



The University of Western Ontario

HISTORY 9806A

Understanding Archives:

The Management of Primary Sources in the Digital Age

Fall 2025

Instructor: Don Spanner, PhD, MLIS

Office Hours: TBA

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Course Description:

This course is designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of professional archival work. Class sessions will primarily be lecture driven, but combine discussion, practical exercises, and demonstrations. Students will gain a solid grounding in the history of the profession, an understanding of basic archival terminology, principles, theory, as well as an appreciation of current practices and how digital technologies have impacted both archival management and public programming. **Optional for Public History students; open to other graduate students with the instructor's permission.**

Graduate Course Level Learning Outcomes/Objectives

1. To understand the nature of archival documents, as recorded information, and the institutions responsible for preserving them;
2. To understand the principles of archival science;
3. To explore methods of retrieving information from archival records, bearing in mind their organization and preservation;
4. To examine management systems for the intellectual and physical control of archival records;
5. To examine the impact of digital technology on archival management and outreach initiatives.

Course Timeline and Format

Week 1. Sept. 10	[Introductions and Review of Course Outline, Expectations, etc.] Understanding Archives and the Archival Profession: History, Types, and Archival Culture
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Week 2. Sept. 17	History & Development of Archival Principles and Theory
Week 3. Sept. 24	Appraisal "Theory" and Practice; Models, Frameworks, and Collection Development
Week 4. Oct. 1	Arrangement: Fundamental Principles & Procedures
Week 5. Oct. 8	Description: Fundamental Principles & Procedures
Oct. 11-19	Fall Reading Week
Week 6. Oct. 22	Issues in the Preservation of Archival Records
Week 7. Oct. 29	Uses of Archives: Understanding the Research Potential of Archival Records
Week 8. Nov. 5	Facilities – A tour of Canada Life Archives
Week 9. Nov. 12	Web-based Reference Tools and the Re-Animation of Records; Users of Archives: Identifying Services & Needs
Week 10. Nov. 19	Traditional Public Programming
Week 11. Nov. 26	Digital Outreach: On-line Exhibits and Digital Classrooms
Week 12. Dec. 3	A Case Study on Planning & Marketing Strategies: The Veterans Project (and wrap-up)

Enrollment Restrictions

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in History, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program. Please contact Kara Brown, the graduate program coordinator (kbrow@uwo.ca) if you are in a department other than History and would like to enroll in the course.

Course Syllabus:

Students must submit one major essay over the course of the term, 13-15 pages double-spaced and worth 30% of their overall grade. On the first day of class (Sept. 10) students will be given a choice of essay topics, due October 29.

Students are given the task of finding an exceptional archival website and submitting a critique (8-10 pages) of its outreach initiatives. Students are encouraged to discuss their choice with the instructor. The critique is worth 25% of the overall grade. Instructions on this assignment will be given on September 11 and the assignment is due on December 4.

Students will be given three practice-based exercises, each worth 15%. Exercise 1 is based on applying learned principles of archival appraisal; Exercise 2 is based on applying learned principles of arrangement; Exercise 3 is based on reference services.

All assignments will be submitted to the instructor via email (preferably as Word docs).

All assignments will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

- Mastery of sources;
- Quality of thought, writing, and expressive force;
- Factual accuracy, clarity, conciseness and comprehensiveness.

Course Materials:

All readings for this course are either available online or will be found on reserve in the Weldon Library. There is no general text or any purchases of course material required.

Methods of Evaluation:

The mark breakdown is as follows:

	Number	Unit Value	Total	Handout/Due Date
Essay	1	30%	30%	Week 1, September 10; due Oct. 29
Archival Website Outreach Evaluation	1	25%	25%	Week 1, September 10; due December 3
Appraisal Exercise	1	15%	15%	Week 3, September 24; due October 8
Arrangement Exercise	1	15%	15%	Week 4, October 1; due October 15
Reference Exercise	1	15%	15%	Week 9, November 12; due November 26
Total		100%	100%	

Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 2% per day.

Please refer to the Policy on Accommodation for Illness ([Western University \(uwo.ca\)](http://www.uwo.ca))

Students are entitled to their privacy and consequently they do not need to disclose personal information to their course professors. In the event that students feel the need to discuss personal information, they

should see the graduate chair. Unlike undergraduate students, graduate students cannot be referred to Social Science Academic Counselling to have their medical or non-medical circumstances evaluated and to receive a recommendation for accommodation. Those facilities are for undergraduates only, and there is no process beyond the department to secure recommendations for accommodation. Our process is that faculty should deal with routine requests for extensions. However, a student's request for accommodation (on medical, non-medical, compassionate grounds) should go to the graduate chair, Prof. Francine McKenzie (historygradchair@uwo.ca) who will consult and communicate with faculty. Additionally, faculty and students should communicate with the grad chair about any case in which work is not submitted before grades are due. In the event that the graduate chair is also the course professor, then a request for accommodation can be taken to the department chair.

Additional Statements

Health/Wellness Services:

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html

Accessibility Options:

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Request for Accommodations/Medical Issues:

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Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

This is a graduate program and the process of writing (ie. a good and proper essay) is such that it helps in developing critical thinking skills, writing skills, and analytical skills. AI tools like ChatGPT can be helpful for providing exemplars of different writing genres. They can therefore provide some support for students learning new genres of writing and/or working in English as a foreign language. Information literacy around digital resources and tools such as ChatGPT is an important competency for information professionals. If you choose to use ChatGPT or another AI tool in preparing an assignment, I encourage you use it for the earliest stages and to reflect critically on the prompt you use and the quality, trustworthiness, and appropriateness of the content the engine returns. If you use an AI tool for any aspect of assignment preparation, you must submit your prompt and the AI content along with your assignment. Assignment wording should be your own: If you use any of the AI content directly in your assignment, you must acknowledge that content fully and clearly to avoid a scholastic offence.

Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence:

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca

NOTE: See Policies and Statements on the Graduate section of the History Department Website, https://history.uwo.ca/graduate/program_information/graduate_policies_and_statements.html. This

includes additional information on academic support services for health and wellness and on other academic policies, including copyright, plagiarism, and accessibility.