Chapter 13. Primary Research in the Vertical Writing Curriculum

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"Weekly, daily, hourly, anything called news was already archival."

– *Goodman, The Cookbook Collector 249*

Archival research, always a staple of academic inquiry, has recently received much broader attention. From Henry Louis Gates' PBS series focused on African American genealogy to Ken Burns' body of archival documentaries to the sheer number of historical novels listed on Goodreads.com, it's clear that archival research can be commercially successful and downright entertaining. Primary investigation often involves following a fun trail of clues, whether the origin of the project is a family artifact, community story, or a serendipitous find. Unfortunately, however, academicians often manage to stifle this most interesting aspect of our research in publications and rarely explain the process we find so engaging to either readers or students. How might we share at least a little bit of this excitement, storytelling, and passion with both our academic readers and our students? More importantly, how do we teach primary research skills and associated writing forms to our students so that they might become passionate about their own writing and in the process find their academic voices, learn to write for specific audiences, and develop research and writing practices that are transferable?

For years, I've shared my academic passion for archival research methodologies and methods with PhD students, those researching dissertations, but recently I have come to the realization that primary research answers a multitude of needs in undergraduate and masters-level writing instruction as well. When students select primary research topics that hold a personal interest, they quickly take ownership of the project, seek archival evidence to support their claims, and write for a targeted audience. The kind of pedagogy I am advocating avoids pitfalls of plagiarism and boredom in the writing class. It teaches writing and research skills that that are adaptable across the curriculum, and prepares students for both academic and workplace writing. In this chapter, I will first discuss extending the vertical writing curriculum in writing pedagogy, then describe a writing class based on primary research, provide some assignments, and offer individual students' work as illustration. I have taught a version of this class in courses earmarked expository writing and advanced composition, but this approach works well in beginning composition courses, too. I recently co-authored (with Michelle Eble) a first-year writing text grounded in primary investigation, *Primary Research and Writing: People, Places, and Spaces* (Routledge 2016), a

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primer designed to introduce beginning writing students across the disciplines to the value of archival research. I find it paradoxical that students fully understand the concepts and praxis of secondary research without having any real knowledge of primary investigation. Given the recent scholarly attention focused not only on theories but also methods of archival research (Glenn and Enoch; Donahue and Moon; Kirsch and Rohan; Hayden; Buehl, Chute, and Fields), pedagogical implications of primary investigation in lower division courses now seem ripe for exploration.

The Vertical Writing Curriculum

Extending the vertical curriculum—that's a common phrase in composition scholarship and the goal of writing programs across the country. Teachers and Writing Program Administrators (WPA) regularly argue for the development and reexamination of courses in the advanced writing program—a curriculum area that is often hard to define, evidenced ironically in both the range and scarcity of texts available for adoption in advanced writing courses, both undergraduate and graduate. The difficulty in defining and shaping composition instruction between the bookends of first-year writing courses and graduate courses in composition theory/pedagogy designed for TAs who teach first-year writing is often problematic at best, as examined in works such as Linda K. Shamoon, Rebecca Moore Howard, Sandra Jamieson, and Robert A. Schwegler's excellent and groundbreaking collection *Coming of Age: The Advanced Writing Curriculum* (2000). However, seventeen years later, teachers, departments, and book publishers alike still have trouble defining how to teach advanced writing courses. In part, this ambiguity is what makes these courses attractive to teachers. We can take an existing class and give it our own imprint—as suggested in the various course plans presented in the *Coming of Age* collection. Contributors to the present volume, *Writing Pathways to Student Success*, certainly present pedagogical ideas that are applicable across the undergraduate curriculum. In her chapter, for instance, Sarah O'Connor suggests that we address common problems in writing courses by helping students understand

- The role of civil discourse in a community
- The importance of identifying the main point in an argument
- The value of knowing the full context of an issue
- The value of listening to and respecting multiple points of views
- The importance of questioning what we hear and read, along with an idea of the questions to ask.

These are important and universal considerations as we design a variety of different composition pedagogies and expand the curriculum to include contemporary theories of writing and research. Keeping O'Connor's points in mind also helps us decide how to refocus existing and new themes in composition classes.

For example, I regularly teach my department's expository writing course, a class that has been on the books for decades but one that teachers always ponder how to teach. Publishing reps have given up trying to sell us a text for this course. However, I love the class for its ambiguity. Yes, the course has published goals (addressing style, form, structure, etc.) but *how* to teach to those "aims" is left open to interpretation. In the past, I've taught the course focused on the history of the essay, as a class in academic publishing, even as a kind of special topics in journalism and exposition. But the last time I taught expository writing, I organized the course with a focus on archival research methods and primary investigation, an approach that is attractive to students from across the disciplines and that prepares students for success in both academic and workplace writing. Here is the class description from my syllabus:

> Historians of rhetorical practices, along with other scholars and those interested in the past, examine archives in an effort to seek nuanced, complicated tales—ones moored to their own times and cultural exigencies. Our adoption of recovery and revision methodologies often leads us to reexamine traditional "truths"; this important work depends on a plurality of research methods and the willingness of the researcher to carefully (re)consider venues and genres for disseminating our work. In this course, we will learn to become "archivists with an attitude"—scholars who base contemporary scholarship on primary investigations, and more importantly scholars who have something original, interesting, and pointed to add to academic conversations.

