Special Collections Learning Outcomes

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These outcomes are intended to cover most Special Collections instruction scenarios for relatively novice users. They create a bedrock for subsequent advanced orientation and research scenarios.

Basic Orientation

All students visiting Hoole Library or the Williams Collection will be given a general introduction to UA Libraries Special Collections and to the specific location they are visiting. This will include an overview of collection formats and scope, as well as an orientation to policies and procedures related to using these collections.

Learning outcomes:

1. Students will be able to identify the formats and subjects common to the location visited
2. Students will recognize what items are not appropriate to bring into the reading room
3. Students will demonstrate proper handling of all materials

Further outcomes can be found below, based on the type of visit, as outlined below.

Visit Types

Goal 1: Hands-On Learning

This kind of session is designed to allow students to hone critical thinking skills through a direct encounter with primary source materials. Such an activity is best accomplished within a structure asks them to consider the materials in a thoughtful, analytic way.

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1 Related to the RBMS/SAA Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy objective “Find and Access,” point E; and the SAA Guidelines for College and University Archives section “Core Archival Functions,” part C, point 1 (Controlling Archival Use).
2 Suggested by the idea of special collections as “educational laboratory” -- see the SAA Guidelines section “Core Archival Functions”, part D, point 2 (Educational and Research Services).
Primary source materials don’t fit predetermined notions of reliability, such as peer reviewed or scholarly vs. popular, so one is forced to assess the authority and credibility of each on its own merits -- a behavior desirable for secondary research as well.

Learning outcomes:³

● Students will recognize that authoritative content may be packaged formally or informally and may include sources of all media types
● Students will analyze the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source

Goal 2: Resources for An Assignment or Project

This kind of session is designed to introduce students to the range of resources available to support an assignment or project, generally based on a particular topic or material format. While the archives librarian will display pertinent examples, the goal is for students to be able to find items on their own.

This requires learning to analyze their research needs and developing lines of inquiry accordingly, understanding that it will evolve in an iterative process. These skills and dispositions are useful in any type of research.

Learning outcomes:⁴

● Students will be able to locate archival collections and rare book items and request access to them
● Students will be able to analyze strengths and weaknesses of particular resources in meeting the goals of the assignment or project
● Students will begin to design and refine search strategies based on search results

Goal 3: Primary Source Research

This kind of session is designed to orient students to conducting primary source research in a special collection or archive. It will introduce them to the complexities of this kind of research so that they can begin to pursue it on their own.

To carry out research in a historical collection, a researcher must understand how primary

³ Related to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education concept “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual”; and the RBMS/SAA Guidelines objective “Interpret, Analyze, and Evaluate,” point B.
⁴ Related to the ACRL Framework concept Searching as Strategic Exploration; and the RBMS/SAA Guidelines objectives “Conceptualize,” points C-D, “Find and Access,” point B, and “Interpret, Analyze, and Evaluate,” point A.
research differs from secondary research. In part, this is pragmatic: special collections are organized in a different way than other library collections and have different modes of access and use. There are also conceptual differences that impact the research process, including big picture concerns about what’s in the historical record and how archival materials are collection and acquired by repositories.

Learning outcomes:⁵

- Students will be able to locate archival collections and rare book items and request access to them
- Students will be able to identify and consider the reasons for silences, gaps, contradictions, and power relationships in the documentary record, and their impact on the research process

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⁵ Related to the RBMS/SAA Guidelines objectives “Find and Access,” point D, and “Interpret, Analyze, and Evaluate,” point D.