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Advancements in Primary Source Pedagogy: Catalysts for Collaboration, Context, and Change

This paper describes how librarians and archivists at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt, the University) reenvisioned their teaching with primary sources by applying findings from the 2021 Ithaka S+R study, “Teaching with Primary Sources: Looking at the Support Needs of Instructors,” to inform and enhance instructional initiatives. Considering Pitt’s library renovation (2017–24), the emergence of digital pedagogy at the University in the wake of COVID-19 health- and safety-related measures, and the call for dialogue around social justice issues, the Ithaka study provided grounding evidence. Inspired by these catalysts, librarians and archivists overhauled their teaching with primary sources through strategic collaborations that prioritized inquiry-based learning for students.

Introduction

The University of Pittsburgh Library System (ULS) aligns instructional efforts with the University’s strategic goal of “Preparing students to lead lives of impact through a supportive environment focused on a holistic and individualized approach to learning inside and outside the classroom,” as stated in the internally distributed document *The Plan for Pitt*.¹ This document outlined a strategic plan for the University, identifying opportunities for improvement and strengthening academics, research and scholarship, and community service. The strategies intended to bring about this goal included enhancing the curriculum through innovation and technology, focusing on personalized learning, and enriching student experience by expanding opportunities for engagement with diverse cultures and perspectives. Through instruction with primary sources, librarians and archivists at Pitt connected distinctive collections to student learning within the context of specific courses and through broader outreach programs to the University community and beyond.

1. University of Pittsburgh, *Plan for Pitt: Making a Difference Together Academic Years 2016–2020*. Pittsburgh: The University, 2016, <https://www.planforpitt.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/strategic-plan-presentation.pdf>.

With the advancement of local pedagogical practice and experience, librarians and archivists at Pitt are developing more collaborations with instructors of record for undergraduate courses (referred to herein as “instructors”). These collaborations allow for the co-creation of course assignments and assessments using primary sources to influence discovery and discourse. To inform these practices—and to capitalize on a newly renovated, technology-infused library instructional space at Pitt—the ULS participated in a research project sponsored by the nonprofit association Ithaka S+R (the Ithaka study).² Twenty-six university library teams in the United States and United Kingdom, plus one ProQuest team, joined this cross-institutional study to evaluate undergraduate teaching with primary sources. In 2019, researchers from each project team participated in training sessions before coordinating semi-structured interviews with approximately 335 instructors across all institutions and analyzing data for a local report in order to contribute to a culminating analysis compiled by Ithaka in 2021.

Ithaka study findings regarding the experiences of instructors who incorporated primary source materials into their courses, and the challenges students faced when engaging with these sources, created opportunities for dialogue and collaboration with instructors. This paper provides examples of partnerships with instructors at Pitt that illustrate the use of distinctive collections to elevate student learning through deep analysis and critical inquiry. The findings from Pitt’s participation in this research study—combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, the addition of a library classroom specifically designed for teaching with primary sources, and the call for dialogue and action in response to institutionalized and systemic racism in the United States—created opportunities for communication, collaboration, and change locally that, ideally, will inform teaching with primary sources at other institutions.

Literature Review

The concept of information literacy emerged in librarianship in the 1970s and centered on empowering people to use information for problem-solving and decision-making.³ While the history of information literacy and the role of academic librarians in facilitating teaching and learning has been represented in the literature for more

2. As part of the study, participating teams contributed “local reports” delineating their particular findings. These are linked on Ithaka S+R’s research report. See <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.314912>. The authors acknowledge the 2021 assessment in this journal by Melissa Gafe that was also influenced by the Ithaka study, which centers interviews and the effectiveness of teaching with physical materials. Melissa Gafe, “Treating the Digital Disease: The Role of Digital and Physical Primary Sources in Undergraduate Teaching,” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 22, no. 1 (2021): 25–32. <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.22.1.25>.

3. Shirley J. Behrens, “A Conceptual Analysis and Historical Overview of Information Literacy,” *College and Research Libraries* 55, no. 4 (1994): 309–22. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl_55_04_309.

than fifty years,⁴ similar discussions in the archives and special collections communities have been more common since the start of the twenty-first century. Daniels and Yakel point to two drivers behind the increased attention to instruction with primary sources.⁵ One was the recognition of the need for research-based university education in the 1990s, in order to advance curriculum beyond fact-based memorization and move toward process-oriented inquiry.⁶ In particular, the 1998 *Boyer Commission Report on Reinventing Undergraduate Education* recommended the incorporation of research opportunities at the undergraduate level as a critical component of university education, stating that “Undergraduates beginning in the freshman year can learn through research.... In the humanities undergraduates should have the opportunity to work in primary materials, perhaps linked to their professors’ research projects.”⁷

