01 01 Unit One Introduction (Reading)

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Unit One:
Introduction to the Course

This one-credit course is offered to provide practical, hands-on, support to students working on a senior thesis project. The course provides you—the student—with an opportunity to gather sources while working with a research librarian. Moreover building confidence in documents research—using a wide variety of resources, such as law materials, government patent databases, or library of congress digital collections, to name just a few—increases the chances that you will excel in any graduate or professional schools you subsequently enroll in or at any research projects you choose to undertake.

You will be asked to complete short assignments designed to reinforce the material discussed in class and in the readings. One such course assignment will ask you to gather sources relevant to your thesis project and to list them on a resource log. This project—although very straightforward—allows you to work on your project, while providing me, the instructor, with an opportunity to ensure that you are using an appropriately wide array of resources. I will review your logs from time to time during the course to make sure you are identifying relevant resources located in libraries beyond Sacred Heart University’s Ryan Matura Library (“SHU-RML”). Once identified these materials can be requested through SHU-RML’s InterLibrary Loan program (“ILL”) or found at libraries in this area. A review of your source log is also useful in ensuring that you are locating reasonably accessible primary resources. You will also have an opportunity to complete a few short research exercises that are designed to provide you with practice using a variety of search tools.
This course also includes a few short quizzes that—like the assignments and research exercises—are written to reinforce the basic ideas from the course. You will also have an opportunity to participate in a few online discussion modules and weigh in on some of the conceptual issues in information literacy—such as bias, the open access movement, and academic integrity.

The primary emphasis of the course is documents research. To accomplish the goal of making you a better document researcher, we will: (1) Conduct basic searches in an array of online catalogs and databases; and (2) Explore some commonly encountered document types beyond books and journal articles. Our coverage of catalogs will include examining catalogs from several major regional collections—such New York Public Library (“NYPL”), University of Albany (“UA”), The Library of Congress (“LOC”), Bridgeport Public Library (“BPL”)—as well as OCLC’s WorldCat. WorldCat is a search tool that allows you to search thousands of online catalogs in one search. The experience you gain in using catalogs will serve you well when you need to verify citations and identify resources beyond the SHU-RML collections. You may, in fact, wish to visit some of collections. Following our discussion of catalogs—and some sample searches we will do together in class—you will be asked to complete a few short document research exercises. These exercises are designed to give you an opportunity to practice the search techniques we cover in class. Research exercises are not, however, intended to test your recall of class content. Accordingly, you should e-mail me for assistance whenever you have questions about an exercise or the resources that an exercise pertains to.

The course also provides a survey of databases and database searching techniques that will begin with the basic search techniques you are already familiar with. We will then
additionally cover some databases and search techniques that many students are not familiar with. We will, for example, cover advanced search techniques such as federated searching (searching multiple databases at once) and proximity searching (searching for terms in close proximity to one another). As with our discussions of catalogs, our examination of databases will include short exercises to give you some practice. Learning databases and database search techniques will allow you to search for documents more confidently and efficiently.

While the overall emphasis of the course is on document research, we will begin with a module on protecting the information you create. In Unit Two we will discuss file-naming protocols, computer security, and back-up protocols that—when used together—will protect your research and writings. The course will then cover catalogs and the interlibrary loan program (Unit Three). This will be followed by a unit on research databases (Unit Four). Unit Five will cover archives and special collections.

With Unit Five we will begin devoting more attention to researching primary materials. Unit Five, for example, will cover identifying archives and special collections, using search tools that are specific to archives, and practical considerations in visiting archives. We will then turn to two units on case law research. Case law is a very dense and rich part of the historical record that is important to researchers seeking an understanding of policy based on authoritative primary documents. We will devote two units to case law research: A unit to review the court system and legal citations (Unit Six); and a unit devoted to researching case law (Unit Seven).

Unit Seven will also provide you with an opportunity to explore document types and search techniques that will likely be new to you. This contributes to an overarching goal of the
course, which is to ensure that you can confidently conduct research into a wide array of document types using a variety of available research tools.

Unit Eight will cover researching dissertations, newspapers, and municipal records. Unit Nine will expand on our earlier discussion of law materials by focusing on statutes and foreign law materials. Unit Ten will cover maps. In Unit Eleven and Unit Twelve we will explore historical patent searching. This will provide you with an opportunity to conduct searches using a classification system, as a basic approach to exploring technological innovation over the last 224 years. Unit Thirteen will provide a survey of major Library of Congress Digital collections. We will conclude the course in Unit Fourteen.

