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Laura Klonaris Gabriel

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THE LIVING ARCHIVE: CREATING AND PRESERVING THE IDENTITY OF AN  
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

by

Laura Klonaris Gabriel

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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## ABSTRACT

Gabriel, Laura Klonaris. M.A. The University of Memphis. May/2012. Major Professor: Dr. Joseph Jones.

This study provides an overview of the "archival turn" in Composition Studies and demonstrates how the values articulated and explored by Composition scholars can be applied to the creation of an archive in a college English department. The surge of interest in archival research in the field of Composition Studies recognizes the archive not only as a source but as a subject from which one can fill in the gaps of history with new perspectives and discoveries, and exploring these gaps benefit both theorists and practitioners.

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## INTRODUCTION

A librarian sorting through Civil War documents, a teacher combing through stacks of student papers, a mother sorting through boxes of family photos, an administrative assistant organizing files of budget reports: these are all examples of archival use. Although archives are typically thought of in historical, exclusive terms, people actually use them on a daily basis. The word itself is used in numerous settings, so its meaning is dependent upon its context. The word “archive” assumes different meanings for different groups and purposes. When we consider different archival uses, however, we realize the value of archives and the possibilities they have for preserving knowledge and maintaining important documents.

Most archives can be classified as one of two distinct types of archives. I intend to argue, however, for a third type, which I call a living archive. The first type of archive is the most common, a library archive. A traditional archive is deliberately arranged and organized with collections of historical information. The second type of archive is found in offices and other administrative settings. A clerical archive typically contains information needed to help a business or administration run efficiently and effectively. I distinguish these two types of archives from a living archive, which is my suggestion for an archive that is both established and filled with useful information but also evolutionary and explorative. A living archive has some aspects of the first two archives but is combined with other ephemera and guided by principles and theories inspired and informed by scholars in composition studies.

A living archive is one especially suited for an English department because of its capacities to combine the clerical, historical, and pedagogical in order to enrich all

members of the department. Some university English departments have clerical or traditional archives, but such collections of historical materials typically consist of newsletters, lists of noteworthy speakers, and other departmental news. English departments at the University of Virginia, the University of Minnesota, the University of California in Santa Barbara, and Eastern Illinois University, for example, have archival sections on their departmental websites. These websites typically contain chronologically organized links to past newsletters, and these are the only traces of historical materials on the sites. None of these department sites mention an in-house departmental archive of historical materials. Indeed, few departments maintain archives. The reasons for not establishing and maintaining a departmental archive are predictable: What would be the value of such an archive? To whom? Who would maintain it? Who would decide what to include? I will address each of these questions, for these concerns should not inhibit a department from establishing a living archive.

Eminent American historian Charles M. Andrews (1863-1943) wrote of the importance of archives:

The more it is realized that the true history of a State and a people lies not in episodes and surface events, but in the substantial features of its constitutional and social organization, the more will archives be valued and preserved. No people can be deemed masters of their own history until their public records, gathered, cared for, and rendered accessible to the investigator, have been systematically studied and the importance of their contents determined [...] It has been well said that “the care which a nation devotes to the preservation of the monuments of its past may serve

as a true measure of the degree of civilization to which it has attained."

Among such monuments, and holding first place in value and importance, are public archives, national and local. (qtd. in Blake).

Scholars in composition studies share this enthusiasm for archival studies and have become keenly interested in theories of archives and archival research. As Susan Wells notes in "Claiming the Archive for Rhetoric and Composition," archival research, for some scholars in rhetoric and composition, has been especially rewarding. She argues that rhetoricians and compositionists "need the gifts of the archive just as much as we need to ask why we [...] might want to do this work. If the archive is a treasure, what does it hold for us?" (55). Wells answers her question by asserting that archives have the potential to "shape specific intellectual projects" by broadening our sense of possibility in writing instruction and engaging scholars' deepest commitments as democratic intellectuals (62-64). The work done by past rhetoricians and compositionists and the literary practices of engaged speakers and writers encourage us to rethink our political and institutional situation and methods of instruction (63). Such possibilities are not only benefits for rhetoricians and compositionists, however; they can benefit all members of an English department because archives offer the possibility of reconfiguring our relation to our own history (64). This is why English departments should consider creating departmental archives. Moreover, creating a living archive for an English department requires envisioning the broadest possibilities for such an archive. To do so, all facets of departmental activities must be considered, including the needs of not only the faculty, but also the students and staff.

