

Library Impact Research Report
**Impact of Archival Collections and
Services on the Western University
Department of History**

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Western University Libraries—Archives and Special Collections

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Abstract

The investigating archivists wanted to understand the impact of archival collections and related services on teaching and research in Western University's Department of History. Moreover, the investigators aimed to learn more about the variability of that impact within the department to identify opportunities for improvement. The archivists hypothesized that Western's archival collections and services had a notable impact across the department's teaching and research needs. We investigated impact by analyzing survey results from faculty and students associated with Western's Department of History, visitor usage and instruction statistics, and completing a citation analysis. This user-centered approach provided opportunities to assess the impact of Western's archives from a variety of perspectives and outputs. This study found that Western's archives has an inconsistent impact across the Department of History. The impact was not as significant or notable as we hypothesized. The survey responses and other data revealed that there is a low level of engagement with faculty and students with little to no growth over the years. The methods utilized in this study could be duplicated to measure impact at similar academic institutions. It provides guidance on how to use both internally maintained user data and user reporting to create a fulsome picture of impact.

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Introduction

Archives and special collections have historically rested on the uniqueness of their collections to define their value. The purpose of assessing impact is to demonstrate this value to their parent institutions and to gather information to make data-driven decisions about how and where to use limited resources. Carter argues that archives and special collections need to successfully illustrate value to their stakeholders to move from “special” to valuable.¹ For organizations in academia, this means understanding the impact of archives and special collections on teaching, learning, and research. Building a culture of assessment within archives and special collections with a focus on developing and communicating value “provides direction, verifies strategies, and indicates improvements needed to effectively leverage our special collections for greatest impact.”²

Archivists at Western Libraries, Archives and Special Collections (ASC) at Western University (hereinafter Western), located in London, Ontario, Canada, are interested in understanding how archival collections can be used to support teaching, learning, and research. We assumed that we had an impact on these areas but did not know the extent, as we have never explored impact by conducting research or analyzing existing data. It should be noted that we do not proactively engage with Department of History faculty or students with any outreach or specific programming. We investigated our impact on the Western Department of History as a case study to identify and understand the broader impact of the archives on teaching, learning, and research.

Why it Matters to Research Libraries

Historically, it has been difficult to assess the ASC’s impact due to an absence of research data, and the lack of analysis of any operational (e.g., visitor and instruction) data. Additionally, Western’s archives experienced significant organizational change between 2001 and 2018. It began as the university archives in 2001, and then absorbed previously existing units (the Regional and Special Collections) when a new facility (the Archives and Research Collections Centre or ARCC) was opened in 2004. The Regional Collection department was a hybrid of local library and archival collections that dated back in one form or another to the 1920s. The Special Collections department consisted primarily of rare books and was of a similar age. The organizational changes that began in 2004 (noted above) were not fully implemented

until 2012. In 2018, Western Libraries created the current organizational team known as “Archives and Special Collections.”

Collectively, these changes entailed a long transitional period where team members had to adapt to new team structures and service models, which impeded regular assessment of research and teaching needs regarding archives. Moreover, there was a fair amount of staff turnover during this time as long-time instructors in Western’s archives and Department of History retired or otherwise moved on. Faculty who had previously worked with Western’s archives retired, and their connection with us was lost.

The newly minted ASC created a separate archival acquisition policy in early 2019. The policy attempted to combine the collecting foci of the university archives and regional collections that had been gradually merging since 2004. Prior to the establishment of the university archives in 2001, local/regional history archival collections garnered much more attention than university records. The Regional Collection had developed a very prominent reputation among the local history community outside the Western campus. This has not changed much in recent years (at least until the COVID-19 pandemic meant that we could no longer welcome off-campus visitors in person). It should be noted that during the time that the university archives was being established, other primary source collections were also being established on campus. Examples include a medical artifact collection and a collection focusing on war, memory, and popular culture. Both collections are managed by Western’s Department of History. Students learning about primary sources find these collections to be more accessible alternatives to Western’s archives.

Additionally, the City of London and County of Middlesex, in which Western has historically resided, do not have their own archives. Therefore, many in the broader community see Western’s archives as their local archives. Moreover, most of our researchers are broader community members, not members of the campus community. In some ways, the archives is seen as more of a community service than a campus one. University-related archival collections are still underdeveloped compared to other university archives in Ontario (e.g., Queen’s University, University of Toronto). In summary, this lack of stability and mandate shifting hindered the introduction of new impact-making programs. It also hindered our ability to provide outreach to the Department of History.

Most, if not all, research libraries include archival collections either as part of special collections and/or university archives. Archival and special collections are often

conflated, as is the work of special collections librarians and archivists. Our study focuses on archival collections and the associated services provided primarily by archivists. This research will be useful to the research library community if we are able to identify patterns and characteristics that can be ascribed more precisely to such services and collections. We focus on the university's Department of History and we hypothesize that archives make measurable impacts on the work of history faculty and students.

While some of the circumstances are unique to Western, some are also applicable to the broader ARL membership. The content of this report will be useful to other institutions, particularly those where university archives and special collections work closely with history departments.

Objectives

This Library Impact Pilot Project examines the use of archival collections by Western's Department of History at both the undergraduate and graduate levels as well as by faculty.

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Understand the impact of our archival holdings and services on Western's Department of History
2. Understand why we serve certain members of the Department of History and not others
3. Identify opportunities to serve non-users of the archives within the Department of History

Hypothesis

Primary sources are a key component of historical research. Jensen writes, "Archival expertise has been key to historians' central role in interpreting the past."³

Departments of history are frequent users of archives and special collections due to this close relationship between primary sources and historical research. This relationship is not exclusive to faculty, but also extends to students. Zhou states, "For many university archives and manuscript repositories, as well as for other historical collections near college campuses, students are a major research constituency, visiting

archives for research projects, term papers or dissertations.”⁴ We assumed that Western’s Department of History was ASC’s main demographic of users. This research project will determine if that is in fact the case as well as evaluate our impact on Western’s Department of History. Our hypothesis was that Western’s archives has a notable impact on Western’s Department of History’s teaching, learning, and research needs.

Literature Review

Impact

Defining Impact

What does the term “impact” mean? Brophy defines impact as “any *effect* of a service, product, or other ‘event’ on an individual or group.”⁵ He continues by stating that impact can be positive or negative, short, or long term, intentional or unintentional, and may produce changed behaviors, attitudes, or outcomes for the individual or group involved.⁶ The importance of “any effect” is key to this definition. While defining impact in relation to archives and special collections, Research Libraries United Kingdom (RLUK) describes impact as the “demonstrable contribution that the unique and distinctive collections of our [RLUK] members can make to research, teaching and learning as well as to society and its wellbeing.”⁷

The Europeana Foundation defines impact in its *Impact Playbook* as “changes that occur for stakeholders or in society as a result of activities (for which the organization is accountable).”⁸ This framework encourages archives, museums, and libraries to use “strategic perspectives” to develop a fulsome understanding of where, as an institution, they have the most impact. These perspectives are social impact, operational impact, innovation impact, and economic impact.⁹ Horton and Spence argue that the different types of impact are complementary and interdependent and simplify the complex definitions of impact to “the difference made.”¹⁰ This definition of impact is the driving force behind this research project: understanding Western’s archives’ difference made on the Department of History.

Models for Assessing Impact

Several models are available for assessing impact for archives and special collections. Utilizing operational data is often a first step in assessing impact. Tanner created the

“Balanced Value Impact Model” for cultural heritage institutions to use while conducting impact assessments, specifically of digital resources. The model consists of five functional stages to work through to identify core values and evaluate outcomes. These stages are: context, analysis and design, implement, outcomes and results, and review and respond.¹¹ The Europeana Foundation’s *Impact Playbook* is founded on Tanner’s impact framework. The *Impact Playbook* guides cultural heritage institutions through a four-phased approach to measure impact. The first phase is identifying what information is important to an institution, the second phase is collecting data, the third phase is analyzing the data, and the fourth and final phase is identifying ways to improve.¹²

Brophy created a model called “Levels of Impact” to capture and compare the outcomes of information and library services on an individual.¹³ He argues that most of the information and library assessment measurements do not lead to improvements in services and measuring impact should be focused on “customer-oriented approaches” rather than “service-oriented approaches.”¹⁴ Dupont and Yakel also conclude that shifting away from collections-centered metrics to user-centered metrics would be a more useful approach to defining and measuring value and impact.¹⁵ Coleman et al. reached a similar conclusion that traditional measures of impact, such as learning outcomes and citation counts, do not capture meaningful impact.¹⁶ They put forward new measures of impact, including cognitive relevance and cognitive impact, to evaluate digital library resources.¹⁷

Marsh et al. investigated the role stories and narratives have on understanding and articulating the impact of digital collections.¹⁸ They argue that current methods for measuring impact lack qualitative data and institutions rely on “proxy measures and anecdotal feedback to evaluate the impact of digitization projects.”¹⁹ This can be extended beyond digitization projects to include entire archives and special collections programs. It is important to fill the gap between operational data and other forms of impact, and the authors suggest that storytelling should fill this gap.²⁰

The economic impact of archives is an emerging model for assessing the impact of archives. Gordon et al. list economic impact as an area for future research in their report on impact in the museum, library, and archives sector.²¹ Horton and Spence reviewed the literature on economic and social impact and evaluated the transferability of impact methodologies from other sectors to the archival sector.²² The Museum, Library, and Archives Council also investigated potential methodologies for measuring the economic impact of heritage institutions. They found that few economic impact methodologies have been applied to museums, libraries, and

archives and suggest possible methodologies.²³ These include asking users how much they would pay for services, return on investment, and social return on investment.²⁴ Yakel et al. agree that the economic impact of archives has not been widely investigated.²⁵ They found that the economic impact of archives does exist but is modest.²⁶ Their research concludes with highlighting the “importance of considering other types of impact, such as social and cultural, alongside economic impact as equally important measures of archives’ true role in society.”²⁷

Barriers to Collecting Data on Impact

While there has been considerable interest in standardizing operational data and measuring the impact of archives, little has been accomplished in the application of these metrics at institutions.²⁸ Several authors underlined barriers to collecting data on the impact of archives. Marsh et al. identify the following barriers: lack of staff, lack of time, lack of system to collect data, and lack of skills in data analysis.²⁹ Williams et al. echo these barriers and highlight the cost of this work.³⁰ Kamposiori and Crossley identify three barriers to collecting data on impact. The first is the challenge of measuring the impact of collections and services used for external projects, the second is the difficulty measuring the long-term impact of collections and services, and the third is knowing how to effectively measure the use of digital resources.³¹ Another barrier to this work is the difficulty assessing impact more broadly. Poll and Payne state that “it is not easy to assess impact. This is primarily because we are usually dealing with assessing the impact on people—changes in their behaviour, knowledge, awareness, competencies, and attitudes. Not only are these things difficult to measure, but it is often a challenge to disentangle our contribution to the change from the contribution of others.”³² Collaboration across the profession on strategies for identifying and measuring impact may help practitioners overcome some of these barriers.

Assessment Methodologies

While many studies focus on describing the various kinds of impacts and what challenges we might face measuring impact, others provide us with direction on methodological approaches to gathering impact data. These include quantitative methods such as analyzing internal operational data, as well as using qualitative data sources, such as focus groups, user surveys and publication and citation data.

