

**“SO, YOU WANT TO
DONATE YOUR STUFF TO THE ARCHIVES...”**

Archival Intelligence Learning Object: Final Report

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INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

Our project was inspired by something Theresa Rowat, director at the Archive of the Jesuits of Canada, said in the ACA@UBC Seminar panel discussion entitled “A is for Appraisal and Acquisition.” During this panel discussion, Rowat described the actions she took to increase archival awareness and knowledge of the people who wanted to donate materials to the Archive. She said that these donors were often apprehensive about donating their materials due to concerns regarding copyright and use. To address these concerns, Rowat and her team developed a pamphlet which explained the steps which were followed by the Archive during and following acquisition, presenting who would have access to these materials and how they could be used by researchers. Coincidentally, the following week, in the class discussion on legal and ethical issues in the archives, guest speaker Paul Hebbard from Simon Fraser University mentioned the fact that donors have a different understanding of the value of their records than archivists do, often not realizing that the records which seem most important to them are not necessarily as valuable to an archives, and vice versa. Hebbard also addressed the fact that donors did not comprehend that splitting up their materials across multiple repositories or institutions would inevitably break up the important interconnectivity (what we call the ‘archival bond’) between their records and negatively impact future researchers being able to identify the context of and relationships between (and sometimes even information within) the records.

We felt that these two discussions (that of Rowat and that of Hebbard) demonstrated the need for a greater understanding of what an archives is and does in people who want to donate their records to an archives. Our intent is to address this need by developing a learning object which would explain to potential donors how archives work, what goes on behind the scenes, how records will be made accessible to the public, and how donors can prepare their records before donating them. All in all, we hope that the learning object will develop the Archival Intelligence of donors (in essence ‘demystifying’ the archives by increasing their comprehension of what happens to their records) and will allow them to recognize that they have more agency than they might have previously thought in the long-term preservation of their materials. As such, we have created a website prototype for a project which will inform potential donors on the workings of an archives as well as address some of the concerns they may have regarding issues of privacy, access, and copyright.

As we imagined our context to be that of a large national archival institution (similar to Library and Archives Canada, for example), we felt that creating a website would be the best way to reach our audience (private potential donors with personal records) as it would be accessible to anyone who has access to the internet. While we understand that not everyone has ready access to the internet, we believe that a website would allow us to reach and inform the largest amount of people across the country. Our website, in addition to presenting the information necessary for donors, will also direct potential donors to the archives closest to them to make their donation or start a discussion with the archivist(s) there. The objective of our website, therefore, is to provide donors the information and the confidence necessary to enter into a working relationship with their local archives. We believe that a project which develops archival intelligence in donors stands to benefit both donors, who will be able to approach the donor-archivist relationship with less apprehension and a greater sense of agency, and archival institutions, in the knowledge of archival principles that donors will bring to the interaction.

As part of our project, we looked into what type of information other repositories were providing to donors and potential donors to ascertain what donor needs were already being met by other institutions and what was still needed to be explored to further develop donor AI. Overall, we found that most donor information pages on archival repository websites were very short and limited in their scope, mainly giving information regarding the actual process of donation (what types of records are and are not accepted, how to contact the archives to make a donation, and the presence or lack of financial incentives for donating), with some delving a little bit more into copyright and privacy concerns as well as how to prepare records for donation.¹ Very few give information relating to how archives deal with records, what archives are, and what happens to records once they are donated.² From this survey, we concluded that there was a need for more specific information which would develop donors' understanding of archives as a whole, not just the donation process itself, a need which we are addressing with our resource.

¹ <http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/donating/index.aspx>;
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/donate/consider.html>;
<http://www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/bc-archives/visitor-information/donating-records>.

² <http://www2.archivists.org/publications/brochures/donating-familyrecs>;
<https://www.halifax.ca/archives/documents/GuideToArchivingForCommunityOrgs.pdf>;
<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/about/landAdonation.pdf>.

