

**AWAIT ANOTHER VOICE:  
EMPOWERING UNDERGRADUATES IN  
SOCIAL JUSTICE COLLECTIONS  
THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING**

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## THE NEED

- Deeper collaboration between librarians and special collections experts to showcase the talent and collections on our campus
- Beyond 'show and tell' engagements for undergrads to foster independent research skills in collections
- Digital projects to introduce public scholarship to undergrads
- A toolkit of pedagogical approaches to adapt for future courses

## THE COURSE

- Semester long engagement in campus archives with honors students from various levels (freshman through senior)
- Culminated in digital exhibit in Omeka
- The semester was split in two – the first half was meetings in the Harry Ransom Center with archivists to engage with collections selected by the faculty member.
- I proposed the content and structure for the second half...

## THE COLLECTIONS

- Embarrassment of riches = overwhelming for students (and faculty)
- Many courses default to Harry Ransom Center visits and engagements, ignoring lesser known and more diverse collections and collecting practices
- Students were brought to the following collections for hands on sessions with pre-selected materials:
  - Dolph Briscoe Center for American History
  - Benson Latin American Collection
  - Fine Arts Library Zine Collection
  - Map Collection

## HANDS ON IN THE ARCHIVES

- Students were asked to work in pairs or alone (they all worked alone)
- They were given the option of materials to choose from
  - I chose these with the archivists or librarians ahead of the session
  - 4 or 5 boxes for 13 students in the Briscoe and Benson, and a stack of ~25 zines in the Fine Arts Library
- They completed a source analysis worksheet that I tailored to that collection and the questions I thought were most relevant

## WHAT DID I LEARN FROM THEIR WORKSHEETS?

- These worksheets need to be graded and need to be attached to the pursuit of secondary research
- Students needed experience and instruction on visual literacy for photos and images.
- Shorter is better – make the questions impactful or focus on questions specifically compelling for the boxes you've chosen

## SPECIAL CASE: ZINES

- Students didn't know what these were
- I framed the worksheet around questions about collections practices: why do we collect these? And communities: what do they preserve or communicate about a community or time or place?
- When appropriate, another idea is to discuss copyright – for issues that incorporate borrowed images, etc.

## POST-CUSTODIAL ARCHIVES

- UT is unique in that we have a Post-Custodial Archivist and she has up to two interns at any given time working in our Human Rights Document Initiative digital collections.
- What responsibilities do we have to the communities from which collections originate?
- Students were assigned to read Michelle Caswell's "Toward a Survivor-Centered Approach to Human Rights Archives: Lessons from Community-Based Archives." Coincidentally, Dr. Caswell was speaking on campus shortly after this meeting and students were encouraged to go.

## TEACHING METADATA

- Invited our Head of Access Systems (former Metadata Coordinator) to speak about metadata in a social justice context –
  - What responsibilities do we have to those we are describing in public facing web projects? How do our decisions affect these populations and those searching for these materials?
- How will people be searching for your items? What words might they use?
- Used worksheet for a practice item, then set them loose on their own items.

## COPYRIGHT AND PRIVACY

- Our Scholarly Communication librarian led a class about copyright and privacy, referring to national and state laws on the matter.
- Students were given a Fair Use checklist to fill out for their projects
- Ethical use of information in public-facing scholarship

## DESIGN REVIEW SESSION STRUCTURED FEEDBACK

- Suggested questions were:
  - Design decisions - why did you choose to use that image? Why did you decide to organize your exhibit this way?
  - Metadata: What did you struggle with when creating tags or metadata? Why did you decide what you did?
  - Current stumbling block: what decision have you been lingering over or revisiting? What are you struggling with?
- Grading this assignment would motivate students

# ASSESSMENT: DIGITAL PROJECT RUBRIC

- I adapted one from my colleague, Amber Welch, head of Technology Enhanced Learning

Technical Fluency	Novice	Developing
Audience	The audience for the site was poorly considered, if at all.	The audience for the site was considered during in-class discussion. Messaging to site or in writing.
Site Organization	Site structure (menus, content categorization, layout) is poorly considered, leading to an incoherent or confusing viewing experience for site visitors.	layout and inclusion of images and multimedia organization of the site that may be evident in header language, or menu order. Inconsistency within the site.
Versioning	The site did not undergo multiple revisions during the design process. Experimentation with content was limited. Menu headers and templates remained stable after the initial decisions were made.	Small changes were made to the site during development. Content changes and widget/footer content curation and media were placed in the site and reviewed. There was some hesitation to experiment beyond a few small changes. Images are present in the site, and add to the overall design, although they may detract from concepts illustrated in writing. Image captions are present, although may be inconsistent. Image placement is present, although the placement doesn't necessarily align with the site is attempting to deliver to viewers.
Visual Communication	Use of images is limited. Placement within the site may be erratic or detract from the overall viewing experience. Images are inconsistently cited and captioned, if at all. Images are low quality, or from non-reputable sources.	