In their 2012 article, Chapman and Yakel call for an institutional uptake in the use of operational data to inform decision-making:

Locally, operational data can be used to adjust services to meet the needs of patrons and staff, support collection development, processing and deaccessioning decisions, and demonstrate to higher organizational officials that goals and objectives are being met. As a shared resource, such data can be used as a benchmarking tool for evaluating operations at peer institutions.³³

Carter proposes the best way to demonstrate impact is through a variety of modes of assessment including surveying collections, process measurement, performing user-driven surveys, and teaching assessment.³⁴ Similarly, Dupont and Yakel call for archives and special collections to assess institutional data along with user studies, such as those facilitated by Archival Metrics, as solutions to communicating value and impact.³⁵ Archives and special collection institutions have historically struggled with finding meaning in measures that focused solely on collections. In the same year, Daniels and Yakel used survey data to help them assess the impact of archival orientation sessions on two university student populations.³⁶ These students were engaged in archival research and evaluated their own experiences in the archives.

By 2014, ISO16439, or “Information and Documentation—Methods and Procedures for Assessing the Impact of Libraries” was published. It was the first-time quantifiable methods had been presented as a standard for libraries to apply when measuring various forms of impact. Poll³⁷ and Creaser³⁸ summarize the methods and discuss the validity of the standards within the information sector.

In 2018, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) published standards of assessment for librarians and archivists to utilize in their specialized repositories. The aim of the report is to “facilitate conversations about the ways in which archives and special collections deliver value and how they might increase it.”³⁹ The focus of the standard is on eight areas of public services including user demographics, reference transactions, reading room visits, collection use, events, instruction, exhibitions, and online interactions. By maintaining standard local measurements, an institution may be able to assess the value of a public service process or event and, in turn, determine the impact or benefit of that activity. The development of consistent and reliable metrics could be used year after year to establish trends, and most importantly, would be easy to use and predictable data gathering would not burden staff.

Daines and Brightenburg noted their success utilizing the SAA-ACRL/RBMS standard in their 2019 case study, “Jumping In: Creating an Assessment program for the L. Tom

Perry Special Collections Reading Room.”⁴⁰ Like many archives and special collections departments, their institution maintained operational statistics for reporting and evaluation purposes. They reported that the implementation of the standards to their already existing data collection processes was straightforward and quickly accepted by staff and researchers alike. The authors reported the standardized metrics “help the curators make decisions about managing collections, the supervisor of reference services manage the reference staff, and the department chair make resource decisions and inform other administrators about the value of Special Collections,” and align the institution with the national standards of ACRL and ARL.⁴¹

There are other studies that explore the use of citation analysis as a method of examining archival usage and, by extension, impact, in scholarly output. Bronstad adapted traditional citation analysis and looked at a sample of 136 historical monographs to discover patterns in user reported archival references. The study found that “68 percent of the titles referenced at least one archival collection, that archival collections housed at universities were used more often than other types of repositories, and that the amount and type of repositories did not in most cases vary based on the subject matter of the book.”⁴² Ewalt used citation analysis in her 2016 study to examine the use of archival visual resources in American history scholarship. Her data showed that scholars used visual archival resources as crucial historical evidence.⁴³ Similarly, Research Libraries UK includes citation analysis as one of its suggested methods for institutions to capture evidence of impact.⁴⁴ While the report authors agreed that it is cumbersome for institutions to gather citation data, they posit it is a vital part of impact evaluation and they call for a “standardized citation format for special collections would be useful in this instance as citations could be more easily measured.”⁴⁵ Assessing use of archival material includes examining research activity of stakeholders.

Research Activity

The core mandate of many university archives is to support the teaching and research mission of the institution. Faculty, staff, and students are critical stakeholders for university archives. In addition to that, archival research is even more critical for stakeholders in the Department of History. Jensen states that “knowledge of archives is essential to all historical research no matter what the sub-discipline.”⁴⁶

Students are critical stakeholders and there is a need for ongoing engagement with this constituency. Archivists cannot be passive observers in the research process. Zhou asserts that “archivists should be more aware that they are real instructors in the orientation, and they should take responsibility both for transferring basic

archival searching skills and for encouraging students to develop critical and contextual thinking skills.”⁴⁷ Zhou goes on to say, “reference archivists play the central role as educators during the orientation, introducing archival knowledge and skills and demonstrating how to apply critical and contextual thinking skills in interpreting primary sources.”⁴⁸ There is a need for archivists to create impact through teaching, outreach, and ongoing interactions with researchers.

Creating impact also means engaging with students at all levels of their academic career. Johnson states, “Library departments of archives and special collections have traditionally served graduate students and faculty much more than undergraduates.”⁴⁹ Saucedo states that “once only faculty and advanced graduate students were expected to conduct research, but today undergraduates may be beginning to realize that simply earning a degree is not enough to ensure that they can compete successfully in the job market.”⁵⁰ Undergraduate students may not be receiving adequate support from archives and special collections on academic campuses. Integrating archival research into undergraduate courses would ensure that students receive the information and support that they need.

Hayden discusses the challenges associated with integrating archival research into undergraduate courses and states that “recent scholarship often has the graduate student or advanced scholar in mind as the audience and their advice may not always apply to undergraduates whose projects are smaller scale.”⁵¹ Saucedo references the importance of undergraduate engagement in his research: “the movement toward original research at the undergraduate level offers librarians an exciting opportunity for engaging students with archives at an early part of their college career.”⁵² Saucedo also asserts that “engaging undergraduates with an institution’s distinguishing archives could enhance the sense of value they associate with their alma mater before and after graduation.”⁵³

Archives have had long-standing image and visibility issues. Saucedo states that “archives around the world have a tremendous amount of material of great interest to many researchers but often with limited visibility and accessibility.”⁵⁴ These visibility and access issues affect the ability to provide services to researchers and ultimately affect impact.

A good body of literature focuses on challenges to bringing awareness to archives and bringing students in to use archival collections. Johnson states that the “first major obstacle in bringing undergraduate students into an archive is essentially getting them over their fear of the unknown.”⁵⁵ Johnson also states that “to so many

undergraduates, entering departments of archives and special collections feels like one step below attempting to enter Fort Knox.”⁵⁶ Zhou states that archival orientation is a complicated activity. In a very limited time, students need to acquire new knowledge and skills, such as general archives concepts, specific knowledge of the archives’ holdings, organization of archival records, accessing rules of archival materials, the concept of finding aids and archival searching skills, and so on.⁵⁷

Engagement with the archivist then becomes critical so researchers learn how to navigate the archives effectively. Duff and Johnson state that “finding information in archives is not an easy task” and that there is great value of having the archivist involved in the research process.⁵⁸ Zhou also talks about the benefits of interactions with archivists: “...students may benefit significantly from increasing their interactions with reference archivists to speed familiarity with the archives’ holdings, learn specific archival search skills and determine their research topics more quickly.”⁵⁹

The above review shows that student interactions with archival collections and archivists are a crucial part of the research process. Equally important, if not more so, is the teaching that archivists deliver in the classroom.

Teaching

ARL conducted a major survey of its members’ special collections in 1998 and published the results in 2001. The results of the survey were inconclusive with respect to the integration of special collections with teaching.⁶⁰ In the ensuing twenty years, scholars have taken on the challenge and the literature regarding archives, special collections, and post-secondary teaching has developed significantly. The research methodology in this area has become more sophisticated.

Running in parallel with this two-decade increase in scholarship, there has been a maturation of the concept of primary source literacy. This has partly arisen out of the information literacy movement, which culminated in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, adopted in 2016.⁶¹ Inspired by the *Framework*, the Society of American Archivists and the ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section developed their Primary Source Literacy Guidelines (approved in 2018).

Much of this research and scholarship about teaching related to ARL institutions, either explicitly or implicitly. One of the first explicit examples was Allison’s 2005

master's thesis, "Connecting Undergraduates with Primary Sources: A Study of Undergraduate Instruction in Archives, Manuscripts, and Special Collections." Allison conducted a survey of ARL members and received 85 responses. Respondents felt that focusing on undergraduate instruction helped archives and special collections staff to integrate with overall library programming. This was despite the oft-noted historical bias towards graduate students in some special collections repositories.⁶² Allison also found that 75% of respondents provide outreach to faculty about their special collections' instruction program. However, she concluded that archives and special collections staff needed to connect routinely with instruction librarians as well. She also recommended that they assess their instruction more, as librarians have routinely done, and connect their instruction to class assignments to have a lasting impact.

Malkmus' study laid out the results of a massive survey of 627 academic historians and 25 follow-up interviews. She recommended that librarians and archivists focus their efforts on three targets: freshman courses where students learn how to think critically and analyze documents; a methods course where majors learn research skills; and upper-year research courses, where one on one consultations were the norm.⁶³

Reynolds summarized findings from a 44-question survey focused on instruction facilities, organization, and content. The good news was 78% of respondents felt that archives and special collections staff needed to focus on faculty outreach to generate more instruction sessions. Additionally, 69% of those responding participated in a new faculty orientation event to keep the lines of communication open. Uneven faculty interest and communication were cited as challenges. The bad news was that only 25% of those surveyed assessed the impact of their instruction sessions.⁶⁴

Nimer and Daines outlined the development of a full archival research competencies course at Brigham Young University. Concerns were raised at the outset about the relationship of the course with existing history courses that taught research skills. Despite this, assessment indicated that students had grown in various knowledge areas taught in the course. The authors concluded that a full archives course may not always be the most practical vehicle for teaching archival competencies, urging archivists to re-structure their more typical instruction offerings with that in mind.⁶⁵

Bahde described an initiative at Oregon State University where a second year American history survey course used the institution's archives and special collections for two hours a week as an instructional laboratory. Students worked through a series of lab exercises with learning objectives that could be graded through a series of rubrics. The author concluded that "the cumulative skill development gained as part

of the laboratory approach to learning history, resulted in a positive effect on student comprehension and production in the survey course.”⁶⁶

In their 2014–2015 article series Morris, Weiner, and Mykytiuk studied the concept of archival literacy, which is related to, but distinct from, the broader concept of primary source literacy. These articles presented findings from a two-phase study of the archival competencies that history students at Purdue University (phase 1) and at a representative sample of 100 higher education institutions (phase 2) were expected to possess upon graduation. The result was a list of 34 archival competencies that undergraduate history students would be expected to develop. These competencies included multiple references to understanding and locating primary sources but also contained additional content specific to archives, such as “obtain guidance from archivists” and “demonstrate acculturation to archives.” The authors recommended that archivists increase their collaboration with history faculty and librarians, contextualize archival literacy in history courses, and conduct assessment of their archival literacy instruction.⁶⁷

All the literature noted above understandably focuses on undergraduate history students. However, Note warned that we should not take graduate students for granted. They don’t necessarily have the research skills that archivists and history faculty members expect them to have. Nevertheless, her recommendations for how archivists should proceed were essentially the same: collaborate and plan together with faculty and students.⁶⁸

Perkins Smith and McGillan described in detail the systematic re-building of relationships between Mississippi State University’s Special Collections with the rest of the library as well as key academic departments. Special Collections held outreach sessions and attended departmental meetings and events. The history department’s historiography course held regular meetings with the instructors. The first meeting occurred prior to the first week of class to review the course objectives and instruction plan. The authors made the point that instruction outreach had to be taken beyond the Department of History. They too argued for a comprehensive assessment of their instruction.⁶⁹

Garcia, Lueck, and Yakel’s 2019 exhaustive review of the literature dating back to 1949 found that history was the academic domain most frequently covered (at 27% of the works identified). Even in cases where no domain was explicitly identified, the authors surmised that history was the “assumed and default field.”⁷⁰

There is an abundance of literature regarding teaching and special collections in higher education, including history departments. Yet, there is still an absence of much broader discussion of the differences in professional practice between librarians and archivists and how that might affect the assessment of impact.