This report will begin by presenting a more substantive review of the literature which exists on donors within the archives in order to get a better sense of their needs. Following this, the report will provide a description of our website, including a discussion of the different sections of the website and why we chose to break it up that way, how we plan to encourage the visitors to our website to follow a certain ‘path of learning,’ and how we are planning to receive feedback from users regarding how we can improve our resource. Within this section, we have also included a discussion of the specific goals and objectives we have for our learning object and of the Archival Intelligence aspects and domains our website addresses. The final section of this report will briefly put the learning object in the larger context of the outreach activities that surround it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Archival intelligence (AI) or archival literacy, being terms of relatively recent coinage, have thus far been explored in relation to limited and traditional audiences such as expert users of archives or undergraduate history students.³ But the concept of archival intelligence may, of course, be applied much more broadly and even to groups who may not be conceptualized - at least primarily - as users of archival materials. Donors and prospective donors of archival materials in particular represent a group that is closely associated with the archival profession and yet, rarely the focus of discussions of archival intelligence or even of archival scholarly literature more generally. However, the literature which does exist can be used as a departure point for the design of our AI learning object whose subsequent development would be informed by consultation with our intended audience. In our review of the literature, we will first consider the need for the learning object within our target user group (donors and prospective donors of archival materials) and then turn to a discussion of the user needs that inform the design of the product.⁴

³ See Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah A. Torres, “AI: Archival Intelligence and User Expertise,” *The American Archivist* 66, no. 1 (2003): 51–78; Sammie Morris, Lawrence Mykytiuk, and Sharon Weiner, “Archival Literacy for History Students: Identifying Faculty Expectations of Archival Research Skills.” *The American Archivist* 77, no. 2 (2014): 394–424.

⁴ Hereafter, the target user group will be referred to as “donors” for the sake of expediency but the term is meant to encompass people who have donated materials to archives, people who are thinking about donating their materials to the archives and even people who have not yet considered donating their materials to the archives but may after engaging with the learning object. We are attempting to reach a

One of the challenges in developing a donor-focused AI learning object is the relative absence of attention given to donors in the archival literature, making it difficult to get a sense of their needs from the literature alone. We may take the abundance of donor information pages on institutional websites as indirect evidence of the need, at least on the part of the institutions, to communicate the most basic elements of archival intelligence to donors: the rules. However, the need for donors to have access to more sophisticated information about the archival endeavour is borne out in the literature which does exist. Daniels et al. observe, regarding a community-based archiving project, that “[n]umerous donors have been concerned about the handling, use, and reproduction of their collection materials, as well as how researchers will access them.”⁵ They mitigated donor concerns by “extensively explaining archival stewardship, reference room procedures, and reproduction policies,” a strategy that strongly suggests an effort to develop the archival intelligence of donors.⁶ Other community archives scholars have echoed the archival institution’s responsibility for educating donors in matters of archival intelligence, noting that “one of the most useful services publicly-funded archives can offer community-based organizations is training in archive skills and advice on matters such as preservation, digitization, documentation, copyright and utilizing collections to raise revenue.”⁷ In particular, Mason recognizes the critical impact of archival intelligence on the diversity of the archival record:

Another obstacle archivists face is that most people have never given a thought to their papers. Many do not even know what an archives is, and if they do, they do not realize they have anything that might be of value to historical research. [...] This is especially true of women who cannot imagine they have ever done anything that merits remembering outside their home. And if this is true of privileged white women, how much more so of African American or Indian women or Latinas, whose lives and work and achievements have been overlooked and devalued for so long.⁸

broad demographic, to say the least. However, our discussion of donors is limited to private donors rather than public bodies, such as government offices, but could encompass individuals, organizations, corporations, community groups, etc.

⁵ Caroline Daniels et al., “Saving all the freaks on the life raft: Blending documentation strategy with community engagement to build a local music archives,” *The American Archivist* 78, no. 1 (2015): 255.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Mary Stephens, Andrew Flinn and Elizabeth Shepherd, “New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector: from handing over to handing on.” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 67.

⁸ Kären M. Mason, “Fostering Diversity in Archival Collections,” *Collection Management* 27, no. 2 (2002): 26-27.

From the literature, we may then draw a conclusion about the need for an AI learning object that reflects the perspectives, concerns and interests of donors.

Determining a suitable modality through which to deliver the AI learning object is equally difficult to support using existing literature, but a few authors have noted the success of using online approaches such as websites and social media to communicate information to donors. Daniels et al. suggest that their use of online tools, such as Facebook and institutional web presences, was critical to reaching potential donors and other participants: "People were eager to learn more [about the project], and they needed a place to find information."⁹ Huddleston also recommends making information about donating materials to available online: "To help potential donors determine what they should donate... information about donating materials should be posted to the archive's website and social media accounts."¹⁰ Both accounts describe a donor engagement strategy in which the institutional web presence acts as the authoritative source of information while social media is used to reach and build relationships with donors. Hager, in his study of the use of Facebook by archival institutions in the US, similarly reinforces the interactive dynamic between more static web content and social media indicating that "nearly all of the institutions have detailed websites that relate basic information about the institutions and their holdings... [while] this analysis focuses exclusively on Facebook activity, such activity is not occurring in digital isolation".¹¹ And so, while we imagine that our AI learning object will be embedded in a larger network of outreach activities in both online venues, like social media, and local initiatives through partner institutions, we believe that a website is the most appropriate tool through which to deliver the AI learning object itself. Having established the need for the product and a rationale for delivering it in the form of a website, we shall next turn to a consideration of our users' needs in the design of the learning object.