Scholarship over the past ten years reflects the emerging importance of primary source engagement for students in uncovering context and fostering the ability to identify and articulate meaning. The findings expressed in Carini acknowledged that engaging with primary sources contributes to the development of critical thinking skills and experiential learning.⁸ Additionally, primary sources are used to teach students the process of inquiry, creating a narrative, and producing original research, which contributes to the overall growth of students as knowledge producers.⁹ This enhanced experience for student learners is influenced by librarians and archivists shifting away from a demonstration-based teaching model to one that is grounded in learning theory. The work of educational theorists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, who laid the framework for Constructivism, a process-based framework that situates learning in a social context and with supportive structures known as scaffolding, is particularly relevant for primary source literacy.¹⁰ Vong advocated for an evolving instructional role for librarians and archivists so that they could guide students in inquiry-based discussion with primary sources instead of presenting facts and information about collections.¹¹ Through enhanced pedagogy, librarians and archivists offer meaningful contributions to learning and capitalize on student enthusiasm for the uniqueness

4. Hannelore B. Rader, “Information Literacy 1973–2002: A Selected Literature Review,” *Library Trends* 51, no. 2 (2002): 242–59.

5. Morgan Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel, “Uncovering Impact: The Influence of Archives on Student Learning,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 39, no. 5 (2013): 414. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2013.03.017>.

6. Daniels and Yakel, “Uncovering Impact,” 415–16.

7. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, “Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities,” *Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University* (1998): 17. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED424840>.

8. Peter Carini, “Information Literacy for Archives and Special Collections: Defining Outcomes,” *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 16, no. 1 (2016): 193–95. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2016.0006>.

9. Carini, “Information Literacy for Archives and Special Collections,” 193–95.

10. Silvia Vong, “A Constructivist Approach for Introducing Undergraduate Students to Special Collections and Archival Research,” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 17, no. 2 (2017): 149–152. <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.17.2.9666>.

11. Vong, “A Constructivist Approach,” 149.

and materiality of objects through their subject and collection expertise.¹² Furthermore, professional frameworks such as the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*, developed by the SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force, provide a foundational tool for moving beyond the show-and-tell model to guide the design, implementation, and assessment of instructional programs, and create “active, hands-on, collaborative learning.”¹³

The second driver for increased interest in teaching with primary sources was a desire to illuminate the impact of engagement with primary sources for students through learning assessments. Carter eloquently identified “impact in the classroom” as an achievable and measurable goal.¹⁴ She wrote about the important role of instructional partnerships between instructors and librarians/archivists to advance teaching and support learning through special collections. Furthermore, Carter acknowledged the key role in assessing this work: “We need to know and be able to demonstrate how well we are helping students to become better scholars, connect with creativity, and develop lifelong learning habits.”¹⁵ More recently, OCLC’s¹⁶ *Research and Learning Agenda for Archives, Special, and Distinctive Collections* report identified teaching with primary sources as “an opportunity for special collections to play an important role in the library’s programmatic vision for teaching and learning.”¹⁷

Another area of focus emerging within the literature is centered on students’ adoption of evidentiary inquiry skills, moving them beyond their own opinions and beliefs toward new ways of thinking about complex issues. Scholarship in this area, particularly from the past five years, reveals that the process of uncovering the complexities inherent in primary sources performs a critical role in student learning. For example, crucial conversations around materials that contain evidence of racism, discrimination, and marginalization stimulate discussion and encourage student reflection, thereby rendering the narratives “more vivid and personal,” and allowing the deep thought required to develop awareness and empathy.¹⁸ At the same time,

12. 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 (April 2019): 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.31274/archivalissues.11072>.

13. Theresa Quill, Maureen E. Maryanski, Meg Meiman, Isabel Planton, Meggan Press, and Carrie Schwier, “Working across Borders: Building Collaborations for Primary Source Instruction,” *Journal of Map and Geography Libraries* 15, no. 2–3 (2019): 153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15420353.2020.1719268>.

14. Lisa R. Carter, “Articulating Value: Building a Culture of Assessment in Special Collections,” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 13, no. 2 (2012): 97. <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.13.2.376>.

15. Carter, “Articulating Value,” 97.

16. Formerly known as the Online Computer Library Center.

17. Chela Scott Weber, “Research and Learning Agenda for Archives, Special, and Distinctive Collections and Research Libraries,” *OCLC Research* (2017): 10. <https://doi.org/10.25333/c3c34f>.