Methodology

Identification of Research Methods

There are a variety of methodological approaches reported and discussed in the literature around measuring and assessing the impact of archives and special collections. We selected our methodology after an extensive review of the literature and multiple conversations with ARL's social scientist consultant. The initial methodological approach to the research involved three focus groups with different populations within Western's Department of History. These included separate focus groups for undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members. Data gathered throughout each focus group would inform a survey distributed to all students and faculty within the Department of History. These focus groups were scheduled for the end of March 2020. During the week of March 16, 2020, Western's campus was suddenly closed in response to the developing COVID-19 pandemic. The in-person focus groups were cancelled due to this closure. This research project was put on hold for several months due to the uncertainty surrounding the global pandemic.

The research project was re-started during the summer of 2020. Discussions ensued regarding the feasibility of continuing with the original methodological approach. It was impossible to conduct in-person focus groups during this period (summer and fall 2020) as the Middlesex Public Health Unit (the health unit governing Western's campus) disseminated strict guidelines for indoor and outdoor gatherings. Online focus groups were considered, but a few concerns were identified. The first concern was Zoom fatigue. Zoom fatigue is tiredness caused by the overuse of videoconferencing software.⁷¹ We were not confident that we would have enough participants to make a focus group worthwhile, especially since almost all of Western's courses in summer and fall 2020 were hosted online via Zoom. The second concern was lack of engagement. Focus groups, when facilitated well, generate lively discussion and engagement among participants. We were not confident in our abilities to facilitate conversation in this new online environment, and we were unsure how

the online format would affect engagement with and between participants. Focus groups were not used for these reasons.

The methodological approach to the research involved three distinct avenues of investigation: the distribution of a survey to faculty and students associated with Western's Department of History, the analysis of visitor usage statistics, including data collected about archival instruction provided to students and visitors to the archives, and a citation analysis. We selected these approaches based on the results of our literature review. This multipronged approach provided opportunities to assess the impact of Western's archives from a variety of perspectives and outputs. The combination of these methodologies gave us a user-centered approach to measuring impact.

A limitation to this methodological approach was the lack of responses from our two surveys. Unfortunately, we did not receive a high response rate for either the faculty or the student survey. The faculty survey's response rate was 20% and the student survey's response rate was 6%. Although the results of both surveys are not statistically significant, there is value in sharing the broad themes identified to inform future work and research. In addition, the low response rate of these surveys inspired the analysis of usage statistics and citations to further understand the impact of Western's archives on the Department of History.

Key Performance Indicators

We measured the fulfillment of the research objectives using the following key performance indicators:

- Faculty and student survey data
- Instruction data
- Visitor data
- Citation data

The survey responses addressed all three research objectives: understanding the impact of our archival holdings and services on the Department of History, understanding why we serve some members of the department and not others, and identifying opportunities to serve non-users of the department. Since we did not receive a high response rate for our survey, we used other areas of investigation to supplement our survey findings.

The instruction and visitor data indicated courses and individuals using our services and holdings from the Department of History. This data was used as a key performance indicator of our impact on the department. It was also used to illustrate opportunities to increase impact going forward, based on visitor demographics, types of archival material used, and topics of research, instruction sessions, and curriculum mapping. Similarly, the data gathered via the citation analysis is a key performance indicator of the impact of Western's archives on the Department of History's research output.

Methods

The study measured the impact of Western's archives on the Department of History using four techniques. These included a survey of faculty and students, analysis of instruction data, analysis of visitor data, and analysis of citations associated with research disseminated from the Department of History.

Survey of Faculty and Students

The purpose of the surveys was to gain a fulsome understanding of the impact of Western's archives on faculty and students in the Department of History. The focus of the surveys was on the impact of Western's archives on the teaching, learning, and research of the department.

A link to each survey was distributed via two internal email lists to the Department of History to solicit participants in November 2020. One email list was for Department of History faculty members and one email list was for Department of History students. The survey software Qualtrics was used to create and distribute the two surveys and to collect the data. Each survey comprised 17 questions. None of the 17 questions on either survey were required and some survey respondents did not answer every question. No personal data was collected, and all participants remained anonymous. The data collection period was two weeks. The faculty survey went out to 40 individuals. The faculty survey received 8 responses, for a 20% response rate. The student survey went out to 413 individuals. The student survey received 24 responses, for a 6% response rate. Survey responses were exported to Excel for analysis and themes were identified. Additional analysis was also completed using R. Since neither survey received a high response rate, other methods of data analysis were utilized to supplement this analysis.

Instruction Data

We had not initially foreseen using operational (including instruction) data for this project. Eventually, however, we felt that we needed additional data to support the survey results. We reviewed archival instruction data kept between 2011 and 2019. Due to the nature of the dataset, we were only able to use data from the first half of 2019. We refined this data into spreadsheets, including only Department of History data, a process that took 1–2 hours.

The following data points for Department of History courses were captured and subsequently analyzed for this study:

- Name and number of course
- Number of students in attendance
- Title and purpose of session

Visitor Data

Visitor data is collected per calendar year. The visitor data from 2011 to 2019 was extracted from the Client Registration Database of the archives management software, Minisis. It should be noted that visitor data for 2020 was not included because of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the closure of the ASC Reading Room in March 2020. The Client Registration Database tracks all visitors to the ASC Reading Room. We used search parameters to find all the visits from the Department of History, including faculty, graduate students and undergraduate students, and exported this data into .csv files for analysis. Personal names were stripped out of the data and non-personal identifiers were used throughout the analysis. All visitors remained anonymous. It should be noted that this data does not include any information about virtual visits.

Citation Analysis

The purpose of analyzing citations was to gain a direct understanding of the use of archival materials by Western researchers. Citations can be thought of as evidence of their value to that research. We analyzed the output of three forms of scholarly dissemination by three academic populations in our citation analysis: articles from the Western University's undergraduate history journal, *The Mirror*, Department of History PhD theses, and faculty monograph publications. We chose these three areas as they were the types of dissemination that we could reasonably expect to review from a set timeframe. There was no definitive way to review and evaluate all the academic output of both faculty and students from online sources, be it via

bibliographies or journal indices, for the period we wanted to review. This was mainly because we could not obtain a list of the publications or scholarly output of every faculty member and student from the Department of History.

The publications we reviewed are available online, in abstract or full text format. Where they were not available online, hard copies were consulted. We utilized Western University's open access repository, library collection, and the Department of History's website to gather our sources. We reviewed 220 publications for the years 2011–2019.

Resources Required

People

Four researchers were involved in this research project. One researcher was assigned to each dataset: faculty and student survey data, instruction data, visitor data, and citation data. Although this work could have been completed with fewer researchers, this approach allowed each researcher to focus on a specific dataset and conduct a thorough analysis. In addition to these researchers, the team also consulted with a social scientist on survey development, a data analyst on data analysis, and a data librarian on database pivot tables.

Skills

Skills and expertise utilized during the research project:

- Microsoft Excel
- Data analysis in R
- Data analysis using pivot tables
- Data visualization in Excel
- Survey development
- Export data from archival management system
- Knowledge of Department of History dissemination methods

Technical Resources

Technical Resources utilized during the research project:

- Microsoft Excel (data analysis and visualization)
- R (data analysis)

- Qualtrics (survey development)
- Minisis (archival management system)
- Scholarship @ Western (institutional repository)
- Omni (Western Libraries' OPAC)
- Zotero (reference management software)

Findings

Faculty Survey

Survey respondents were asked to confirm that they were faculty members in Western's Department of History. Survey respondents were asked to identify their research and teaching area of specialization. Canadian history was the most common response, with American history, Asian history, environmental history, public history, and military history also identified as areas of specialization. There does not seem to be a relationship between area of specialization and use of the archives. When survey respondents were asked if they had used Western's archives for their courses and/or research, 63% of survey respondents indicated that they had (Table 1).

Table 1. Have you used Western's archives for your courses and/or research?

Response	Frequency
Yes	5
No	3
Total Responses	8

There appears to be a relationship between a faculty member's time employed at Western and use of Western's archives. A majority (75%) of survey respondents worked at Western for 14 years or longer (Table 2). When analyzing the use of Western's archives in conjunction with the length of time at the university, we found that senior faculty members are more likely to use Western's archives. Of those respondents who indicated that they had used Western's archives, 80% have worked at Western for over 14 years.

Table 2. How long have you been at Western?

Response	Frequency
0-4 years	0
5-9 years	1
10-14 years	1
14-19 years	4
20+ years	2
Total Responses	8

Survey respondents were asked to identify the purpose for using Western’s archives (Table 3), selecting all applicable options. Most survey respondents indicated that they used Western’s archives for academic research, with a response rate of 56%, followed by teaching, with a response rate of 33%.

Table 3. What did you use Western’s archives for?

Response	Frequency
Academic Research	5
Teaching	3
Personal Interest	1
Other	0
Total Responses	9

Survey respondents were then asked to select under what circumstances they would use Western’s archives in the future. Survey respondents were invited to select all applicable options. Faculty members selected academic research (47% of responses) as the primary reason for using Western’s archives, with teaching (33% of responses)

being the second most frequent response. It is important to note that one survey respondent indicated that they would not use Western’s archives going forward.

Table 4. Under what circumstances would you use archival material at Western?

Response	Frequency
Academic Research	7
Teaching	5
Personal Interest	2
Other*	1
Total Responses	15

Survey respondents ranked the types of resources and services at Western’s archives, with 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important. Reference and instruction were the highest ranked services and social media and physical exhibits were the lowest ranked services (Table 5).

Table 5. Rank the types of resources and services at Western’s archives.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Reference	4	1		1		1		
Scanning/ copying	1		4	1	1			
Finding aids	1		4	1	1			
Webpage		2	1	1	1	2		
Social media							2	5

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Physical exhibits				1		3	1	1
Digital exhibits		1	1		2	1	2	
Instruction	2	2			2		1	

When asked how survey respondents first heard about Western’s archives, three themes emerged: faculty members knew about Western’s archives before they started work at Western, they learned about Western’s archives as a graduate student at Western, and they heard about Western’s archives from fellow faculty members. These methods do not involve Western’s archives as the primary source of discovery.

Survey respondents were then asked the impact of Western’s archives on their work as a faculty member. Most survey respondents stated Western’s archives has no impact on their work as a faculty member. Other responses stated that access to archival sources had an impact on their work as a faculty member. Some responses also indicated that Western’s archives had no primary sources in their area of specialization and therefore had minimal impact on their work as a faculty member.

When asked what Western’s archives can do to build a stronger relationship with the Department of History, survey respondents stated improved access to the archives, specifically more and/or better finding aids, promote fonds and collections to the department, create a liaison position for the department, and host meet and greet sessions for faculty members. These suggestions would help build a stronger relationship with the Department of History.