Before discussing the literature we reviewed to support a user-centered design of the website, it is first important to note that any AI learning object developed for donors would

⁹ Daniels et al. "Saving all the freaks," 248-249. While our AI project will have a social media component in its promotion to a wider audience, the decision for using a website rather than, say, Facebook for the AI learning object itself is its affordances for learning, being quickly searchable and concisely focused on material central to the intended outcomes.

¹⁰ Julia Huddleston, "A Vibrant and Vocal Community: Establishing an Archival Outreach Plan for the LGBTQ Community in Utah and Similar States." *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 33 (2015): 27-28.

¹¹ Joshua D. Hager, "To Like or Not to Like: Understanding and Maximizing the Utility of Archival Outreach on Facebook," *The American Archivist* 78, no. 1 (2015): 24.

necessarily involve extensive consultation with stakeholders: a diverse range of experienced donors, but also the archivists who work with them and prospective donors from groups that are underrepresented in the archives.¹² Documenting and sharing the outcomes of that process would have the potential to contribute to an area that is currently neglected in the literature. As already mentioned, it is perhaps because donors are not considered to be end-users in the archival endeavour that a gap exists in the literature, because their role is arguably outside of the traditional conceptualization of users of archives. However, we may take a broader view of archival public services as encompassing *all* interactions between archival institutions and the public, including those that happen with donors. As a point of departure for better understanding the needs of the user group that we hope to reach with our AI learning object, we may look instead to literature that explores the relationship building process that occurs between archivists and donors in order to map a set of guiding principles for the design of the website.

While the importance of building relationships with donors as part of the acquisition of archival materials has often been observed at an anecdotal level, it has not yet become a major focus of archival scholarly writing.¹³ The few explorations of donor engagement in the literature are situated in reflections about the efficacy of documentation strategy, an approach to archival acquisition and selection that seeks to address the underrepresentation of groups in the archival record by setting or defining topics to guide the acquisition and selection processes rather than relying upon donors to approach the archives with their materials. Because of its emphasis on collaboration, there are numerous opportunities to actively involve donors and prospective donors. Although documentation strategy has largely been abandoned by the archival profession in informing the development of institutional acquisition policies, it continues to be an approach used for special initiatives which aim to acquire the records of marginalized groups.¹⁴ There are indeed lessons that we can derive from such literature to inform our understanding our audience for the AI learning object.

¹² A steering committee with oversight over the project would be integral to identifying these stakeholders.

¹³ Fisher notes “recent archival writing is largely silent on the theoretical implications of donor-archivist interaction and engagement.” See Rob Fisher, “Donors and Donor Agency: Implications for Private Archives Theory and Practice,” *Archivaria* 79 (2015): 92.

¹⁴ Reasons include the time and cost-intensive nature of documentation strategy, because it requires considerable more effort than simply receiving materials from donors, and the limited engagement with the community that it suggests in having archivists helicopter in to do a project and then leaving.

Kathryn Neal, writing about her experiences with directing the *African American Women in Iowa* project, highlights cultivating relationships with donors as a vital and enjoyable dimension of the work.¹⁵ Similarly, Daniels et al. emphasize the importance of actively engaging and building relationships with the donor community in the success of their documentation of the Louisville underground music scene.¹⁶ In recounting an appraisal of records from a theatre company, Gannett et al. describe a collaborative approach that had theatre staff involved in the selection process. Archival materials were appraised based on the criteria that they possess “an identifiable degree of informational, historical, or aesthetic value or items that must be legally kept for the long-term based on the Theatre’s existing record retention policy.”¹⁷ Given the specificity of the criteria to the archival and records management professions, we can infer that the archivists involved in the project must have provided at least some education in archival intelligence topics that Gannett et al. unfortunately do not elaborate upon; the actual ‘how’ of developing archival intelligence in non-archivist project partners is rarely mentioned in the literature surrounding documentation strategy and other collaborative acquisition efforts. However, we may extrapolate from the literature the insight that our AI learning object has the potential to play a role in relationship building with donors as the first point of contact they might have with understanding the donor-archivist relationship and also as a continuing source of information for the donors to consult as part of their interaction with archivists. Our design of the AI learning object must thus consider how the website will perform that role.