18. Jeanne Abrams, “Primary Sources in the College Classroom: The Beck Archives at the University of Denver Libraries,” *Judaica Librarianship* 21 (July 2020): 54. <https://ajlpublishing.org/index.php/jl/article/view/535>.

the discomfort, frustration, and anxiety that students experience in handling primary sources further illustrates the “complications and implications of working with [them].”¹⁹ While primary source materials in any format are influential for student learning, it should be noted that access to physical materials during times of campus closure (as when institutions closed during the global health emergency) highlighted primary source materials’ unique role in student engagement. Colleagues from Yale University, another participating institution in the Ithaka study, noted the key role of materiality in the value instructors placed on primary source engagement for their students,²⁰ especially in a landscape in which the experience of teaching and learning was increasingly digital.

The literature reflects the landscape of career preparation for information professionals in that it points to few opportunities for formalized pedagogical training in graduate library and information science programs. Like colleagues working in other areas of librarianship, “many who end up teaching in special collections and archives may have no formal education on how to teach and assess their efforts.”²¹ Despite this apparent void in formal teacher training for librarians and archivists, there is an increasing need for library professionals to learn about primary source pedagogy. Anderberg et al. surveyed archival training programs in the United States and Canada and identified little pedagogical training, with most experience gained outside of coursework.²² To address the gap, archivists and librarians share best practices through symposia and conferences.²³ Quill et al. described how these opportunities to participate in focused workshops, training, and other programs gave rise to the co-creation of innovative pedagogical practices around primary sources. These learning initiatives facilitated collaborations among librarians and archivists across distinctive collection repositories, encouraged interdisciplinary approaches to curation, and fostered co-teaching to keep pace with increasing requests for primary source engagement.²⁴

In conclusion, these developments shined a spotlight on the need for the Ithaka study on teaching with primary sources. While there was abundant reflection on the perceived value of learning through primary sources from the perspective of archivists and librarians, there was little from the instructors’ viewpoint, as previously defined.

19. Kara Flynn, “Scaffolding Primary Source Research and Analysis in an Undergraduate History Research Methods Course: Case #12,” *Case Studies on Teaching with Primary Sources* (2020): 6. https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/TWPSCase_12_Scaffolding_Primary_Source_Research_0.pdf.

20. Gafe, “Treating the Digital Disease,” 28–29.

21. Anne Bahde, Heather Smedberg, and Mattie Taormina, *Using Primary Sources: Hands-On Instructional Exercises* (Libraries Unlimited, 2014): xiii.

22. Lindsay Anderberg, Robin M Katz, Shaun Hayes, Alison Stankrauff, Morgen MacIntosh Hodgetts, Josué Hurtado, Abigail Nye, and Ashley Todd-Diaz, “Teaching the Teacher: Primary Source Instruction in American and Canadian Archives Graduate Programs,” *The American Archivist* 81, no. 1 (2018): 188–215. <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-81.1.188>.

23. Strandmark, “The Undergraduate Feedback Loop,” 10.

24. Quill et al., “Working across Borders,” 158–65.

Without evidence of deeper interactions between instructors and librarians/archivists, the library and archival literature is missing instructors' perspectives, concerns, and processes, which are helpful in establishing and sustaining educational partnerships. The results from the Ithaka study and subsequent publications address this gap in the literature, as they illuminate instructors' intended purpose in teaching with primary sources, and their individual experiences that influence the integration of primary sources into courses and curricula.

Methods and Findings

Using an interview protocol designed by Ithaka (see appendix), the ULS project team interviewed thirteen instructors in humanities and social sciences disciplines who recently taught undergraduate classes using primary source materials at Pitt. Providing the structure for conversations with instructors, Ithaka's interview questions were pointed enough to gather analyzable data across different perspectives and also allow for the necessary flexibility to explore specific concepts or topics of interest that arose during the conversations. Through the subsequent coding and analysis of data, four major themes emerged:

- Learning to teach with primary sources is largely informal: The ways in which instructors integrate primary sources into teaching are influenced more by their own experiences, research processes, and practical experience than any pedagogical training. Instructors rely on mentors and their own formative educational experiences to shape how they design and deliver their respective students' learning opportunities.
- Curation of both physical and digital materials is challenging: Selecting primary source content to fulfill instructional purposes or facilitate learning outcomes is time-consuming. Instructors cited increasingly larger class enrollments, varying levels of students' research skills, and the evolving availability of materials in physical and digital formats as particular challenges. Many instructors were concerned that digitized content would be understood by students as more significant and preferred merely because of accessibility and convenience.
- Tension between facilitated discovery versus self-motivated discovery: Instructors are ambivalent about covering more resources versus taking time to provide an in-depth look at one or two items. The survey uncovered a paradox in which instructors' commitment to careful selection and arrangement of primary sources for their students' use can inadvertently limit students' learning. Without experiencing the process of discovery, access, selection, and the opportunity to practice interpretation of sources on their own, students do not develop skills that they can transfer to other research projects.
- Primary source learning fosters the development of analytical skills: Engaging with primary sources is integral to development of critical thinking for students.

