordelon, “Composing Women’s Civic Identities during the Progressive Era: College Commencement Addresses as Overlooked Rhetorical Sites”  
2. Gold, “ ‘Eve Did No Wrong’: Effective Literacy at a Public College for Women”  
3. Hayden, “‘Gifts’ of the Archive: A Pedagogy for Undergraduate Research”  
| **Weeks 7–8: What can we learn from the Hunter College Archives?** | 1. Balmuth, “The Hope of Our Humanity: Beginnings of the Teacher Education Program at Hunter College, 1870”  
2. Grunfeld, “Behold the People’s College, 1870–1895”  
3. Halasek, “‘Long I Followed Happy Guides’: Activism, Advocacy, and English Studies”  
### Week 9–10: Methods, methodologies, and feminist research

2. Enoch, Bessette, and VanHaitsma, “Feminist Invitations to Digital Historiography”  
3. Gaillet, “(Per)Forming Archival Research Methodologies”  
5. Padgett, “Feminist Research as a Journey (or, Like, Whatever?)”  

### Week 11: How are archives rhetorical?

1. Finnegan, “What Is This a Picture Of? Some Thoughts on Images and Archives”  
2. Mailloux, “Reading Typos, Reading Archives”  
3. Morris, “Archival Queer”  
4. Articles in Graban and Rose, *Peitho: The Critical Place of the Networked Archive*

### Week 12: What are the ethics of archival research?


### Week 13: Reflections on methods and methodologies

1. Clancy, *Beyond Citation: Critical Thinking about Digital Research*  
2. Enoch and Bessette, “Meaningful Engagements: Feminist Historiography and the Digital Humanities”  
3. Glenn and Enoch, “Drama in the Archives: Rereading Methods, Rewriting History”  
4. Gold, “Remapping Revisionist Historiography”

### Week 14: Final Project Presentations