Survey respondents were asked to identify any barriers while using Western’s archives. Most respondents indicated that they had not experienced barriers while using Western’s archives. Other responses included COVID-19 restrictions, lack of finding aids, and reliance on staff knowledge alone to access holdings. Although the COVID-19 restrictions are temporary, and outside of the control of Western’s archives, strategies can be put in place to decrease the level of mediation required to access archival holdings.

Most survey respondents indicated that they had received help from an ASC staff member. One survey respondent stated, “Yes, on numerous occasions. Staff members

have been instrumental in advising both undergraduate and graduate public history students with their major course projects both in-person and online. They have also hosted workshops and archives tours.” Most survey respondents also indicated that they have requested or received instruction on Western’s archives. One survey respondent stated, “Yes. I have been fortunate to experience several workshops hosted by Western’s archives which has enabled me to arrange numerous community partnerships with our undergraduate and graduate public history programs.” ASC staff have an impact on the faculty and students in the Department of History.

Student Survey

Survey respondents were asked to confirm that they were students in Western’s Department of History. Of the 24 survey responses, 19 confirmed their status as a student within the Department of History and continued with the survey. Survey respondents were asked to identify their research area of specialization, if applicable. A variety of areas of specializations were identified, including, history, international relations, WWII, Islamic history, public history, and biology.

Survey respondents were asked to identify their status as an undergraduate or graduate student and their year of study (Table 6). Twelve of the survey respondents were undergraduate students and seven of the survey respondents were graduate students. The student who identified as other indicated that they were in undergraduate studies, year 5.

Table 6. Status as a Student. Are you a(n):

Response	Frequency
Undergraduate student – year 1	0
Undergraduate student – year 2	3
Undergraduate student – year 3	1
Undergraduate student – year 4	7
Graduate student – master’s	4
Graduate student – PhD	3
Other	1

Response	Frequency
Total responses	19

Survey respondents were then asked how they have used Western’s archives in their course work and research (Table 7). Most respondents had not used Western’s archives for their course work or research. Research papers, thesis and dissertation, class assignment, and personal interest all received the same frequency (3) of responses.

Table 7. How have you used Western’s archives for your courses and/or research?

Response	Frequency
Research paper	3
Thesis/dissertation	3
Class assignment	3
Personal interest	3
Paid employment	2
Volunteer work	0
Other	0
Have not used Western’s archives	7
Total responses	21

When asked what type of material they have used at Western’s archives, documents were the most frequently utilized type of material, followed by photographs and books (Table 8). Is there a relationship between the type of students (undergraduate or graduate student) and type of material used in the archives? The most common type of material used by undergraduate students is documents (33%), followed by books and photographs (22%). The most common type of material used by graduate students (master’s) was documents (40%). All other types of materials had the same value

(20%). The most common type of material used by graduate students (PhD) is books (33%). All other types of materials had the same value (17%).

Table 8. What type of material have you used at Western’s archives?

Response	Frequency
Maps	2
Photographs	4
Books	4
Documents	6
Assessment rolls/fire insurance plans/directories	3
Other	0
Total responses	19

Survey respondents were then asked under what circumstances they would use archival material in their research (Table 9). Most survey respondents stated that they would use archival material for a research paper in the future. Thesis and dissertation, class assignment, and personal interest were also frequently selected. It is interesting to note that “would not use Western’s archives” received zero responses. There seems to be potential for increasing the impact of Western’s archives on students’ research and class work, if they are informed about the archives.

Table 9. Under what circumstances would you use archival material at Western in your research?

Response	Frequency
Research paper	13
Thesis/dissertation	12

Response	Frequency
Class assignment	10
Personal interest	10
Paid employment	6
Volunteer work	5
Other	0
Would not use Western's archives	0
Total responses	56

When asked to rank the types of resources and services at Western's archives, with 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important, reference and scanning/copying were the most important services, and social media and physical exhibits were the least important services (Table 10). It is important to note that these rankings align with the faculty survey rankings.

Table 10. Rank the types of resources and services at Western's archives that matter most to you.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Reference	6	1	3	1	2			
Scanning/ copying	1	6	2	2	2			
Finding aids	2	2	4	1	2	1	1	
Webpage	2	2		3	3	1	2	

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Social media						4	2	7
Physical exhibits				1	2	1	4	5
Digital exhibits	2	1		3	1	3	3	
Instruction		1	4	2	3	1	1	1

How did survey respondents first hear about Western’s archives? The overwhelming responses to this question were through their professor or through the library. This suggests the critical role of faculty members in promoting Western’s archives to students.

Survey respondents who indicated they had not used Western’s archives were asked why they had never used archival services or collections. Many respondents indicated that they were not sure how to use Western’s archives, that they did not need to use Western’s archives, or the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their ability to use the archives. As the most common reason for not using the archives is not knowing how to, we need to bridge this gap.

Survey respondents were asked to describe the impact of Western’s archives on their work as a history student. The most common response was the belief that primary sources add to their understanding of historical concepts and events. Other responses included excellent resources as well as no impact on their work. Since many survey respondents stated that primary sources add value to their understanding during their studies, we need to highlight this impact and expand on it.

Is there anything that Western’s archives should be doing to increase its usefulness? Survey respondents advised that promoting services and collections, becoming more user friendly, becoming more accessible, and increasing the archives’ online presence would help the archives become more useful.

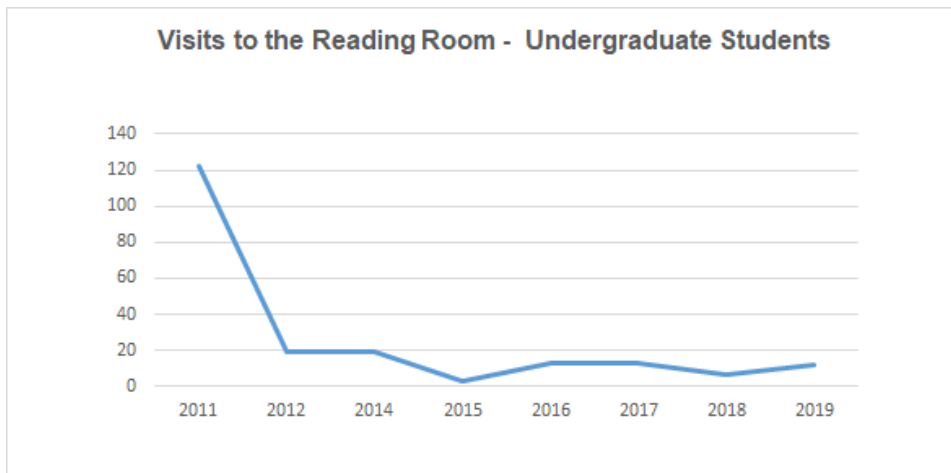
Survey respondents were asked if they had received help from a staff member at Western’s archives and to describe the circumstances. Most surveyed said they had

not received help from a staff member. This is especially important to consider in relation to the barrier of not understanding how to access the archives. Those surveyed that responded yes had positive comments about the help they received. One respondent stated, “Yes. I have always received great help from all the staff at the archives. They are always enthusiastic about the reason you are going in for and are so willing to help you come up with possible resources to check out.”

Survey respondents were then asked if they had received any instruction about using Western’s archives. Most respondents indicated that they had not received any instruction. The respondents that had received instruction provided very positive comments about their experience. One survey respondent stated, “I have received instruction about how to use the archives and I appreciate their diligence during 2020’s ups and downs. It shows they are committed to ensuring access to information.” Another respondent stated, “I’ve received classroom instruction. This has generally helped me develop effective research skills as it helped be properly navigate the archives and utilize their sources to my advantage.” When students receive instruction, it appears to have a significant effect on their work. When asked if they had taken a course where instruction in archives and/or primary sources would have been beneficial, most students indicated that all history courses could benefit from students receiving this form of instruction.

ASC Reading Room Visitor Data

Figure 1. Visits to the Reading Room—Undergraduate Students



There is a dramatic decrease in undergraduate student visits from 2011 to 2012. It should be noted that there were no visits by undergraduate history students in 2013.

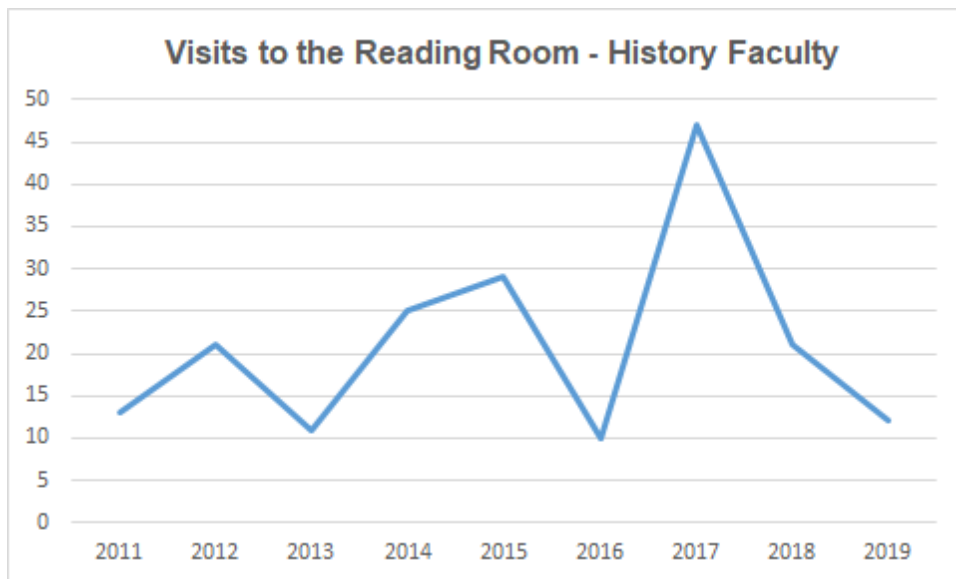
After 2013 the number of undergraduate student visits remained very low, but consistent.

Figure 2. Visits to the Reading Room—Graduate Students



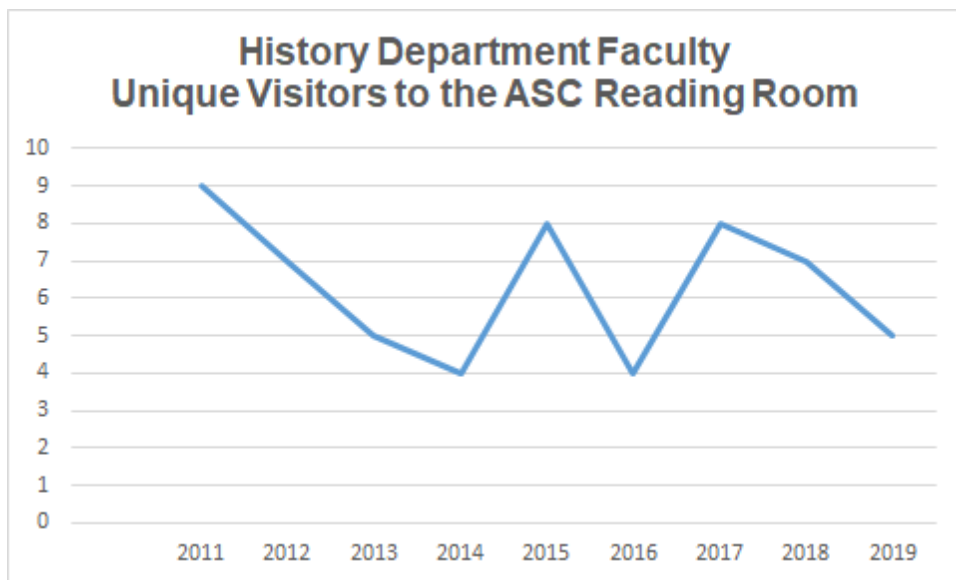
The majority of graduate student visits were from the public history stream of the Department of History. There was steady growth in graduate student visits from 2012 to 2015 but then small increases and decreases from 2016 to 2019.