While numerous commentators on documentation strategy projects have observed the importance of belonging to the group whose materials are being sought, Huddleston notes that it is not necessary for archivists to “be active participants in every community whose history they wish to preserve” in discussing her involvement with an archival outreach plan for the LGBTQ community in Utah. She suggests instead that it is more important for archivists to, effectively, increase the archival intelligence of the community: “Explaining the overarching importance of collecting from all aspects of society, not just those that an archivist is personally involved in will establish a firm footing for an archive to stand upon.”¹⁸ Transparency, for Huddleston, is

¹⁵ Kathryn M. Neal, “Cultivating diversity: The donor connection,” *Collection Management* 27, no. 2: 37.

¹⁶ Daniels et al., “Saving all the freaks,” 257-258.

¹⁷ Leahkim A. Gannett et al., “The Studio Theatre Archives: Staging an Embedded Appraisal,” in *Appraisal and acquisition: Innovative practices for archives and special collections*, eds. Kate Theimer and Ebooks Corporation (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 111.

¹⁸ Huddleston, “A Vibrant and Vocal Community,” 28. Huddleston does not use the term “archival intelligence” specifically, but evokes it.

essential to earning the trust of the donor group. Earning donor trust is a pervasive theme throughout the literature on acquisition, because many groups have historically been excluded from participating in the creation of the archival record and may be suspicious of archivists' motives in reaching out to them. We may identify as a "need" of our user group the need to feel included, to be welcomed into the learning experience and the larger activity of archival acquisition. Particularly if our AI learning object means to reach new donors who are underrepresented in the archival endeavour, we must be attentive to how our AI learning object may reflect and reinforce the values of dominant groups. In developing our website, a careful consideration of the subtle cues communicated by its visual appearance and use of language will be necessary to ensure that it does not diminish trust or exclude certain donors.

A key part of the relationship building process is recognizing the donor's agency in the interaction, and so, Rob Fisher's article on donors and donor agency has been instrumental to conceptualizing the needs of our intended user group. Fisher adopts the term "agency" as it is used in the social sciences, in "the ability of donors to exert and promote their interests and influence archival practice."¹⁹ He observes that, while donors play a role in the making of collective memory as creators, owners and keepers of documentary materials, recent archival writing has subconsciously marginalized the agency of the donor by framing their participation in terms of the obstacles or inconveniences they create for archivists.²⁰ He proposes developing an "archival consciousness" in donors that veritably describes archival intelligence, encompassing the pre-custodial care of archival materials, considerations of privacy and the logic behind archival acquisition practices.²¹ As a guiding principle for the design of our AI learning object, we will take up Fisher's notion of donor agency and seek to treat donors as equal partners in the archival endeavour. By making archival principles and practices more transparent, we hope to empower donors to approach their interactions with archivists from an informed and prepared stance.

¹⁹ Fisher, "Donors and Donor Agency," 94.

²⁰ Ibid., 105-106 & 111. The donor information web pages referenced in the introduction of our report arguably reflect this view by not evidencing an interest in the donors' affective state and the various motivations they may have in donating materials to the archives.

²¹ Ibid., 111-118.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRODUCT

Learning Outcomes

In creating this website, we hope to increase the understanding potential donors have of archives and their processes. In doing so, we aim to increase the trust of donors and allow for a better working relationship with them. In giving donors greater knowledge of archival terms, practices, and objectives, they will understand that archives do not only preserve the records of historically significant persons but also serve as a tool to preserve the memory of the community within which they are located. Furthermore, by delineating the methods for the preparation of a donation, donor will be given more agency in the donation process.

With respect to the specific learning outcomes we want donors to be able achieve after going through the various sections of the website, they include:

- describing the kinds of materials that archives accept (“What kinds of stuff do archives take?”)
- defining ‘records’ and explaining why archives want to collect them (“What kinds of stuff do archives take?”)
- identifying materials of interest to an archives (“What kinds of stuff do archives take?”)
- relating archival principles to reasons why they are practiced (“How do you prepare your stuff for the archives?”)
- preparing a response to questions from the archivist about copyright and privacy restrictions (“How do you prepare your stuff for the archives?”)
- outlining the processes that archival materials undergo to take them from their donation to the archives to their use by archival patrons (“What does the archives do with your stuff?”)
- listing common sources of donated archival materials (“Who donates their stuff to the archives?”)
- describing how people use archival materials (“Why does your stuff matter to the archives?”)