Critical thinking ensures students' success within disciplinary contexts and is transferable to other areas. Instructors specifically cited students' ability to ask well-informed questions—and to think beyond their own experiences and embrace new perspectives—as integral for academic success in any discipline.

Findings from the interviews conducted at Pitt provided details about how instructors internalize and teach the research process with primary sources. The memory of their own learning at critical educational junctures served as a model for instructors' approaches to teaching with primary sources. As a result, creating opportunities for students to encounter new or challenging concepts through serendipitous—but structured—discovery of primary sources featured strongly in instructors' pedagogical strategies. Overall, instructors prioritized students' engagement with primary sources because of the transformative educational experiences involving student encounters with different perspectives these sources provided, despite the time spent curating primary sources for instruction and the challenges involved with accessing sources across physical and digital formats. The greatest takeaway from these findings was the potential for librarians/archivists to collaborate with instructors to design and deliver in-depth, inquiry-based learning experiences.

Based on the insights gained from gathering data about instructors' priorities, concerns, and challenges when teaching with primary sources, instructional consultations and collaborations focused on primary sources at the ULS now have the potential to be more evidence-based. To further influence primary source pedagogy through this evidence, the members of the ULS project team who collaborated on the Ithaka study conducted meetings with internal and external library stakeholders to share the findings and discuss next steps. The need for a community of practice around primary source pedagogy emerged, as did a call for training programs on how to incorporate primary sources into teaching. This not only closed the loop on the study but also situated the findings as generally applicable to other partnerships and projects involving librarians and instructors across disciplines.

Technology-Enhanced Teaching at Pitt Post-Ithaka Study

Just as instructors find teaching with primary sources to be an iterative process, librarians and archivists who teach with primary sources are in a continual state of learning about best practices in developing instructional initiatives and identities. To that end, at Pitt a follow-up survey was sent to sixty instructors who had previously brought classes to the library for instruction with primary sources in 2018, 2019, or 2020. Twenty-seven completed surveys were received. Within the time frame of the University's COVID-19 health- and safety-related measures (COVID-19 policies), this survey informed the creation of virtual and hybrid programming that best supported instructors' teaching and research.

In terms of responses, the majority (74%) reported that they would be interested in developing assignments using existing digitized primary sources from Pitt's collections and collaborating with librarians and archivists to select and curate sources on a specific course topic. Most (78%) would consider real-time (synchronous) and interactive class sessions with primary sources facilitated by librarians and archivists using Zoom. Many (59%) expressed interest in using short, prerecorded asynchronous videos, and 48% of respondents indicated interest in incorporating student-created output, such as online exhibits using primary sources. As a result, tools to support different modes of instruction and delivery of classes were incorporated into the teaching repertoire during this time, including digital learning objects, asynchronous modules, and digital materials from distinctive collections, as outlined at <https://pitt.libguides.com/ascclassvisits>.

While access to technologies and digital research materials facilitated teaching and learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in impressive ways, the lack of physical access to distinctive collections for teaching purposes was challenging. The Ithaka study revealed that when facsimiles or digital surrogates are available, instructors expressed concern that students might misinterpret some digital surrogates as having greater significance over others (when, in fact, they were employed for ease of access). While the standard practice for teaching in hybrid or virtual settings has been to provide links to digital primary sources to students, much of the context from the original materials—arrangement, container, physical features, etc.—could be lost. As one instructor shared from the interviews,

[T]here's a real push in terms of digitizing, but there's also a real limitation in terms of what gets digitized. And I worry that as we go toward everything digital that we bring with us, all these kinds of assumptions that we can't see, and that will limit then what we imagine worth collecting and telling.²⁵

While a class visit might include primary sources accessed via database subscriptions and Pitt's digital holdings, librarians and archivists also used a document camera to incorporate physical collections of material importance in response to instructors' concerns about the use of digital surrogates. These collections included the Elizabeth Nesbitt Collection of historical children's materials, the Nietz Collection of 19th-century schoolbooks, and the Darlington Memorial Library. Both digital and physical formats were considered when librarians and archivists selected materials for classes during fall 2020 and spring 2021.

25. Diana Dill, Carrie Donovan, Jeanann Haas, Berenika Webster, and Clare Withers, "Teaching with Primary Sources at the University of Pittsburgh: Summary Report of Local Findings, August 2020," *Unpublished Project Report*. (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Libraries, 2020): 7. <http://dscholarship.pitt.edu/39698>.