Figure 3. Visits to the Reading Room—History Faculty



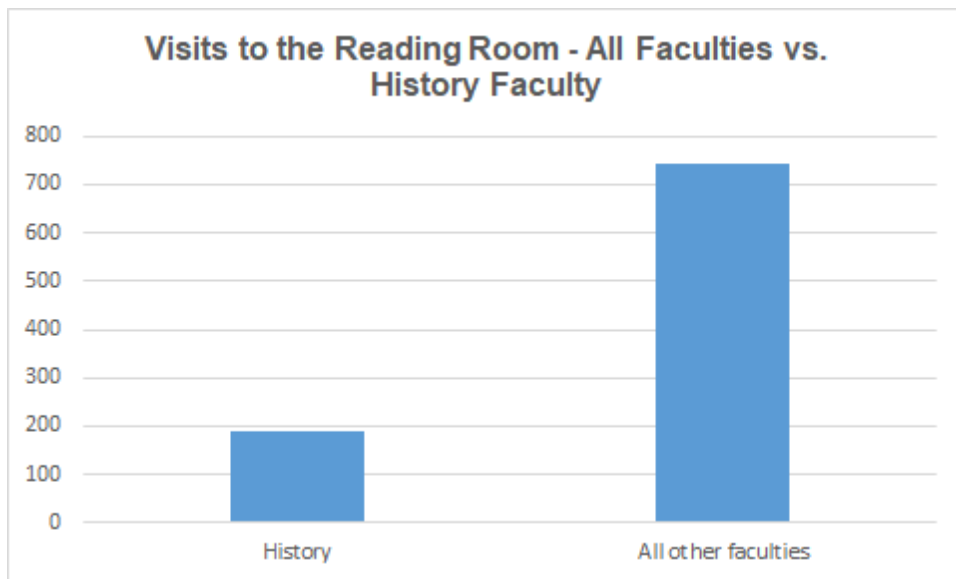
The figure above indicates that faculty visits from the Department of History have been up and down with no consistent growth.

Figure 4. History Department Faculty Unique Visitors to the ASC Reading Room



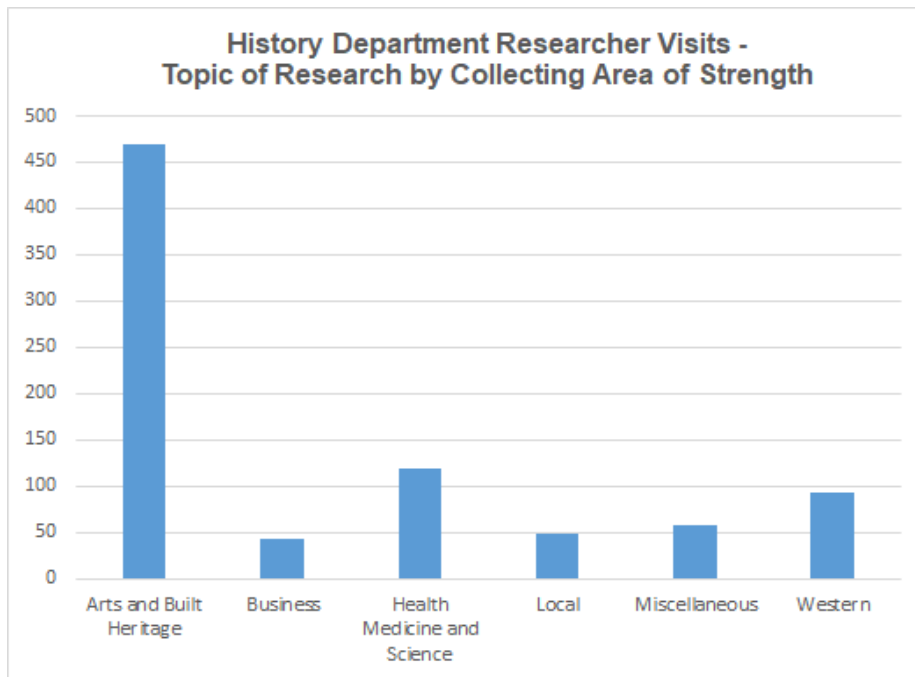
The figure above indicates that unique faculty visits from the Department of History have been up and down with no consistent growth.

Figure 5. Visits to the Reading Room—All Faculties vs. History Faculty



There were 189 visits from Department of History faculty members during the period 2011–2019. There were 742 visits from faculty from all other faculties at Western during the period 2011–2019. The total number of faculty visits from 2011–2019 is 931. Department of History faculty made up 20% of visits while 79% of faculty visits were from other faculty at Western University.

Figure 6. History Department Researcher Visits—Topic of Research by Collecting Area of Strength



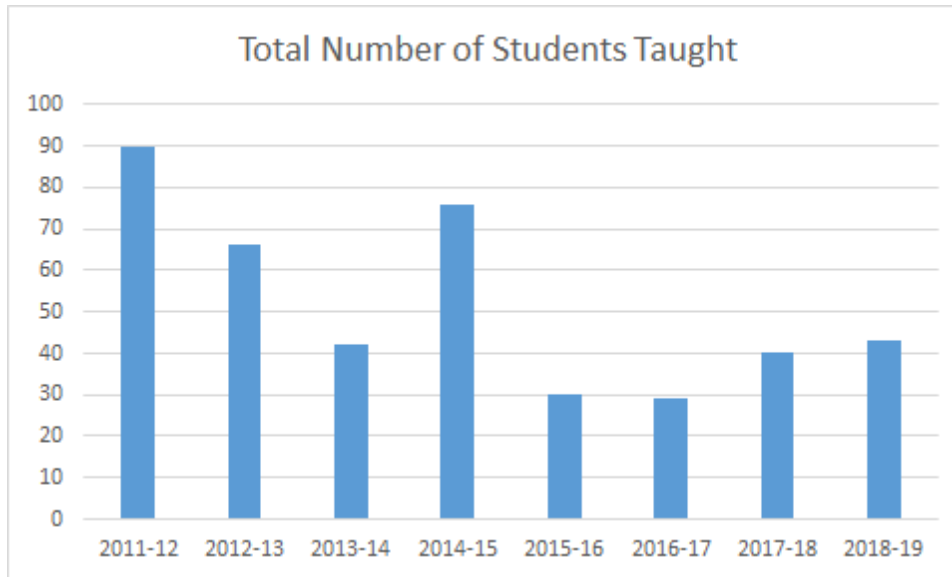
The term “researcher visits” is used to capture visits from undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty members. Department of History researcher visits were categorized using existing collecting areas of strength within ASC. Some visits fell outside of an area of strength and as a result they have been categorized as “miscellaneous.” The large number of researcher visits focusing on arts and built heritage is directly linked to the fact that the graduate public history program of the Department of History uses archival resources to support built heritage projects that are part of the curriculum.

Instruction Data

The following graphs illustrate the number of students (graduates and undergraduates) who were given instruction by archivists from the academic years 2011/2012 to 2018/2019. Instruction was defined as any formal presentation to students in a course, including classroom sessions, tours, and hands-on sessions in the ARCC itself. The classrooms used were adjacent to the ARCC in the main library (D.B. Weldon Library).

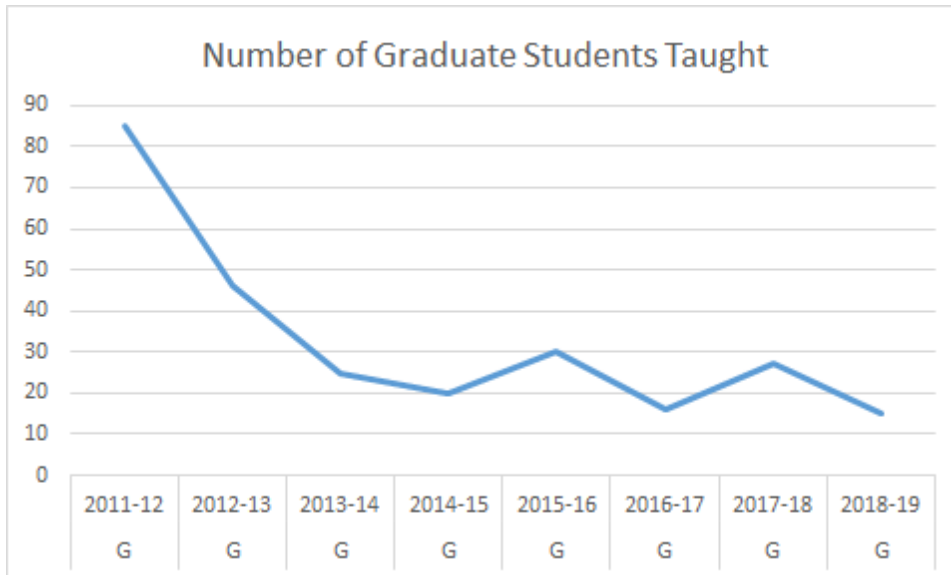
In 2011–2012, archivist instructors led sessions for six graduate history courses (including three in public history) and two undergraduate courses. The total number of history students in attendance for all sessions was 90, which would be a high point for the subsequent decade.

Figure 7. Total Number of Students Taught



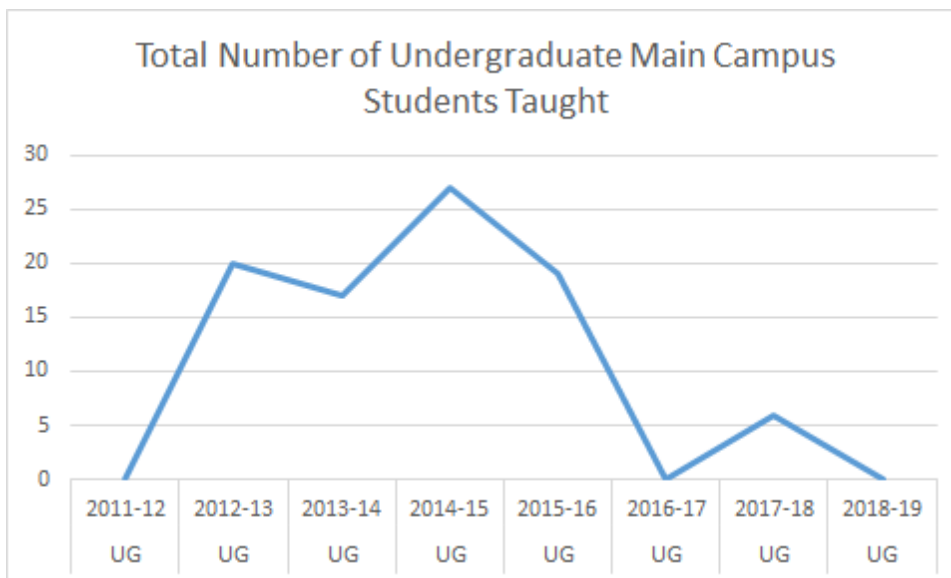
The total number of students taught fluctuated regularly but declined noticeably throughout the decade with some stabilization at the end. The increase in 2014–15 (to 76 students overall) can be attributed to a temporary jump in the number of undergraduate students taught (see below), which overcame an abrupt decline in graduate students. In that year, only one of five sessions taught was for a graduate course, Public History 9800 (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Number of Graduate Students Taught



