## Background

We report the findings of 16 student interviews conducted at a large public university in fall 2005 as part of the research project Developing Archival Metrics in College and University Archives and Special Collections. Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Archival Metrics project is developing standardized evaluative survey instruments to help North American college and university archives collect user-centered data. The planned instruments will standardize data-collection procedures and definitions, and potentially allow consolidation and analysis of data across institutions.

## Interviewed Students

### At what stage in their education did the graduate students first use archives?

- 1,13% Senior (graduate)
- 1,13% Junior (graduate)
- 2,24% Sophomore (graduate)
- 1,13% "Upper level" undergraduate
- 2,24% Freshman (graduate)
- 1,13% Undergraduate (unspecifed)

Figure 1: (n=8).

### At what stage in their education did the undergraduate students first use archives?

- 3,37% Senior (undergraduate)
- 1,13% Junior (undergraduate)
- 1,13% Sophomore (undergraduate)
- 2,24% Freshman (undergraduate)
- 1,13% Undergraduate (unspecifed)

Figure 2: (n=8).

## Students Perceptions of Archives

- Overall satisfaction: 4
- Return feeling comfortable: 3
- Focus on rules: 2
- Not using common vocabulary: 2
- Overwhelmed and confused: 2

Figure 3: n=16.

“I liked being treated like a historian even though I totally am not one, but being allowed to have the same access.”

“It’s very difficult to have sort of a general set of how one archive works versus another archive. Even though that there are sort of the same rules that you could expect of different archives of how you behave and how you actually use the materials and how they’re stored and retrieved.”

### Student Perceptions of Archivists

“…Unlike a library, an archive requires you to have a connection with another person, an archivist…but it tends to be more impersonal than I expect it to be. And that divide between what I expect and what it has actually turned out to be for me has caused me a bit of discomfort, of thinking, “Am I doing something wrong?””

“I felt like my project wasn’t important enough to get her attention or distract her from whatever else she was doing since she was clearly busy.”

“The archivist was great, they knew so much information, they were probably the most useful tool in all my research.”

“If you fall on a nice archivist, then it’s good, but otherwise you are just completely lost.”
Feelings of Self-Confidence

7 of the 16 students interviewed described an initial feeling of intimidation in the archives. Even so, they continued using archives for research. Each student interviewed felt that they had become relatively confident about using archives, whether they gained confidence with an archivist or teacher’s assistance or they expressed that they learned on their own through trial and error.

“If I went to a new archive now, I might have an idea of what to do but each one has its own procedures. But, yeah, I feel pretty proficient.”

“It really helps to have the archivist there to lead you on a path, it’s great to have ideas but knowing where to find everything, you kind of have an idea but sometimes they’re really helpful in pushing you in the right direction. I think I just became a lot less intimidated of archives.”

Teacher Roles in Student Archival Experiences

9 of the 16 students (3 graduate students, 6 undergraduate students) mentioned receiving valuable guidance from their teachers in using the archives. This guidance ranged from introducing students to primary sources in class to establishing relationships for students with specific archivists.

Student Experiences with Note Taking

![Student tools for taking notes in the archives]

Figure 5: n=7.

“I think it would be beneficial if you, as in the University or the teacher or someone, would show the students the different methods you can use to take down your information and go about it.”

Institutional Resources

“If it’s too expensive I tend not to do it because most of the research funding is from my own pocket.”

“They’re hours are not very good. For me I work a full time job. They’re only open 40 hours 8-5, they are open two hours on Saturday from 10-12 which again is not the best time for most people. So it would be really nice if they were even open until 6 or 7.”

“The computers are really old. I don’t know if they’ve been replaced in the last couple of years. I have no problem with things not being state-of-the-art, completely new, but they were, like, '50s-main-frame-style old.”

More About the Project

Morgan Daniels and Erin Passehl assisted the project from February 2006 to April 2007 while MSI students at the University of Michigan School of Information. They present their own analysis of the student interview data here. For more information about the project, see [http://www.si.umich.edu/ArchivalMetrics/](http://www.si.umich.edu/ArchivalMetrics/)

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