One successful hybrid class activity involved in-person students initiating discussion and peer-to-peer learning with their virtual counterparts by showing the primary sources that they were handling via the document camera. Active handling of a text rather than viewing a static digital object helped make the learning experience more engaging. In this example, students observed physical features of the work, including dimensions and materiality—aspects of an artifact that are not often easily understood when studying digital surrogates. Another example included sharing the *Angeli Domini*,²⁶ a fourteenth-century manuscript leaf featuring an antiphon for the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel, via the document camera to a remote audience on Zoom. Students used the Zoom annotation tool collectively and wrote Latin translations onto a visual overlay of the manuscript. This exercise encouraged students to deliberate and differentiate scripts, expand abbreviations, and identify the writing of different individuals on the manuscript, and to do something otherwise forbidden with special collections materials: make notes over the text. Because access to the original manuscript was not possible due to COVID-19 policies, the annotation tool allowed students to collaborate and discuss their attempts at translation in real-time.

In addition, ULS findings from the interviews conducted as part of the Ithaka study revealed that instructors struggled with whether to cover one or two items in-depth, or to provide a broader overview of multiple items, as evidenced by the following statement from a Pitt instructor:

Sometimes it's better to sacrifice the breadth so that you can get some depth and slow down a little bit and teach them about a certain way of thinking, a certain approach, and make sure you're getting that point across. I think working with primary sources can teach that lesson, that sometimes quality is more important than quantity in the classroom.²⁷

In response to this dilemma, the ULS created brief prerecorded videos of select items, which provided more context and could be used as supplemental instruction, depending on the students' needs and interests. This approach allowed students to perform close reading and develop improved understandings of context around a particular source. As a result, students posed more thoughtful questions and participated in robust class discussion.

Classroom Innovations

During fall 2020 and spring 2021, two members of the ULS project team worked closely with an instructor from a History of the Politics of the English Language

26. "Angeli Domini, 14th Century. Rare Book and Manuscript Leaves Collection," 1400. SC.1970.01, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh Library System.

27. Dill et al., "Teaching with Primary Sources at the University of Pittsburgh," 11.

course who previously visited the ULS in-person with classes, and who expressed concern about whether students would fully engage with digital surrogates in a virtual environment. Through instructional consultations, the instructor identified goals for her students regarding thoughtfully considering, identifying, and discussing authorship, audience, critical reception, access and dissemination, and materiality. Based on their shared understanding of learning outcomes, the instructor and librarians co-created virtual learning experiences that showcased special collections materials for the instructor and students, who all participated via Zoom.

This experience allowed students to explore primary sources—created for a target audience of children—by considering the advancement of cultural norms and the significance of language. The lesson began with one librarian briefly introducing an item, *Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable*,²⁸ on the document camera, and conducting a close reading of a page, with both librarians and the instructor modeling evidentiary inquiry and posing questions aloud. As additional pages were viewed, students engaged as a group by using the chat feature, unmuting their microphones, and speaking to the class to offer observations, pose questions, and comment.

Having provided this basic scaffold, the librarians introduced a PowerPoint that contained thematic slides. Students were given time to select one or two video recordings to review on their own; they listened to the contextual presentation and paused the recording to closely inspect and/or read the text. The students chose to work with content either based on materiality (text, paper, dimensions, binding, and illustrations) or on contemporaneous and historical information (creator, dissemination of the text, audience, and other cultural contexts). Each slide topic included links to videos of document camera handling of curated content, including foundational early literacy; foundations of dominant culture; patriotism and citizenship; and people of color. Each of these brief (three minutes or shorter) recordings featured a librarian handling an item from the collection and narrating broad contextual information such as title, author, date of publication; and some statements about audience and critical reception. The videos were designed to demonstrate the scale and size of an item, and care was taken to highlight materials that were not available as part of an existing digital collection. Students considered the political significance of language in terms of race, gender, class, religion, ableism, patriotism, or some other issue. They analyzed objects individually and considered cultural context and implications, historically and through a modern lens.

Students then joined a Zoom breakout room of their choice—arranged by the pre-assigned topics—to discuss their independent analysis. Returning from the breakout

28. Mary Godolphin and Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable*. New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1869.

rooms, students provided brief overviews of their Zoom room conversations, which culminated in a lively all-class discussion. Some focused on the materiality; others explored creator, dissemination of the text, audience, and other cultural contexts. Many students were astonished by one of the additional works reviewed, the Navajo reader, *The Flag of My Country = Shikéyah Bidah Na'at'a'i*.²⁹ Students questioned creator intentions and audience agency. The twenty-three-page reader features line drawings and English text with Navajo translation on each page. Students provided evidence of the use of language from the text that many perceived as propaganda and supplied examples to substantiate their arguments about the power of language to promote behavior.