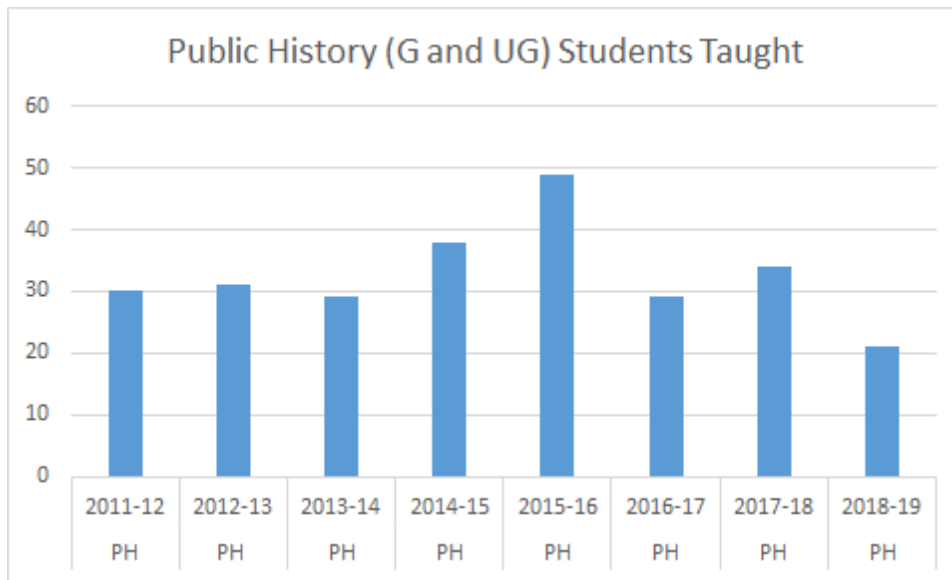
The number of graduate students taught declined significantly in the middle of the decade and did not recover to earlier levels. Numbers declined after the elimination of two courses: Methods and Practice in History (not offered after 2013–14), and Ontario History (not offered after 2012–13).

Figure 9. Total Number of Undergraduate Students Taught



The number of undergraduates taught increased during the first half of the decade and then declined sharply during the second half. The bump in undergraduate students in 2012/13 (to 26) came from a new third year course in public history (2011/12), a course, which was not consistently offered in the second half of the decade.

Figure 10. Public History (Graduate and Undergraduate) Students Taught



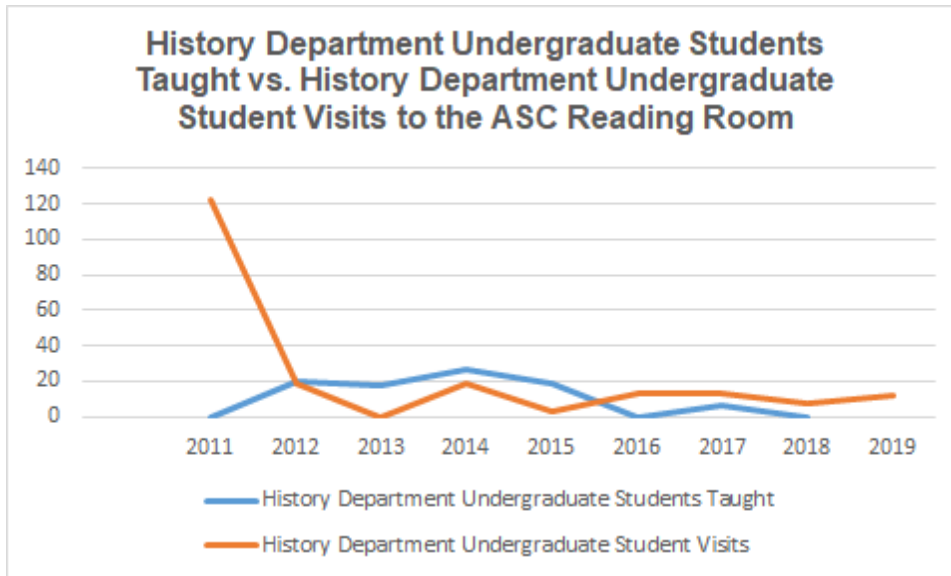
The graduate public history program of the Department of History has regularly made use of archival and special collections resources to support built heritage projects that students undertake each year. Not surprisingly, public history instruction was relatively stable throughout the decade. The increase in the middle of the decade can largely be attributed to the arrival of a sizeable new cohort of undergraduate public history students, whose ongoing presence thereafter was inconsistent. Additional evidence of archival impact on the graduate public history program is found in our visitor data.

Discussion of Instruction Data

There was a greater variety of history courses using archives in the first part of the decade. Several veteran instructors maintained stable relationships with the course faculty members for the first few years of the decade. Most of these courses were graduate courses; in many cases, the courses were discontinued, and/or the faculty retired. There was a noticeable increase in undergraduate courses offered in the

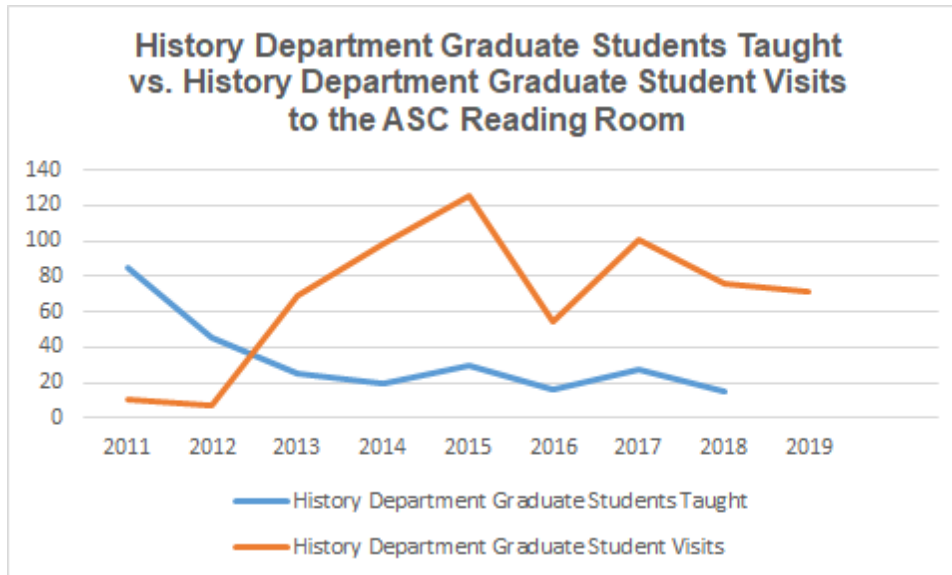
middle of the decade, but these were mostly offered by affiliated colleges, outside the scope of this study. There was not a sustained increase in undergraduate students from the main campus. In summary, the impact of archival instruction on history students, especially graduate students, decreased over the course of the period 2011–19, with the notable exception of public history.

Figure 11. History Department Undergraduate Students Taught vs. History Department Undergraduate Student Visits to the ASC Reading Room



In some cases, the number of students visiting is higher than the number of students who attended instruction sessions, however it should be noted student visits may be higher because of repeat visitors (also referred to as unique visitors). Unique visitors are considered to be visits by individual students who visited the ASC Reading Room one or more times. Unique visitors are analyzed below.

Figure 12. History Department Graduate Students Taught vs. History Department Graduate Student Visits to the ASC Reading Room



As with analysis of the undergraduate student data, analysis of the graduate student data shows that in some cases the number of students visiting is higher than the number of students who attended instruction sessions; however, it should be noted student visits may be higher because of repeat visitors. Data was analyzed to determine the unique number of visitors and that is presented in the section below.

Figure 13. History Department Graduate Students Taught vs. History Department Graduate Students Unique Visitors to the ASC Reading Room

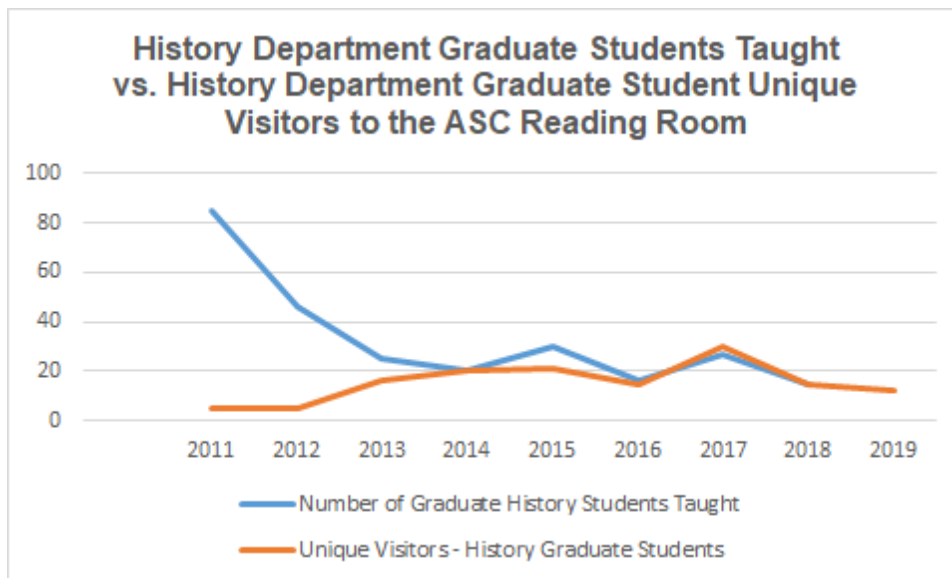
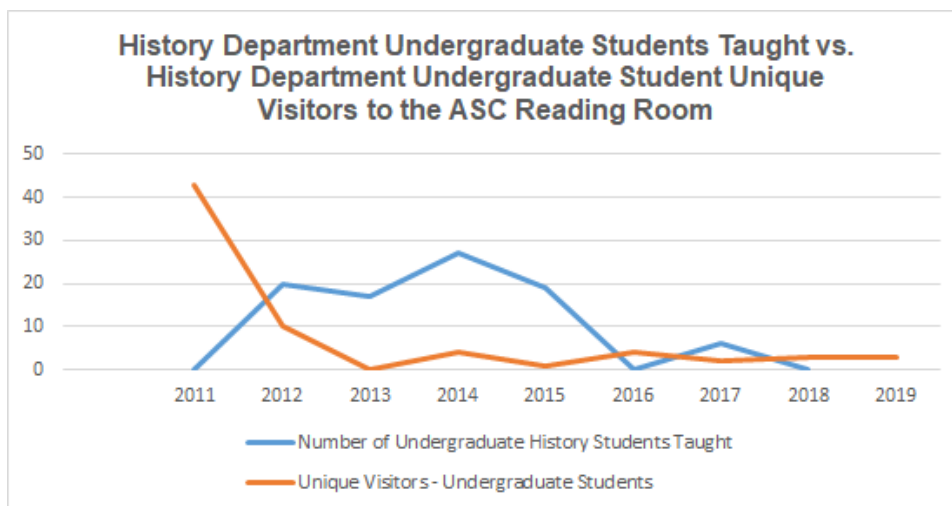


Figure 14. History Department Undergraduate Students Taught vs. History Department Undergraduate Students Unique Visitors to the ASC Reading Room



It should be noted that there were no visits by Department of History undergraduate students in 2013.