- explaining why it is important to donate materials to the archives (“Why does your stuff matter to the archives?”)
- creating a donor action plan (all sections)

Archival Intelligence Domains and Aspects Addressed

The main AI domain that this learning object will address is the “Knowledge of Archival Theory, Practices, and Procedures” domain, and more particularly the “Language ability and conceptual understanding of archives” aspect of this domain. By walking potential donors through the process that their records go through following their donation, as well as presenting information relating to the archives as a whole, we hope to develop their understanding of archives. In addition, we will be providing a glossary of more complex and specific archival terms to explain their meaning and allow the website’s visitors to become more familiar with archival jargon before they interact with archivists. Because of the nature of our audience (as in, the fact that they are donors to, and not traditional users of, the archives), many of the aspects of AI do not directly map onto the objectives of our website. However, some of the aspects of AI, such as “Preparation” and “Question Asking,” can be more loosely related to these objectives. The website develops preparation skills by encouraging potential donors to plan the donation and organize their records ahead of time and informing them how to do so. Similarly, by presenting potential donors with questions they might want to ask themselves before donating their material, the resource is encouraging visitors to form their own informed questions to ask both themselves and their local archivist, thus developing the “Question Asking” aspect of AI.

Content

The website contains five main sections: “What kind of stuff do archives take?”, “How do you prepare your stuff for the archives?”, “What happens to your stuff when it goes into the archives?”, and “Who donates stuff to archives?” and “Why does your stuff matter to the archives?”. Most pages contain further sub-sections to make them more visually pleasing and so that visitors are not merely faced with a block of text. We chose these five main sections because we believed these would be the questions potential donors would ask themselves when first embarking on the idea of donating their materials. Because the visitors to our website are not archival professionals, or even archival users necessarily, we expect their knowledge

about archival processes and terms to be limited. As such, we are providing what we believe is the necessary information for potential donors to develop a greater understanding and trust of archives, without overwhelming them in the process. For this reason, we are trying to present a high-level overview of the different aspects of the archives, rather than going deep into detail which could confuse rather than aid our audience. We explore concepts such as the hierarchical structure of fonds (series, files, and items), what records are, institutional mandates, provenance, original order, digitization, copyright, privacy, appraisal, selection, arrangement, description, preservation, access, archival research, and the archival paradigms (memory, accountability, identity, and community). Complex archival terms and jargon will have a link to their definition in the website glossary to aid with comprehension.

Learner Experience

Although our website, like most others, will allow visitors to self-navigate, we would also like to encourage visitors to follow a certain path which we believe will develop their understanding of archives better. To do so, we have ordered the pages of the website a certain way, to mimic the path that records would take from being created by their creator to being made accessible and preserved by the archives. In addition to presenting the pages of the website in a certain order, we will be providing a link at the bottom of each page which take to visitor to the next page, allowing them to follow the intended path more easily. At the same time, for users with a more specific informational goal in mind, we have included a search bar to enable them to find what they need to know quickly.

Evaluation

While evaluating the user experience of the website is one dimension of evaluation, which could be assessed using fairly standard user testing methods, the evaluation of the website as a learning object which robustly achieves its learning outcomes proves somewhat more difficult on a larger scale (i.e. for every donor who uses the website). Many learning objects include - as part of the learning experience - assessment activities that allow the learner to self-evaluate their performance, such as post-lesson quizzes or gamification elements. We acknowledge the value of these activities, but also recognize that the needs of our users might preclude such assessments. Traditional measures, like quizzes, might be perceived as trivial or

patronizing and even cause user discomfort if some donors experience test anxiety. And yet, it is important to ensure that learning outcomes are being met somehow.

Our preliminary thinking around how we could evaluate the success of the website as a learning object involves working with a small but representative group of users from our target audience. With the group, we could administer pre- and post-tests to gauge their learning, but also get qualitative feedback from the participants about their preparedness to approach the donor-archivist interaction through a mixed methods experiment design. Another, less quantifiable method of assessing the learning outcomes is through tracking changes to future interactions between archivists and donors through a longitudinal study done in partnership with smaller archives.

CONCLUSION

Although our intent is to create a web-based AI learning object resource, we understand that it would be grounded in a much larger series of activities that occur both online and off in order to reach the audience that we have identified; that is, we would not build it and expect “them” to come. The outreach component of the project, though outside of the scope of the report, would include social media accounts maintained by but distinct from the presence of the national institution/organization we envision leading the project, archival skill-building workshops hosted at local institutions and other community-based initiatives to connect with audiences who might not find the website on their own. Moreover, while the core content of the learning object might remain static, we would seek out opportunities to include stories from donors as a means of augmenting the message of donor agency. The prototype we are proposing is thus not a finished product but a work-in-progress, to be enriched by the contributions of the donors it means to support.

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