Beyond Archival Intelligence: Towards increased access and use of digital archives by undergraduate students

Jonathan Dorey
Doctoral candidate
McGill University
jonathan.dorey@mail.mcgill.ca

Elaine Ménard
Associate professor
McGill University
elaine.menard@mcgill.ca

Context
“Remote archival users require imagination to refine their reference questions, to probe for more information and to provide archives and finding aids systems.”
- Duff, 2010, p.122

“[...] the reference archivist by time-honored tradition has been, importantly but simply, a pointer – the ‘P’ word. Reference no longer is just pointing.”
- Grazy, 1997, p.172

Archival literacy

Archival reference
Information about: the repository; the holdings; from the holdings; about record creators; referrals to other repositories or resources; information about laws and ethics regarding the use of information; instruction on the use of records; education about the research process; physical access to holdings
- Pugh, 2005

Research questions
1. How is the Archival Reference Knowledge framework represented on archives websites?
2. What are undergraduate students’ expectations with regards to Canadian university archives websites in the context of history course assignments?
3. What barriers do undergraduate students face when navigating Canadian university archives websites in the context of history course assignments?
4. How is the Archival Reference Knowledge framework operationalized when considering the expectations of undergraduate students and the barriers they face?

Data collection

Phase 1: website analysis
- Canadian university archives (n=41)
  - Content analysis:
    - Based on Bromley (2010)
    - Adapted to ARK
    - Complemented with instructional knowledge
    - Pre-tested
    - Inter-rater reliability tested
  - Measures of efficiency and effectiveness

Phase 2: user questionnaire
- Canadian university undergraduates (n=171)
  - Questionnaire:
    - Based on Archival Metrics
    - Rating section (from phase 1)
    - Demographics
    - Use
    - Pre-tested
  - Determines current understanding, expectations, barriers and preferences.

Revised ARK framework

Results – Websites

The typical website (currently)
- Provenance: 75
- Description of formats: 75
- Phone: 74
- Email: 73
- Staff list: 70
- Directions: 67
- Hours: 65
- Description of subjects: 62
- Mail: 60

Results – User survey

The ideal website (user)
- Searching in finding aids: 20
- Searching in catalogues: 17
- Research guide: 20
- Hours: 65
- Conducting research: 36
- Handling: 40
- Provenance: 79
- FAQs: 40
- Reproduction: 48

Discussion and conclusion

- Each of the 3 types of knowledge from the ARK framework + the new instructional knowledge were operationalized as explicit markers.
- In total, 37 markers: 6 for research knowledge; 18 for interaction knowledge; 6 for collections knowledge; and 7 for instructional knowledge.
- Currently, markers of collections and interaction knowledge are overemphasized, while markers of research knowledge are underrepresented.
- Some markers point to the physicality of archives: opening hours of the institution, handling procedures, reproduction policies.
- Could this mark a new view of online (digital) research but in-person (analog) browsing?

Note: We only report here the data from the 137 English-language respondents, excluding the 34 French-language respondents.

References


Grazy I, O. B. (1997). No longer is a “P” word: the reference archivist as marketer. The Reference Librarian, 56, 171-184