Thoughtful questioning of creator intentions, audience agency, and the promulgation of cultural narratives continued in a discussion of multiple editions of *Robinson Crusoe*, from a 1719 edition³⁰ to an abridged die cut version for children,³¹ to a beginning reader edition³² and a twentieth-century reimaging.³³ After commenting on the prevalence of the story in Western culture over three centuries, students discussed the abridgement process and issues related to the use of images in works for children. Students considered depictions of scenes of Crusoe discovering a footprint in the sand³⁴ and standing with his foot on the neck or head of a prostrate Friday.³⁵ Such engagements with primary sources fostered critical analysis skills that related to considerations of systemic racism and structural oppression.

Cultural Competency with Primary Sources

The Ithaka study revealed that instructors who were interviewed at Pitt valued primary source engagements that moved students from their own opinions to evidentiary inquiry in evaluating past artifacts as a means of exploring current cultural context. This process can be sparked by a juxtaposition from an artifact that prompted curiosity, questions, or concerns. For example, students viewing primary source materials relating to sexuality and gender such as *Transvestia*³⁶ were often affronted and voiced disbelief about the verbiage used in publications by and for sexually marginalized

29. Cecil S. King, *The Flag of My Country = Shikéyah Bidah Na'at'a'i*, 2nd edition, Lawrence, Kansas: Haskell Institute, 1956.

30. Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who Lived Eight and Twenty Years, All Alone in an Un-Inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oronoque, Having Been Cast on Shore by Shipwreck, Wherein All the Men Perished but Himself, with an Account How He Was at Last as Strangely Deliver'd by Pyrates*, 3rd edition, London [at the ship in Pater-Noster-row]: Printed for W. Taylor, 1719.

31. Lydia L. A. Very and Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*. American Poetry, 1609–1900; Segment III, No. 3222 Boston: L. Prang & Company, 1864.

32. Godolphin and Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable*.

33. Michel Tournier, *Friday and Robinson: Life on Speranza Island*, New York: Knopf, 1972.

34. Godolphin and Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable*, Plate 4.

35. Godolphin and Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable*, Plate 5.

36. Virginia Prince, *Transvestia*, Vol. 3. Los Angeles, California: Chevalier Publications, 1962.

populations. In addition, students viewed a girls' etiquette book, *The New Seventeen Book of Etiquette and Young Living*,³⁷ and noted the edicts on dieting, dating, and reforming of self for male appreciation. With a deep dive into materials from various time periods, students observed how language evolved and changed. While instructors offered insight into vocabulary, students developed critical evaluation skills that enabled their understanding of the artifacts, as well as their recognition of the dominant narratives from the time period and how those can inform sociocultural awareness of present day.

The Pitt Ithaka local report³⁸ as well as the Ithaka Capstone Report³⁹ on teaching with primary sources showed that instructors valued the commentary provided by librarians and archivists regarding provenance, background, creators, methods of production, dissemination, and inclusion or exclusion into the institution's special and archival collections. Such practices dovetailed with course readings and lecture content through the curatorial role librarians and archivists fulfilled as they selected materials and design or collaborated on creation of engagement activities to meet instructional outcomes for specific courses. In-class discussion during the sessions in the library might center on complicated topics such as how or why items are selected, gaps and silences in the archive, exploration of which voices are represented or missing, or how materials are described and made accessible.

As a result of the Ithaka study, librarians and archivists at Pitt investigated opportunities to position primary sources in conversations around diversity and inclusion beyond the classroom. For example, a workshop was delivered at the University's 2021 Diversity Forum, "Dismantling Oppressive Systems: Building Just Communities," a four-day online event free and open to the public. The forum issued a call for proposals from all members of the Pitt community and Pittsburgh at large, to design and lead sessions aligned with the forum's topic to dismantle systems of oppression. The library's session explored music, ephemera, manuscripts, and books from social movements of the past and how consideration of such materials fostered understanding and built just communities in and beyond academia.

Participants were invited to interact with primary source materials and consider cultural and historical context from past movements to uncover the complicated processes that resulted in change. Close readings, imagery comparisons, and discussion were used to analyze objects and examine primary source materials in daily life and

37. Enid A. Haupt, *The New Seventeen Book of Etiquette and Young Living*. New York: McKay, 1970: 33–35, 37, 48, 65–67, 94–96.

