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In December 2015, a colleague from the History Department approached me to discuss one of his upcoming courses, American Environmental History. For this 300-level course, he required each student to complete a semester-long research project that included extensive source analysis and independent archival research. However, none of the fourteen students enrolled had previously taken the department’s 200-level methods course. While History majors and minors are encouraged to take the methods course early on, some students take the course in their junior or senior year. Additionally, these students represented eleven different majors and minors, and ranged from sophomores to seniors. Half the students were non-History majors, and had little or no background in historical research methods. American Environmental History thus served as an elective for students with an interest in understanding the historical context of a variety of environmental issues. My colleague feared that without intensive support his students would not be able to complete the independent research assignment. He asked for assistance in designing a curriculum that would integrate students’ acquisition of content knowledge and development of historical research skills.

To accomplish this, I became an embedded archivist in the course for the first half of the semester. My colleague and I created a scaffolded approach to archival instruction that, over the course of six weeks, led students through the stages of the research process. This series of archival workshops transformed a group of undergraduates with no historical research experience into budding scholars capable of making meaningful contributions to the existing body of knowledge.

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1 Over half of the History department’s majors are in the Bachelor of Science in Education concentration. Due to the requirements of the education curriculum, these students do not take the department’s 200-level research methods course.

2 Most students take HIS105 and HIS106, two introductory world history courses that cover the very basics of historical research methodology and practice, during their first year. However, transfer students or students coming to college with AP credit may not be required to take these courses or take them later in their college career.
Archival Educators

Many archivists have written about the integration of archival instruction into undergraduate courses and the role of archivists as educators. The most common method for increasing students’ “archival intelligence” is through one-shot archival orientation sessions where archivists provide students with an overview of what archives are and how to conduct archival research. In a case study conducted at Yale University, Barbara Rockenbach describes a spectrum of archival education approaches that goes from single-session orientations to in-depth research experiences. Rockenbach focuses on how the archivists at Yale collaborated with faculty to insert inquiry based learning strategies into one or two class sessions. On the other hand, some archivists have created credit courses to teach undergraduates archival competencies. At the end of a case study that describes their attempt to design a credit-bearing archival research methods course, Cory Nimer and J. Gordon Daines conclude “We need to engage with faculty on our campuses and become more closely integrated into the core curriculum of their classes.”

One way to do this, without developing a credit-bearing course, is through embedded archival instruction.

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6 Rockenbach, “Archives, Undergraduates, and Inquiry-Based Learning: Case Studies from Yale University Library.”

7 Nimer and Daines, “Teaching Undergraduates to Think Archivally,” 15.
Embedded librarianship began on college campuses with branch libraries that provided resources on particular subjects.¹ This practice evolved as librarians at central campus libraries worked to strengthen their relationships with constituents through collaboration. Geraldine Delaney and Jessica Bates argue that librarians should fully engage with the populations they serve so that information literacy is “embedded in the curriculum.”¹ This could happen in a variety of ways, whether a librarian teaches students through online platforms, becomes an active member of a research team, or assesses learning outcomes related to research skills. Building partnerships across campus is a core part of library services, and is important to archivists as well.

While librarians have long described themselves as “embedded librarians” when they work closely with faculty to provide library support for particular courses, archivists have not yet used the term “embedded archivist” to describe their instructional work. At this point, the phrase “embedded archivist” has only been used to explain how archivists have lent their expertise to assist clients in creating digital repositories. In their study of documentation within the gaming industry, Megan Winget and W. Walker Sampson briefly explored how an embedded archivist worked with game developers to set up procedures for preserving video games.¹⁰ Hannah Kosstrin’s review of choreographer Bebe Miller’s digital guidebook Dance Fort: A History, alludes to how an archivist helped Miller’s company create an archive of their choreography process.¹¹

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This case study demonstrates how archivists can embed themselves into university courses and argues that archivists who work closely with faculty should co-opt the phrase “embedded archivist” to recognize the intensity of their work. The benefit of being an embedded archivist is that one can “slow down" the pace at which content is delivered so that students have time to fully digest each step of the research process.