Publication and Citation Analysis

Doctoral Theses

Doctoral theses were accessed through Scholarship@Western and a total of 65 are listed in the repository. Full text is available for all but three, which are subject to a publishing embargo as of the publication of this report and were unavailable for review. Of the 63, a total of 9 referenced the archival holdings of Western Archives and Special Collections. The remainder either referenced archival collections at other national or international institutions or had no references to archival material at all. The material referenced in the nine applicable theses was of local historical significance, either personal or family papers.

Undergraduate Publications in The Mirror

A total of 121 bibliographies were reviewed for the years 2010–2019. These included those from articles, essays, book reviews and historiographies. Forty-seven of the authors were Western University upper-year undergraduate students (second year and up) with majors or minors in history. Of the total bibliographies reviewed, only one included a reference to archival resources at Western’s archives: a 2010 essay on student reactions to the Second World War. This result is not entirely surprising, as most of the articles are national or international in scope and rely heavily on published forms of primary and secondary sources. Very few, in fact, use archival sources of information at all.

Faculty Publications

For the years 2011 through 2020, thirty-four faculty publications are listed on the faculty’s website, and all bibliographies were reviewed for analysis. Of these, only one publication cited reference to Western’s archives. This monograph referenced one collection of family papers, which was like our findings of the doctoral theses.

Data

Survey Data

The data was gathered using Qualtrics, a survey development software. A link to each survey was distributed via two internal email lists to the Department of History to

solicit participants in November 2020. One email list was for Department of History faculty members and one email list was for Department of History students. The data was exported to Microsoft Excel for data analysis.

We used an institutional subscription to access Qualtrics. Although there were no financial implications to the researchers of this project, there would be a cost associated with this survey software if future researchers did not have an institutional subscription to the software. Another cost associated with this research is the time required to develop and distribute the survey and to analyze the data. These tasks took approximately 70 hours.

The main obstacle to obtaining the desired data was a lack of response to both the faculty and the student survey. The faculty survey went out to 40 individuals. The faculty survey received 8 responses, for a 20% response rate. The student survey went out to 413 individuals. The student survey received 24 responses, for a 6% response rate. This might be more successfully addressed in the future if an incentive is offered to participate in the survey.

Visitor Data

The visitor data was exported from the Client Registration database of our archival management software, Minisis. The Client Registration database is used to log information about each visitor who visits the ASC Reading Room. We used a search strategy that allowed for searching of Department of History undergraduate student, graduate student, and faculty visits to the Reading Room. Visitor data was collected and analyzed based on the calendar year.

The undergraduate student, graduate student, and faculty visitor data was exported from the Client Registration database into a .csv file, which was then converted to an .xls file. We created pivot tables within Excel to assist with data analysis of both sets of data. The costs of gathering the data were five hours of staff time to export the data from the database.

There were several obstacles encountered when gathering the visitor data. One significant obstacle to getting the data was the difficulty of extracting the data from Minisis. It was challenging to export meaningful data. A second significant obstacle was that the data was not always specific enough to be useful for this research purpose.

The data that was gathered relates to visits to the ASC Reading Room and includes the following:

- Type of researcher such as undergraduate student, graduate student, or faculty member
- Date of visit (specifically the year of the visit)
- Course code/course name associated with the visit
- Type of materials used during the visit
- Nature of the visit
- Category of research

It is necessary to create a more systematic and streamlined approach to gathering visitor data. Restructuring the client registration database in Minisis would make data extraction easier. This involves changing some fields, creating new fast access tables for fields and other changes to allow better manipulation, and reporting of data. This type of data is gathered every day that the ASC Reading Room is open since it is created as part of regular operating practices. Exporting and analyzing this data on a regular basis would be beneficial, since it would result in ongoing analysis of reading room visits.

Instruction Data

We reviewed archival instruction data kept between 2011 and 2019. This data documented almost all the previous decade. Instruction data dated 2019–20 is inconsistent due to organizational changes noted in the introduction, which affected all parts of Western Libraries. Data for 2020–21 was non-existent due to the pandemic. Consequently, we decided to focus on pre-2019 data, which was reliable and extensive enough to permit analysis. Instruction data is collected and analyzed based on the academic year (September to April).

Instruction data has always been collected within Western’s archives as part of the libraries’ routine gathering of teaching related statistics, kept for internal and external assessment purposes. Western Libraries maintained an in-house instruction database from 2005 until 2018, when it was replaced by a LibInsight dataset. LibInsight is part of the Springshare LibApps suite of applications.

Pre-2018 data (based on locations) was readily available for the ARCC. This data had been exported out of the in-house database to Excel spreadsheets by the Libraries’ Teaching and Learning Team in 2019 and retained on their network drive. Data for

2018 and later (based on functional teams) remains in LibInsight. We further refined this data into spreadsheets including only Department of History data. This process of extraction and refinement took one to two hours.

In all cases, instruction data did not always accurately or thoroughly reflect archival instruction.

Nevertheless, the following data points for Department of History courses were captured and subsequently analyzed for this study:

- Name and number of course
- Number of students in attendance
- Title and purpose of session

Going forward, Western Libraries' LibInsight Stewardship Committee has developed, in consultation with ASC, an instruction dataset that will enable better assessment of archival services at Western.

Publication Data and Citation Analysis

The use of Western's archives collections by Department of History faculty and students was gathered in a three-pronged approach, which is outlined below.

Student Publications: PhD Theses

Scholarship@Western is Western University's institutional open-access digital repository for faculty and student academic dissemination and publication. Each academic faculty, department and school is represented in this repository. We used the Department of History's page to identify publications for which archival resources from Western's archives have been used for research purposes to help us evaluate the impact of our archival collections on the research of the department. This page provided access to collections of datasets, digital initiatives, presentations, publications, and theses and dissertations. We analyzed the bibliographies and in-text citations of monograph publications and theses to determine the frequency of references to archival collections and fonds from Western Archives and Special Collections' holdings. We did not distinguish between physical or digital materials. We reviewed publications dated 2011 to 2020.

Student Publications: Undergraduate Journal Articles

The Mirror is the oldest undergraduate academic history journal in Canada and first began publishing in 1981. It is published by the Department of History on an annual basis and accepts submissions from undergraduate history students from across the country. We reviewed hard copies of each publication from 2010 to 2019.

Faculty Publications

Data on faculty publications is difficult to gather and compile from online database sources, therefore we sought data from other reliable online sources. Data on faculty publications were extracted from the list of monographs on the Department of History's website. The main limitation to faculty citation data is that faculty dissemination via Scholarship@Western is entirely dependent on the author uploading the content to the repository. There is no requirement to use this repository and use appears to be limited. It is not frequently updated so access to online publication is sometimes met with dead links. In other instances, the publication information available is limited to an abstract. This is especially true for non-peer reviewed publications and links to full text do not exist.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned from this research project include both expected and unexpected learnings and come from both the research process and the research results.

Clearly, engagement with faculty and students is crucial. Other institutions can learn from our experience (a cautionary tale) of the risks of a lack of constructive engagement. It is important to be very deliberate and planned, especially in reaching out to students and faculty, and nothing should be taken for granted. We also learned how challenging it is to measure impact, especially that of archives on teaching, research, and learning, at an academic institution.

The COVID-19 pandemic was the most significant factor to impact this research project, and much was learned from it. Because of COVID-19, the Western community was working remotely and as a result an online survey seemed to be the most effective way to measure impact during this time. In hindsight, distributing an online survey during a pandemic may have had an adverse effect on the survey results. The ASC Reading Room was closed in March 2020, and this caused a physical disengagement with ASC researchers, which may in turn have contributed to the low response rate

for the survey. COVID-19 directly affected our ability to carry out our initial study methods and, in turn, meant the entire project took more time than we had initially considered.

The response rate to the survey may have been bolstered by a change in methodology. For example, offering an incentive for the survey may have resulted in more responses. As well, emailing the survey to the faculty directly instead of through the Department of History mailing list may have resulted in more responses.

While distribution of a survey was the initial focus on this project, as the project evolved the investigators learned that there was a substantial amount of other data that was applicable to the research question. ASC collects data for different purposes and through a variety of channels—all of which was very relevant to this research. Exploring other sources of data was beneficial in helping to uncover other aspects of impact that were not initially considered.

An examination of available data led to the unexpected learning that there is a need to collect better-quality data. Each visitor to the ASC Reading Room is registered in the archives management software visitor database. There are some mandatory fields in this database such as name and affiliation (e.g., faculty, graduate student, undergraduate student), however, there are some fields that are free text (such as research topic), and there is no requirement to link the visit to a specific course name or course number. All of this makes it challenging to extract this type of data and report on it. Collecting better quality and more standardized data would allow for more effective analysis in the future.

Collecting better quality data also includes improving the collection of statistics for virtual interactions. As mentioned above, every visitor to the ASC Reading Room is registered in the visitor database, however, there is less control and fewer statistics available for virtual “visits” with ASC either through website visits or email interactions. This is something that has not been considered previously and is an unexpected learning from this research project.

Furthermore, the data showed that instruction sessions for the Department of History and visits from members of the Department of History have both steadily declined over the years and were not as frequent as we assumed. This is a sign of a decrease in overall engagement; however, this should be explored in more detail to determine why this decline has occurred. An analysis of the survey results led to the realization that members of the Department of History want increased engagement with ASC.

Examples of suggestions to increase engagement include implementing a liaison specific to the Department of History, and hosting a meet-and-greet with members of the Department of History.

Survey responses indicate that members of the Department of History perceive barriers to using the archives, including having to rely on staff knowledge to access fonds and collections. This was an unexpected learning, but again is supported by the visitor numbers and the small number of visits from the Department of History faculty.

Visitor data and instruction data both indicate that there is less interaction with lower year undergraduate students in the Department of History than there is on upper year and graduate students. The lesson learned from this is that there needs to be increased engagement with undergraduate students and the faculty who are teaching undergraduate courses. It is also evident that engagement needs to be proactive rather than reactive.

The visitor and instruction data also indicate that most history student visits focused on built heritage work. Built heritage is an area of strength for ASC. Other courses such as the long-standing plagues and illnesses course have fewer visitors because there are fewer archival holdings relevant to this course. This research brought to light the need to collect in different areas. There is a need for more purposeful collecting to meet broader curriculum needs.

Value

The research provided value to the investigators and will provide value to our institution for planning purposes. There is always value in taking stock of your activities and operations. We took this research opportunity to analyze operational data, which we collect through the client registration and material request processes. Archives and Special Collections compiles this data for annual statistical reporting purposes to senior leadership and external agencies, such as the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) and ARL, however, it had limited use to our own internal operations. The benefit of the analysis was that it afforded us the opportunity to reflect upon the data in a meaningful way. We have been able to ascertain collection usage and trends in research. This project provided us with any opportunity to closely reflect and assess those statistics in a way that we might not have otherwise, and we

certainly gained new insight into our users. We are now considering ways in which we might change our acquisition policy to better meet the needs of campus researchers.