In this class design, students learn how to select topics that have personal appeal for the researcher/writer, follow a list of steps and suggestions to find archives (both physical and digital), visit collections, and explore ways to analyze findings and introduce the results into existing scholarly conversations. The researcher examines his or her reasons for conducting research and personal beliefs and biases throughout this process. Students may be initially unsure exactly where we're headed, but most embrace the opportunity to blaze meaningful trails, and the resulting writing is engaging, unique, interesting, and perhaps most importantly inspired. Even when it falls a bit short of the students' initial goals, the work is so much better than the majority of student writing I've read since I began teaching over thirty years ago. While many students write about family and community issues, the class offers opportunities for investigating workplace issues as well.

One of my students was rather uninterested in the class until we began discussing how primary research is essential on the job. He works as a deliverer at a national pizza chain. Throughout the course he expressed great displeasure at how the computer in another state dictates how many delivery persons an outlet needs to staff during a specific shift, regardless of the weather conditions. Togeth-

er, we came up with a research project based on his dissatisfaction—in an attempt to change work practices. He studied the computer data over a given time period and successfully made a recommendation to headquarters about adjusting staffing in downtown Atlanta markets on rainy Sunday nights. He scored big points at work with this project. Another student who was unhappy with management practices at the restaurant where she worked offered her services to help the establishment write a policy and procedure manual for wait staff—informed in part by experience, observation, and interviews with other employees. These projects, along with the familial and community projects described below, demonstrate value of archival investigation across the disciplines.

While I have adapted existing classes to include archival research and occasionally taught both graduate and undergraduate special topics courses in archival research methods, my ultimate goal was to have a regular course addressing this methodology in the course catalog. Fall 2016, I taught the first "on the books" section of ENGL4521/6521: Archival Research Methods. The projects emerging in this class followed the same patterns found in the 3000 level class. Topics ran the gamut, reflecting students' interests and access in family records, work-place practices, and community issues. What I quickly learned is that archival investigation is inviting and fascinating for ALL researchers, regardless of their level of training or experience because they are vested from the first moment in their projects, and in many instances finally have an opportunity to research topics that they may have been thinking about for quite a while. Consider this project description from a semester-long student project titled "American Song":

> "You Are My Sunshine" is a part of the American songbook, alongside favorites like Mildred J. Hill's ditty "Happy Birthday," and Woody Guthrie's protest song "This Land is Your Land." It is also part of my family history, for my family contends that my great grandfather wrote this song, a claim of some heated dispute. This dispute is what led to my interest in pursuing research on the song and its subsequent avenues. I feel compelled, however, to state up front that while I have a dog in the fight and I believe in that dog, I am aware that others could say the same. Moreover, I must note that the songs status as a source of contention that so accurately speaks to the topics surrounding privilege and opportunity (socio-economic) common during the early twentieth century, really fuels my interest in solving this riddle. (Jessica Rose)

Jessica uses the opportunity for archival research as an invitation to solve an historical family "riddle," and in the process writes a wonderful, personal case study illustrating universal and contemporary copyright law, author attribution, and royalty issues. She uses as her primary evidence, interviews and artifacts, historical records and legal documents.

Another student, Mandy Ryan expanded a very personal familial project into a case study significant to historical investigations of mental illness. As Mandy explains,

> For the [archival research] course, students chose one research project for the semester that involved using physical and digital archives. I choose a series of letters written by my great-grandmother who had been briefly institutionalized by her husband in the late 1940s. I spent months researching her history in various archives trying to trace her career path and subsequent admittance. I realized that her story was a small part of a much larger picture of women who had been silenced through ECT, so I turned my focus to other letters and admittance procedures, and I researched early psychiatric practices. I am beyond proud of my final project and even more excited that it isn't finished, but the beginning of a much larger research project that I intend to continue working on and growing with.

Similarly, moving from a familial project to a community one with much wider appeal, Emily Kimbell describes her project investigating a local/historical college in her hometown. This project will resonate with researchers interested in feminist studies and the history of educational practices, as well as those readers wanting to know more about Newnan, GA:

> My research project focuses on College Temple, a late 19th century women's college located in my hometown of Newnan, Georgia. College Temple first opened in 1853 and was purportedly the first college to grant women a master's degree. Throughout its thirty-six year existence, College Temple developed a preparatory department, served as a Civil War hospital, and transitioned into a co-educational facility. My journey to learn more about the school has brought me to both physical and digital archives housed at universities, historical societies, and local libraries. Throughout my research, I've developed a connection with the women who attended College Temple and discovered their writings, their lives, and their impact. My class project has turned into a life-long research endeavor - one that leads me back home to reflect on my community, my historical influences, and in turn, myself.