One question you may be asking at this point is “Just how does this course help me write my thesis?” This question might best be answered using an example. Let us take a hypothetical student—Max, short for Maxine—who is researching the history of the blues from 1912 (the year in which Hart Wand’s *Dallas Blues* was published) to 1948 (the year Muddy Waters recorded *I Can’t Be Satisfied* and helped to inaugurate blues music that used electric guitars and amplifiers).

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Max can use the information she learns from the unit on catalogs to quickly gather a wider, more comprehensive, set of scholarly sources than would be available in the SHU-RML collections. Max might, for instance, search the LOC catalog for the keyword “W.C. Handy” to locate possible sources:

Max can identify several sources that might be very useful to her, such as items composed by W.C. Handy, items about W.C. Handy, and a small archival collection described as “Eight letters with stamped signature, 21 t.l.s. (typed letters signed) and 38 pieces of ephemera—letters, printed

“Cadillac Records,” Muddy Waters inspired legions of fans and other artists. His use of an electric guitar in the late 1940s in his rousing call-and-response blues songs revolutionized the sound of blues. The late electric guitar superstar Jimi Hendrix acknowledged Waters as his musical inspiration. Legendary rock and roll group the Rolling Stones took their name from the Muddy Waters hit record “Rollin’ Stone.” The popular music magazine Rolling Stone is also named after the Waters hit.”

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essays, letters from his daughter (who later ran the publishing company). The search will also identify books Handy wrote, including his 1941 autobiography title *Father of the Blues*. Max can use OCLC’s WorldCat catalog to locate libraries that have that book:

![WorldCat search results](image)

Note that once Max has gathered citation information using the catalog search for “W.C. Handy”, she can do additional sources for other blues composers, song titles, and so on. She can also search the Library of Congress site for additional resources such as research guides. Using Google Max could, for instance, set up a search for “Beale Street Blues” that was restricted to the LOC site by using the search string “Beale Street Blues” site:loc.gov:

![Library of Congress search results](image)

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4 See LOC full record for *W.C. Handy Archive.*
Among the LOC results is an online Library of Congress bibliography—Joseph C. Hickerson, *A Bibliography of the Blues* (1971)—which has several relevant sources Sam can consider tracking down and adding to her resource log, including:


However Max need not stop there. She can also use the LOC catalog to locate sheet music and sound records for blues songs, including Handy’s *Beale Street Blues.*

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Max is now working directly with primary materials: sound recordings and sheet music. This creates new possibilities for Max’s research. She may now consider analyzing the content of the lyrics of blues songs or—perhaps working with a primer on music theory—analyze the harmonic and melodic features that make blues in the first half of the Twentieth century distinctive. Max could additionally use catalogs to locate photographs of blues musicians, such as this 1941 photograph of Handy found using the LOC Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.⁶

Max could also explore the instruments used by musicians by researching, for instance, relevant United States patents. Moreover, by searching in a wide array of databases, Max could discover sources that she might not otherwise find, such as the following source cited by a Mississippi judge in a decision that demonstrates the influence C.W. Handy had on popular culture:

The Columbus & Greenville Railway operates trains through the Mississippi Delta town of Moorhead. That town has a poetic association with this railroad. The tracks of the Columbus & Greenville’s predecessor, the Southern Railway, and the tracks of the Yazoo Delta Railroad, nicknamed the “Yellow Dog,” intersected at Moorhead. The town became known, including through a 1901 blues song composed by W.C. Handy, as the place “where the Southern crosses the Dog.” Marie M. Hemphill, Fevers, Floods, and Faith: A History of Sunflower County, 1844-1976, privately pub., Indianola (1980). The excerpt refers to a song Handy published in 1914 titled The Yellow Dog Rag, which is available in a Duke University’s Historic American Sheet Music Collection, part of that University’s digital Collections:

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8 C.W. Handy, Yellow Dog Rag (Memphis: Pace & Handy Music Co., 1914).
To understand why the excerpt used 1901 as the date the song was written, Max may want to consult the Hemphill book, *Fevers, Floods, and Faith*. A searching of the book title in WorldCat indicates that the New York Public Library, among other libraries, has a copy of *Fevers, Floods, and Faith*. 
While Max’s research might ultimately take her in a number of direction, her document researching skills ensure she will be able to use a wide range of search tools to access a variety of document types—including authoritative primary documents—and, equally importantly, that her research will be exciting. By learning more about document research, Max makes it much more likely that she will experience a sense of discovery and genuinely enjoy her research.