**Curriculum Structure**

The curriculum my colleague and I designed for American Environmental History involved embedding me into the course for the first half of the semester. The class met three times per week (fifty minutes per session). Over six weeks, we held an archival workshop at the University Archives for the third session of the week. Using a variety of documentation from the archives’ collection, I created four sample collections related to environmental history that students would use to develop their understanding of archival practices and historical research. Each week’s workshop focused on a different step in the research process and required students to work in groups to answer a research question using their collection materials. Our goals for the workshop series corresponded to the course objectives requiring students to apply the standards of historical research and writing including basic concepts of archival and primary source research, analysis of secondary source literature, and the fundamentals of completing an original research project.

Each workshop session followed a similar structure. The session began with lecture and discussion, and review of the homework assignment from the previous week. Students then spent the remainder of class working on their group assignments. I made a LibGuide for the course that contained a page for each session that included the objectives for the day’s lesson, relevant resources, assignments, and rubrics. Starting in the second workshop session, students completed

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a homework assignment that the course instructor graded. This ensured that groups made progress from week-to-week. With the instructor’s feedback, students individually applied what they learned in the workshop to their semester-long independent research projects.

To ensure that students stayed on track with their projects, we required them to meet separately with the instructor and me at several checkpoints over the course of the workshop series. I met with each student twice to provide them with assistance on their independent projects. These meetings supported students at their point of need, allowing for in-depth instruction on narrowing a topic, how to search library databases, where to find primary sources appropriate for their topic, and how to cite sources properly.

The workshop series concluded with students informally presenting the findings of their group research project. We also asked the class to reflect on their experience participating in the workshop series. Positive student feedback indicates the success of the workshops. At the conclusion of the workshop series, students expressed that they felt more confident in conducting archival research, analyzing secondary literature, and conducting an original research project.

**Workshop One: An Introduction to Archival Research**

I began the workshop series by introducing the class to the basic concepts of archival research. As none of the students had previously taken the History Department’s research methods course, the instructor and I knew that few, if any, of them would be familiar with archives. My lecture focused on the purpose and mission of archives, how archivists describe collection materials and make them accessible, issues of access and security, the basics of an archival research visit, and archival research strategies.

For the last half of the session, I divided the class into four groups and assigned each group a research topic. I gave each group a topic sheet that provided an overview of the topic, a
broad research question that the group would work to answer, and a list of archival materials related to their topic (see Appendix A for each group’s topic sheet). Groups spent the remainder of the session familiarizing themselves with their collections and began to develop strategies for conducting their research.

Workshop Two: Preparing a Prospectus

The second workshop set archival research in the context of the larger historical research process. In this session, we taught students how to prepare a prospectus. We opened the session by showing students how to use Zotero, a citation management system, to track their sources. Each student created a Zotero account that they connected to a group library so they could share sources with their groupmates. Students invited the course instructor to view their Zotero libraries so he could monitor their progress. I then provided students with a brief overview on how to find secondary sources for their projects using the library’s databases and several freely available online environmental history resources.

We closed our initial segment of the workshop by explaining what a research prospectus should include and what it should look like. We instructed students to prepare for their prospectus by conducting a survey of their archival materials and by gathering information from their collection to write a draft prospectus for their group topic as homework (see Appendix B). The prospectus required students to define their local case study and to set it within a broader historical context, forcing them to think early on about what type of information they needed to address their research questions, and to determine whether that information would come from the primary sources in their archival collection or from secondary sources.

Workshop Three: Evaluating Secondary Sources
The third workshop focused on how to evaluate secondary sources. We spent the first half of class breaking down the various types of secondary sources that historians use, so that students would understand the difference between sources that provide background information, historical context, and historiographical context. Using a sample topic, and books from the instructor’s personal collection, the class practiced identifying which books would count as different source types. We asked students to explain what information they would expect to find in each book based on its title and introduction, and why it would fall into the category in which they had placed it.

We then taught the class how to construct focused research questions that would help them understand and answer the broader research question they received in the first workshop. Groups spent the majority of this session conducting research in their archival collections so that they could determine what questions they could not answer with primary sources alone. For homework, each group completed a preliminary annotated bibliography of secondary sources (see Appendix C). The annotated bibliography pushed each group to recognize the limits of their primary sources and to engage with the secondary literature to become conversant in the intricacies of their topic.