## ASSESSING METADATA AND TAGS

<b>Description</b>	<b>Exemplary (3)</b>	<b>Developing (2)</b>	<b>Beginning (1)</b>	<b>Does Not Fulfill Task (0)</b>
<i>Metadata</i>	Completes metadata for all required fields according to Dublin Core standards	Completes metadata for more than half of required fields and adheres to Dublin Core standards with no or few errors	Completes metadata for less than half of required fields and/or has many errors in application of Dublin Core	Exhibit does not have any metadata, or has metadata that is not Dublin Core
<i>Tags</i>	Tags added to exhibit adequately and thoroughly describe important concepts of the artifact; connects items within the course site with two or more tags	Tags added to exhibit describe some important concepts of the artifact; superficially or does not connect items within course site	Exhibit has few tags that depict important concepts in the artifact; does not connect items within course site	Exhibit does not have any tags that depict important concepts in the artifact; does not connect items within course site

## ASSESSMENT: END OF SEMESTER SURVEY

- The faculty member and I brainstormed what we needed to know for next time
  - What was helpful or missing in Omeka support?
  - Did students engage deeply in metadata decisions?
  - Was switching from Ransom Ctr to other collections whiplash?
  - Was choosing a collection overwhelming?
  - What were some of stumbling blocks or "pain points" you encountered in the process?

## WHAT I WAS SCARED TO HEAR...

- Choosing a collection to research was overwhelming!

## WHAT THEY SAID...

- “I think the most rewarding aspect not only of the class, but also of the selection process for our final projects, was the freedom to explore and engage with UT's myriad archives and the wealth of information they contain.”
- “Although at times it did, and does, feel overwhelming having so much freedom, it's also given me a chance to really explore and delve into the items in the collection of my choice.”
- “Narrowing down what I wanted to study for each project in this class has been painful because I want to use everything and there is no end to what I could discover in these collections. I think I've also been really intimidated by these resources, which is a stumbling block into which I did not expect to run. I feel unqualified to be doing any of this stuff.”
- “My collection is very much in line with my research, career, and political views. Choosing a collection that is relevant to my black studies major and my career interest in education policy is very rewarding.”

## WHAT I WAS SCARED TO HEAR...

- Learning Omeka was too hard and time consuming

## WHAT THEY SAID...

- “Overall, considering my experience with Omeka so far, it seems like a great tool and a creative way to present our final project as opposed to simply writing a paper.”
- “I have found working with Omeka really difficult. I would have liked to have a lot more experience working with Omeka before the end of the semester.”
- “As someone who is not very technologically savvy it was really helpful to have Elise guide us step by step...It allowed us to clear up misunderstanding right away. I think we should have started working on the workshop a bit earlier than we did.”
- “Having the ability to synthesize an exhibit on the Omeka platform really allowed me to express my ideas creatively and in a way that a formal paper wouldn't have.”

## WHAT I WAS SCARED TO HEAR...

- Being in the Ransom Center the first half of the semester seemed irrelevant to the work I did on my project

## WHAT THEY SAID...

- “Helped me learn that sometimes the information pertaining to a certain item in a collection or archive may not be available, but using outside research and context clues from other related items can help you formulate your thoughts and research on the item.”
- “Working in the Ransom center taught me the importance of asking critical questions when working with archival material and the importance of investigating the historical context of an item as well.”
- “Before the Ransom Center, I didn't think about physical objects as having any place as sources of information in scholarly research.”

## WHAT I WAS SCARED TO HEAR...

- Superficial engagement with the metadata piece

## WHAT THEY SAID...

- “Those served as good exercises to get familiar with the thoroughness and rigor that metadata requires.”
- “The metadata-creation component helped me think in more detail about the choices I needed to make in sourcing. For example, ensuring I was not infringing on any copyright laws, which also opened up another world of information that I had not known about.”
- “Working in groups to figure out how to do this was very helpful because we all had similar questions and were able to work through it.”
- “In creating metadata I’m struggling with a lot of the dated language used in the 1950s, and how to make the clippings searchable for an audience today, while staying true to their content.”
- “The metadata resources have been useful, as well as the class sessions talking and thinking about what a decentralized archival process looks like, and how to allow communities control the presentation of their own material. In being a student at The University of Texas this is the history of my community, although my community wasn’t the one targeted. Working up my presentation involves balancing those two truths in the clippings I select and the viewpoints I present.”

## NEXT TIME

- Earlier hands on activities in collections students can use in their projects
- Earlier introduction to Omeka and digital public-facing projects
- Earlier, more formal assessment of how they're feeling about the software and collections choices (rather than in class discussion around "howsit going?")
- More scaffolding – graded along the way – avoids procrastination

# INSPIRATIONS

- Carly Marino and Sarah Fay Phillips (Humboldt State University), [Undergraduates Crossing the Threshold: Assessing Library Interns using the Framework](#). Presentation at Library Instruction West, 2016.
- Charlotte Nunes, [ArchivesEducate blog](#).
- Potter, Robin, and Alycia Sellie. “Zines in the Classroom: Critical Librarianship and Participatory Collections.” *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook: Lesson Plans*. Ed. Nicole Pagowsky and Kelly McElroy. Vol. 2, Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016, pp. 117–124.
- [DocsTeach.org](#) – National Archives
- [Teach Archives](#) – from Brooklyn Historical Society
- [Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy](#) – Draft (ALA / SAA)

# COURSE GUIDE AND LIST OF ACTIVITIES

- Course Guide for students: <http://guides.lib.utexas.edu/lah350lang>
- List of Activities and Approaches: <http://guides.lib.utexas.edu/toolkit/lah350lang>
- Course Omeka site: <http://socialjusticeutaustin.omeka.net/>