Recommendations for Future

There are many ways we could improve upon the research to expand and develop our understanding of our impact on university research.

Initially, we might start with revisiting our initial plan of conducting faculty focus groups. These would allow us to ask probing questions about faculty research agendas, as well as curricula needs in the classroom. We may uncover new or emerging areas of research that may not have presented themselves through the survey. There needs to be deliberate collaboration with faculty and students to meet their needs.

Additionally, a natural next step for us would be to develop our teaching program to foster engagement with faculty and students. Evidence suggests embedded archival instruction in a course leads to increased student success in the areas of historical research.⁷² A desire for archival instruction is certainly something we saw reflected in our survey responses. We could utilize our existing relationships with faculty members to develop in-class learning opportunities. Such a project would require agreement and support from faculty and a measurable workload from archivist staff members in terms of planning, pre- and post-workshop assessment, as well as undertaking the workshop instruction itself. The literature suggests there could be significant benefit to students and piloting such a project is not without merit.⁷³ A smaller academic program, such as the Master of Public History, would be a logical place to pilot an embedded archivist program, as we have evidence of impact on that program and support from faculty members. Depending on feedback, there is an opportunity to expand teaching into the larger history program, both at Western's main campus, as well as the history departments at affiliate colleges.

This project provided us with the opportunity to reflect upon our place within the context of the Department of History's academic research. The scope of the project excluded analysis of our impact on the greater Western academic community; however, our methods could be duplicated for other faculties and departments for which we have limited user data. Candidates for this research expansion could include those in the social sciences, humanities, and arts. We have significant archival collections that would support the academic goals of those faculties and we want to provide value to their research outputs and classroom learning outcomes.

Part of Western Archives and Special Collections' mandate is to facilitate research for external researchers and local community partners, and it is a strategic goal of Western Libraries. For instance, the London heritage community has a strong commitment to research and public engagement, and we know that they rely on the holdings of Western Archives and Special Collections for that research. We have close relationships with the institutional members of the London Heritage Council, as well as ties to independent historical researchers, environmental consultants, and heritage staff at the City of London. We would like to take the lessons we learned from this project and apply it to this user group. We are aware of the challenges of measuring impact of external users, and that the tracking and capturing of data from those users can be difficult.⁷⁴ However, as external users comprise a sizable portion of our patron demographic, the research bears investigation.

One way to accomplish that evaluation is through measuring impact using altmetrics, as opposed to the traditional metrics we employed in this research. It could complement our existing data, and help us assess the impact of services, collections, and activities for which we currently do have operational data. For example, since the start of the COVID pandemic we have made strides to increase collection accessibility and discoverability. Currently we do not capture the reach of those tools and digital objects and their impact on researchers, although significant resources and time went into putting the material online. We do not measure the reach of our finding aids, research guides, digital exhibits, or other digital content. We also do not capture the impact of our tweets, Facebook posts or YouTube videos. Capturing altmetrics would help us identify areas of collecting strengths in those online activities, as well as help us consider where we might have the most opportunity for campus and community reach.

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Appendix A—Student Survey

Q1 Student Letter of Information and Consent for Participants

Project Title

The Impact of Archives on Western University’s Department of History

Principal Investigator and Contact

Tom Belton, Archivist, Western University

Introduction

Western Archives and Special Collections maintains unique archival materials, local history books, and rare published materials in the Archives and Research Collections Centre (ARCC). This research is facilitated by the Association of Research Libraries and relates to how Western’s archives support and promote teaching, learning, and research in Western’s Department of History. The results of this research will not necessarily affect the operations of Western Archives and Special Collections. For the purposes of this survey, we are interested in archival records, defined as documents created or received by an individual or organization and preserved as evidence of activity, and services to provide access to these documents. The survey will not include questions about rare books. We will use the term “Western’s archives” as a shorthand.

Information about the Study

You are being asked to participate in this survey because you are a student in the Western University Department of History and we are interested in your feedback about your knowledge and experiences with Western’s archives. The survey is comprised of 17 questions. It should take 15 minutes to complete. There are no mandatory questions.

There are no known risks for participation in this study. The benefit to society is a greater understanding of the impact of archives on research and teaching in the academy.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may decide not to answer any specific question. You do not waive any right by consenting to this study.

Delegated representatives of Western University and its Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records in order to monitor the conduct of this research in accordance with regulatory requirements.

Your survey responses will be collected through a secure online survey platform called Qualtrics. Qualtrics uses encryption technology and restricted access authorizations to protect all data collected. In addition, Western's Qualtrics server is in Ireland, where privacy standards are maintained under the European Union safe harbour framework. The data will then be exported from Qualtrics and securely stored on Western University's server.

The results of this survey will be disseminated in a report distributed by the Association of Research Libraries and may be disseminated in publications and/or conference presentations. Data collected from the survey will be stored on a secure drive for seven years and held by the principal investigator. If the results of this study are published, personal identifiers will not be used. Completed survey results cannot be withdrawn. Incomplete survey results will be deleted. Demographic details including year of enrolment and area of specialization will be collected in order to understand how Western's archives could support history students. Anonymized data only may be shared with the Association of Research Libraries.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, 1-844-720-9816, email: ethics@uwo.ca. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

Consent

I agree to participate in the research study. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences.

Yes

No

Print this screen if you want to retain a copy of the Letter of Information and Consent for future reference.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q2 Are you a student in Western's Department of History (main campus)?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q3 Are you a(n):

Undergraduate Student—Year 1 (1)

Undergraduate Student—Year 2 (2)

Undergraduate Student—Year 3 (3)

Undergraduate Student—Year 4 (4)

Graduate Student—Master's (5)

Graduate Student—PhD (6)

Other (7) _____

Q4 If you have an area of specialization, what is it?

Q5 How did you first hear about Western's archives?

Q6 What do you know about Western's archives? For example: anything about our collections, services, or facility?

Q7 How have you used Western's archives for your courses and/or research?

Research paper (1)

Thesis/Dissertation (2)

Class assignment (3)

Personal interest (4)

Paid employment (5)

Volunteer work (6)

Other (7) _____
Have not used Western's archives (8)

Q8 What type of material have you used at Western's archives?

Maps (1)
Photographs (2)
Books (3)
Documents (4)
Assessment rolls/Fire insurance plans/ Directories (5)
Other (6) _____

Q9 Why have you not used Western's archives?

Q10 Under what circumstances would you use archival material at Western in your research?

Research paper (1)
Thesis/Dissertation (2)
Class assignment (3)
Personal Interest (4)
Paid employment (5)
Volunteer work (6)
Other (7) _____
Wouldn't use Western's archives (8)

Q11 What is the impact of Western's archives on your work as a history student? We define impact as "changes that occur for stakeholders as a result of activities."

Q12 Is there anything that Western's archives should be doing to increase its usefulness?

Q13 Rank the types of resources and services at Western's archives that matter most to you. 1 is the most important and 8 is the least important.

_____ Reference (1)
_____ Scanning/copying (2)
_____ Finding aids (3)
_____ Webpage (4)
_____ Social media (5)
_____ Digital exhibits (6)
_____ Physical exhibits (7)
_____ Instruction (8)

Q14 Have you received help from a staff member at Western’s archives? If yes, can you describe the circumstances? This can be in person or online.

Q15 Have you received any instruction about using Western’s archives? What impact did this have on your work or perceptions? This can include classroom instruction or tours of the facility.

Q16 Have you taken a course where instruction in archives and/or primary sources would have been beneficial? If yes, which course?

Q17 Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix B—Faculty Survey

Q1 Faculty Letter of Information and Consent for Participants

Project Title

The Impact of Archives on Western University’s Department of History

Principal Investigator and Contact

Tom Belton, Archivist, Western University

Introduction

Western Archives and Special Collections maintains unique archival materials, local history books, and rare published materials in the Archives and Research Collections Centre (ARCC). This research is facilitated by the Association of Research Libraries and relates to how Western’s archives support and promote teaching, learning, and research in Western’s Department of History. The results of this research will not necessarily affect the operations of Western Archives and Special Collections. For the purposes of this survey, we are interested in archival records, defined as documents created or received by an individual or organization and preserved as evidence of activity, and services to provide access to these documents. The survey will not include questions about rare books. We will use the term “Western’s archives” as a shorthand.

Information about the Study

Participants will be asked about their knowledge and experiences with Western's archives. You are being asked to participate in this survey because you are a faculty member or post-doctoral researcher in the Western University Department of History and we are interested in your feedback about your knowledge and experiences with Western's archives. The survey is comprised of 17 questions. It should take 20 minutes to complete. There are no mandatory questions.

There are no known risks for participation in this study. The benefit to society is a greater understanding of the impact of archives on the academy.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may decide not to answer any specific question.

The results of this survey will be disseminated in a report distributed by the Association of Research Libraries and may be disseminated in publications and/or conference presentations. Data collected from the survey will be stored on a secure drive for seven years and held by the principal investigator. If the results of this study are published, personal identifiers will not be used. Completed survey results cannot be withdrawn. Incomplete survey results will be deleted. Demographic details including rank, years of employment at Western, and area of specialization will be collected in order to understand how Western's archives could support faculty and post-doctoral researchers. Anonymized data only may be shared with the Association of Research Libraries.

Anonymized data only may be shared with the Association of Research Libraries.

Consent

I agree to participate in the research study. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences.

Yes

No

Print this screen if you want to retain a copy of the Letter of Information and Consent for future reference.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q2 Are you a faculty member in Western's Department of History?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q3 What is your area of specialization?

Q4 How long have you been at Western?

- 0–4 years (1)
- 5–9 years (2)
- 10–14 years (3)
- 14–19 years (4)
- 20+ years (5)

Q5 What is your rank?

- Lecturer (1)
- Assistant (2)
- Associate (3)
- Professor (4)
- Adjunct (5)

Q6 How did you first hear about Western’s archives?

Q7 Have you used Western’s archives for your courses and/or research?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q8 What did you use Western’s archives for?

- Academic research (1)
- Teaching (2)
- Personal Interest (3)
- Other (4) _____

Q9 Under what circumstances would you use archival material at Western in your research or teaching?

- Academic research (1)
- Teaching (2)
- Personal interest (3)
- Other (4) _____
- Would not use Western’s archives (5)

Q10 What is the impact of Western’s archives on your work as a history faculty member? We define impact as “changes that occur for stakeholders as a result of activities.” Example: My students achieved learning outcomes associated with primary sources.

Q11 What can Western’s archives do to build a stronger relationship with the History Department?

Q12 What, if any, barriers have you encountered in using Western’s archives?

Q13 Rank the types of resources and services at Western’s archives. 1 is the most important and 8 is the least important.

- _____ Reference (1)
- _____ Scanning/copying (2)
- _____ Finding aids (3)
- _____ Webpage (4)
- _____ Social media (5)
- _____ Physical exhibits (6)
- _____ Digital exhibits (7)
- _____ Instruction (8)

Q14 Have you received help from a staff member at Western’s archives? If yes, can you describe the circumstances? This can be in person or online.

Q15 Have you requested or received instruction on Western’s archives? If yes, what impact did this have on your teaching and/or curriculum? If not, why not?

Q16 Have you taught a course where instruction in archives and/or primary sources would have been beneficial? If yes, which course?

Q17 Is there anything else you would like to share?

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