38. Dill et al., "Teaching with Primary Sources at the University of Pittsburgh," 8.

39. Kurtis Tanaka et al., "Teaching with Primary Sources: Looking at the Support Needs of Instructors," *Ithaka S+R* (March 2021): 1–56. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.314912>.

activism. Informed by the impact of the image in the History of the Politics of the English Language class, librarians and archivists opened the workshop with a depiction from one of the abridgements previously referenced, *Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable*,⁴⁰ and alluded to the powerful, ubiquitous images of George Floyd⁴¹ shared throughout social and print media, which continued to spark public debate and to fuel public protests. Next in the workshop, facilitators traced the history of the 1931 Florence Reece song “Which Side Are You On?”⁴² from its origin in a coal mining West Virginia kitchen, to workers’ rights strikes and contemporary activism at protests. Depictions from ULS collections were mixed with Twitter footage from Black Lives Matter protests⁴³ in Pittsburgh and beyond.⁴⁴ Capitalizing on Ryan Coogler’s blockbuster film,⁴⁵ the workshop featured Black Panther artifacts including *The Black Panther* newspaper featuring community efforts such as clothing drives,⁴⁶ and the earliest introduction of the Marvel superhero Black Panther,⁴⁷ and as well as an issue with a anti-KKK plotline;⁴⁸ all of this seeded discussion on cultural impact and values. Finally, local activism by the university community was examined, with facilitators sharing the publication *Gay Life*,⁴⁹ which featured articles recounting Pitt students’ responses to anti-gay activist Anita Bryant in the 1970s.

The library’s session was scheduled among fifteen other concurrent sessions and welcomed approximately thirty attendees. The ULS Coordinator for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion later emailed the presenters to share that, at a Forum wrap-up meeting, the forum’s planning committee noted that the ULS presentation was “one of the most informational and excellent presentations of the forum.”⁵⁰ With the success of this event, the ULS will seek additional opportunities to use primary sources in conversations to deconstruct established narratives and inspire cultural competence and understanding through historical context.

40. Godolphin and Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable*, 1–93.

41. Darnella Frazier, “Video of Derek Chauvin Pressing His Knee on George Floyd’s Neck,” 10:00, Minneapolis, May 25, 2020.

42. Edith Fowke, Joe Glazer, and Kenneth I. Bray, “Songs of Work and Protest,” New York: Dover Publications, 1973: 54.

43. Natasha Lindstrom (@NewNatasha), “In addition to holding up signs such as ‘Abolish White Supremacy Systems,’ protesters sing: ‘#DaunteWright was a freedom fighter and he taught us how to fight.’ So we gonna fight all day and night until we get it right. What side are you on? We’re on the freedom side,” *X, formerly known as Twitter*, April 13, 2021, 8:58 p.m. <https://twitter.com/NewsNatasha/status/1382136237973192704>.

44. Rebecca Rivas, “Demonstrators ‘Disrupt’ STL Symphony Singing a ‘Requiem for Mike Brown,’” *YouTube Video*, 2:11, St. Louis, October 5, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_7ErkQFduQ&t.

45. *Black Panther*, directed by Ryan Coogler (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2018).

46. “N.Y. Free Clothes,” *The Black Panther* Vol. 3, no. 28 (1969): 1–24.

47. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, “Fantastic Four,” *Marvel* Vol. 1, no. 52 (1966): Cover art.

48. Don McGregor, Billy Graham, and Bob McLeod, “Jungle Action Featuring the Black Panther,” *Jungle Action* no. 19 (1972): Cover art.

49. J. Austin and B. Michaels, *Gay Life* Vol. 12 (1978): 15, 23.

50. Internal email to ULS staff, 2021.

Learning Assessment

Assessment activities designed to measure the impact of incorporating primary sources into teaching and learning are necessary for evolving and improving instructional practice, as well as informing educational partnerships going forward. In a separate research study sponsored by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Research Library Impact Framework (RLIF), librarians and archivists at Pitt explored how special collections support and promote teaching, learning, and research. As part of the study, the ARL project team at the ULS designed a lesson plan with a corresponding rubric that mapped to the ACRL RBMS/SAA *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* to influence and assess student learning. This toolkit provided a framework for planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction with primary sources. It also served as a mechanism for fostering educational partnerships by facilitating conversations about pedagogy, student engagement, and assessment of student performance. The results of these data are available as part of the ARL Research Report.⁵¹ Assessment data gathered through the application of the toolkit continues to demonstrate compelling examples of student learning, thereby providing tangible evidence of the successful librarian/archivist contributions to the achievement of instructor learning goals. In a recent example, learning outcomes for students in a graduate education class included critically evaluating the perspective of the creator, situating the primary source material into cultural historical context, and providing evidence and analysis of power relationships. The librarian involved with this course was invited to attend the students' capstone presentations and observed examples of each outcome integrated with lecture content and course readings throughout the presentations.