Workshop Four: Evaluating Primary Sources

In session four, we taught the class how to analyze primary sources as historical evidence. We discussed how to evaluate the source’s author, point of view, intended audience, purpose, and significance. Each group then continued to conduct research in their archival collections and began selecting several primary sources to analyze for their homework assignment, which required each group to create an annotated bibliography of primary sources (see Appendix D).
For the non-History students in the class, thinking of archival records as evidence was a new concept and learning to unpack primary sources was critical. We taught the class to question their sources by evaluating each source for author bias, intended audience, purpose, and significance. It was important for students to realize that although the documents in their sample collections had been selected to help them answer carefully crafted research questions, the records did not exist in a vacuum. Critically analyzing sources would be a key component of the students’ independent projects, and this assignment provided them with a chance to practice this skill in a group setting using sources that were known.

**Workshop Five: Revisiting the Research Prospectus**

In the penultimate session, we assisted students in revising their original research prospectus (see Appendix E). The revised prospectus allowed each group to refine their original proposal using the additional information they had learned, and sources they had gathered, over the previous weeks. By expanding their topic description and lengthening their bibliography, groups fleshed out their projects and prepared to present their research to their classmates.

By asking students to revise their original prospectus, we forced them to revisit their initial assumptions about their research topic and process. After five weeks of working with their archival collections, each group had a thorough understanding of their topic, and a firm grasp of their sources. Reworking a prospectus shows students that the research process is iterative – while they may start out with an idea of where they hope their research will go, they cannot anticipate the result.

**Workshop Six: Presenting and Reflecting on Your Research**

The workshop series concluded with each group informally presenting their revised prospectus. Three groups answered the initial research questions posed to them in a satisfactory
manner. The fourth group only partially answered their research question as they struggled to connect the primary source evidence in their collection with the secondary literature. However, the course instructor and I were both impressed with the groups’ work. Most of them delved deeper into their sample research projects than we had anticipated, and they could have gone on to further develop their work into an independent project.

We then asked the class to discuss what they learned throughout the workshop series. Many students commented that the in-depth nature of the workshops made them feel more confident in their research abilities than they were at the start of the semester. Several students appreciated the time spent on citations; they felt Zotero allowed them to easily keep track of their group’s sources and that they had a better understanding of Chicago style. Other students mentioned that the workshops helped them to better map out their research strategies and that would be beneficial for future projects. Most students said they never realized how time consuming research was, and wished they would have managed their time better. The class agreed that they wanted more time to work with their collections and felt constrained by the short class period.

**Conclusion**

Spending the first half of the semester as an embedded archivist was time intensive. It would not be possible to conduct this workshop series for every History class. However, it would be worthwhile to recreate the workshop series for an introductory research methods class or for a course where the majority of students lacked the training necessary to complete a required long-term research project. The course instructor and I felt that we achieved our goals of getting students to learn to conduct archival and primary source research, analyze secondary literature, and conduct an original research project on their own.
Embedded archivists have the potential to greatly enhance the learning and success of undergraduate students. By becoming part of the American Environmental History class, I was able to get to know students and their research interests, and to assist them on a deeper level. A year later, I have seen these students go on to pursue more intensive work in their upper level courses. They do not shy away from bigger projects that require more thoughtful planning and concentrated study. There is much room for further research on the impact of embedded archival instruction, particularly into the long-term benefits to undergraduates. For this cohort of American Environmental History, embedded archival instruction turned students into scholars.
References

Carini, Peter. “Archivists as Educators: Integrating Primary Sources into the Curriculum.” 


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Supplemental Material
Working as an Embedded Archivist_Appendices.docx
Working as an Embedded Archivist in an Undergraduate Course:
Transforming Students into Scholars through an Archival Workshop Series

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Academic librarians have long defined strategies for inserting library services into the curriculum as “embedded librarianship.” Academic archivists, however, have not described their work as being “embedded” into the life of the institution, although that terminology best captures their collaboration with constituents across the university. Classes offered by academic archivists cover the spectrum of intensity, from one-shot sessions to credit-bearing courses. While these two experiences are commonly discussed, middle ground between them is often overlooked. In spring 2016, a History professor at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania had a group of students who were not prepared to complete the requirements of the course. The author, Shippensburg’s University Archivist, explains how, over six weeks, she embedded archival instruction into this 300-level undergraduate course to teach students with no historical research training how to conduct an original research project. At the conclusion of the six week workshop series, students indicated that they felt more confident in conducting archival and primary source research, analyzing secondary literature, and conducting an original research project. This case study demonstrates how archivists can embed themselves into courses at the university level and argues that archivists who work closely with faculty should co-opt the phrase “embedded archivist” to recognize the intensity of their instructional work.