These example illustrates two recurring themes that I've discovered in teaching archival research methods: (1) students ALWAYS take on projects that I could never have anticipated or assigned and (2) the work is rarely finished at the end of the term. Most projects end with subsections titled some version of "Where I Will Go Next." Students leave the course with plans for continuing their investigations

and plans for disseminating their findings more broadly. For me, this is the most exciting facet of this pedagogy.

Be the Archivists

In the advanced undergraduate writing class and the split-level 4000/6000 level course, I adopt the 2010 collection *Working in the Archives*, co-edited by Ramsey, Sharer, L'Eplattenier, and Mastrangelo, as the class text. Contributors to this volume tackle the practical issues associated with seeking primary documents, discuss the role serendipity plays in archival searches, and explore the way academic investigation shifts when the search is online. Specific "how to" chapters offer concrete suggestions for investigating photographs, letters, and student writing. And other contributors provide taxonomies for organizing research findings, personal accounts about archival research methods and findings, and ways advice for becoming an archivist-researcher. Collectively, the authors introduce researchers to archivists' terms and practices. I've been researching archives for 30 years but didn't understand until reading this volume the real meaning behind primary research terms such as "original order," "finding aids," "provenance," or "preservation principles." *Working in the Archives* changed my perception of not only the role that the archivist plays in the researcher's work, but also how I might recast my teaching and scholarship in ways that lead me to teach students how to be archivists, not just researchers. I have a great upcoming project to test out my new knowledge.

I've had two boxes of my long-retired (and now deceased) dissertation director's papers sitting in my office for years. I have not opened those boxes—although I wanted to. These materials and manuscripts are related to Dr. Winifred Horner's important book, *Scottish Rhetoric: The American Connection*. I didn't open them because I was afraid that I didn't have the necessary skills to catalog the materials. They've been staring at me for a long time, and for the first time I felt equipped after reading *Working in the Archives* to open the box without disturbing the original order, to create a finding aid, store the items appropriately in acid free folders, reproduce and then purge the collection of toxic materials like newspaper clippings. In short, I am now ready to be the archivists *and* the researcher—and I have enlisted one of the undergraduate students in my class to work with me so she can learn basic archival principles to use in her own forthcoming projects. Learning with my students is what keeps teaching alive for me, and in classes based on primary research, I learn just as much with and from my students as they do. In addition to learning how to gather and interpret primary research, my students have learned how to archive materials, including: family artifacts (photos, newspaper clippings, public records, and letters), materials of monetary value (loose stamps that were catalogued and appraised), historical items (civil war ammunition, pamphlets, and flyers), and municipal documents (government papers, maps, and committee meeting minutes). Impressive accomplishments indeed.

I will remember these students (and many others like them) along with their work long after the courses are over, but more importantly, I think they will remember what they have learned in these writing course as well, apply archival research methodologies and primary investigation skills to other academic ventures, and use what they have learned in real-world and workplace writing situations.

First-Year Writing

To truly discuss a vertical curriculum, we have to include first-year writing—and even high school instruction—in examinations of archival research. We need to think about ways we teach writing and research to students who aren't remotely interested (and perhaps shouldn't be) in traditional research methods and patchwork writing. As mentioned above, *Primary Research and Writing: People, Places, and Spaces* is designed to introduce first-year writers to original research. Although researching and writing about primary sources only enriches course goals for first-year writing instruction, like the ones advocated by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, I realize that the tasks we are asking both students and teachers to do are alien, a bit scary, and sometimes initially uncomfortable—simply because these assignments are unconventional in the beginning writing class. However, where these tasks *are* everyday and common is in the workplace (as my student mentioned above found out delivering pizzas), and in other academic classes. Subjecting students at every level to a variety of research methods, asking them not only to study the basic principles and how-tos of primary research methods but also engage in original research projects is exciting, albeit hard, work—the kinds of activities ultimately required across the curriculum and in our students' careers, whether they pursue academic positions or not. Most professionals don't write traditional research reports based on one kind of research methodology except to provide background, couch findings and analysis. The ways we traditionally introduce inquiry in writing classes and the kinds of projects we require are, in the worst case, *just* academic. They have no life, no reason for being apart from fulfilling an assignment (whether it's a first-year required research paper or a required doctoral dissertation—in many cases still the most narrowly conceived kind of academic writing). We need to make research exciting, interesting for both the researcher and the audience, and tailored in terms of methods of inquiry, subject matter, and the researcher's goals.

To that end, in the first-year writing class, I assign students a range of activities that help them understand the role primary research plays in their own work, just as I do in the advanced courses. Good pedagogy is good pedagogy, regardless of the level of instruction. The research and writing ideas presented in this chapter are engaging for students at every level, seen most clearly at the end-of-the-semester mini-conferences I organize every term. Students formally present their work, usually in a space outside the classroom, to fellow students and

invited guests, many of whom are participants in their research studies. Students take ownership of their projects, creating Prezis, PowerPoints, posterboards, and videos in sharing their findings. The concluding class event is an academic conference, and the students know that they are scholars.

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