Conclusions

The ULS participation in the Ithaka study on teaching with primary sources was valuable in launching a long-term process of inquiry into how instructors are inspired to use primary sources in their courses and the role of librarians and archivists as educational partners. The findings from both the local and capstone Ithaka reports significantly informed changes to teaching with primary sources at Pitt. They inspired new pedagogical practices incorporating technologies available in a renovated classroom, informed creative collaborations with instructors, and increased opportunities for dialogue, awareness, and action around systemic racism in the United States. The project team, along with ULS colleagues, now has a better understanding of how primary source engagement can advance conversations about antiracism and social justice issues. In addition, librarians and archivists are better prepared to incorporate hybrid and virtual learning environments through new tools and the exchange

51. Clare Withers, Diana Dill, Jeanann Haas, Kathy Haines, and Berenika Webster, *Library Impact Research Report: A Toolkit for Demonstrating and Measuring Impact of Primary Sources in Teaching and Learning* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.29242/report.pitt2022b>.

of ideas among a nascent community of practice. The results of the Ithaka study were operationalized at the ULS to inform educational partnerships and create pathways for innovation in teaching with primary sources. These experiences provide librarians and archivists with the evidence and confidence to grow beyond supporting a single class visit to offering more sustainable and measurable partnerships. These collaborations with instructors and students focus on scaffolded and experiential learning with primary sources that transcend the traditional research paper. The lessons learned show that librarians and archivists have the capacity to be more involved in curricula and pedagogy, and thereby can have an increasing influence on student learning with primary sources.

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The authors participated among twenty-seven total partners in the Ithaka S+R Teaching with Primary Sources research project. This paper reports on the local findings for the University of Pittsburgh Library System. The full findings of the Ithaka study on teaching with primary sources can be found in the ULS local report⁵² and Ithaka Capstone Project.⁵³

52. Dill et al., “Teaching with Primary Sources at the University of Pittsburgh,” 1–16.

53. Tanaka et al., “Teaching with Primary Sources,” 1–56.

Appendix. Supporting Teaching with Primary Sources Interview Guide

Background

Briefly describe your experience teaching undergraduates. Examples: how long you've been teaching, what you currently teach, what types of courses (introductory lectures, advanced seminars) you teach

- How does your teaching relate to your current or past research?

Training and Sharing Teaching Materials

How did you learn how to teach undergraduates with primary sources? Examples: formal training, advice from colleagues or other staff, trial-and-error

- Do you use any syllabi, assignment plans, collections of sources, or other instructional resources that you received from others?
- Do you make your own syllabi, assignment plans, collections of sources, or other instructional resources available to others? If so, how? If not, why not?

Course Design

I'd like you to think of a specific course in which you teach with primary sources that we can discuss in greater detail.

- Do you have a syllabus you're willing to show me? I will not share or reproduce this except for research purposes.
- Tell me a bit about the course. Examples: pedagogical aims, why you developed it, how it has evolved over time
- Explain how you incorporate primary sources into this course. If appropriate, refer to the syllabus
- Why did you decide to incorporate primary sources into this course in this way?
- What challenges do you face in incorporating primary sources into this course?
- Do you incorporate primary sources into all your courses in a similar way? Why or why not?

In this course, does anyone else provide instruction for your students in working with primary sources? Examples: co-instructor, archivist, embedded librarian, teaching assistant

- How does their instruction relate to the rest of the course?
- How do you communicate with them about what they teach, how they teach it, and what the students learn?

Finding Primary Sources

Returning to think about your undergraduate teaching in general, how do you find the primary sources that you use in your courses? Examples: Google, databases, own research, library staff

- Do you keep a collection of digital or physical sources that you use for teaching?
- What challenges do you face in finding appropriate sources to use?

How do your students find and access primary sources?

- Do you specify sources which students must use, or do you expect them to locate and select sources themselves?
- If the former, how do you direct students to the correct sources? Do you face any challenges relating to students' abilities to access the sources?
- If the latter, do you teach students how to find primary sources and/or select appropriate sources to work with? Do you face any challenges relating to students' abilities to find and/or select appropriate sources?

Working with Primary Sources

How do the ways in which you teach with primary sources relate to goals for student learning in your discipline?

- Do you teach your students what a primary source is? If so, how?
- To what extent is it important to you that your students develop information literacy or civic engagement through working with primary sources?

In what formats do your students engage with primary sources? Examples: print editions, digital images on a course management platform, documents in an archive, born-digital material, oral histories

- Do your students visit special collections, archives, or museums, either in class or outside of class? If so, do you or does someone else teach them how to conduct research in these settings?
- Do your students use any digital tools to examine, interact with, or present the sources? Examples: 3D images, zoom and hyperlink features, collaborative annotation platforms, websites, wikis
- To what extent are these formats and tools pedagogically important to you?
- Do you encounter any challenges relating to the formats and tools with which your students engage with primary sources?

Wrapping Up

Looking toward the future, what challenges or opportunities will instructors encounter in teaching undergraduates with primary sources? Is there anything else I should know?