To begin my efforts to create a blueprint for a living archive for the Department of English at the University of Memphis, I had a conversation with the chair of the department, Dr. Eric Link. I knew that he was also interested in the creation of a departmental archive, and I wanted to learn about his goals and progress thus far. We spoke about each of our goals and what we wanted out of an archive. While he was more interested in establishing a clerical archive for the sake of accountability, I shared my more historical, preservationist stance.

After speaking with Link, I e-mailed some long-standing faculty members to ask if there had been any action taken in the past to establish an archive in the Department of English. I also asked if they would be interested in the creation of a departmental archive. No long-standing faculty members remembered a time when an in-house archive had been planned for or created. While most of these faculty members were interested in the creation of a departmental archive, some had reservations, and most did not want to be part of the creation/establishment process.

Speaking with the senior faculty members proved so helpful that I decided to survey all English department faculty and staff. The online survey I created asked about their interests in the creation and implementation of an archive, as well as what materials they would suggest including and other suggestions. I analyzed their comments for similarities and differences. While some senior faculty members were interested in creating a physical space for emeritus materials and department ephemera, younger members were concerned with including materials that were devoted to addressing student learning capabilities and other academic needs. The online survey was also sent to graduate teaching assistants in the department. I valued the opinions of the teaching

assistants because of their dual roles in the department as students, teachers, and academic researchers (as most of them are working on theses or dissertations). Most graduate teaching assistants craved teaching materials, such as course syllabi, lesson plans, assignment guidelines, and sample papers. Although wants and needs differed between faculty, staff, and graduate teaching assistants, all had a desire to enrich and expand their disciplines, whether by creating a richer, fuller departmental history, providing retiring professors space to donate personal artifacts, or collecting materials for instructors that make them more effective practitioners.

My analysis led to a provisional plan for the establishment of what I call a living archive, a hybrid of traditional and clerical archives that also includes materials unique to, and significant to, the Department of English. Actually creating a living archive is a project of great depth and breadth that would require a sustained commitment by this or any other English department. I recommend dividing the living archive into three spaces: the administrative, the academic, and the historical. Dividing the departmental archive into these three spaces is an effective way to organize a wealth of information and assist the various stakeholders within an English department. Furthermore, a living archive can be a vital aspect of a department's identity because an archive helps a department situate itself in relation to who it has been and what it has done, who and what it is now, and who and what it could or should be in the future.

## The Three Types of Archives

Adequately defining an archive may seem a simple task, but it is actually quite complex, and the definitions vary because the purposes of archives differ for various groups. In this section, I first offer a selective overview of the origins of archives. Next, I define three types of archives: the traditional, the clerical, and what I will call the living. These are not “officially sanctioned” definitions, nor do they have fixed boundaries; the classifications serve organizational and descriptive purposes. The traditional archive concerns historians and those in library science and is defined by the orderly collection of historical information. The clerical archive, by contrast, is used in offices and business administrations. Administrators and support staff establish clerical archives as a collection of files, often arranged chronologically, containing useful business information and important records. The living archive as I define it is a “messier” conceptualization of an archive inspired by principles and theories from composition scholarship. Composition scholars regard archives as living records that are often without fixed shape or uniformity. Such archives may have aspects of traditional collections, but they can also include rough stacks of materials with untold stories from the past that lend to the advancement or understanding of the present and future. To some degree, however, all archives exhibit the paradoxical nature of both a record keeper and an evolving collection of materials.

### *The Traditional Archive*

Throughout history, attempts have been made to record culture by people who recognized the importance of preserving the knowledge and documents of their own

civilizations. The degree and nature of these activities varied, as did the civilizations, and ranged from simple prehistoric cave paintings to more sophisticated systems evidenced on ancient cuneiform tablets of the Sumerians. Many of those records were found in the ruins of the ancient Mycenaean palace at Pylos and they, like a voice from the past, transmitted a great deal of information about their culture. For instance, the tablets were inscribed with legal records and business inventories and contained inventories of human chattels, or slaves.

In 1898 three Dutch archivists, Johan Feith, Robert Fruin and Samuel Muller, wrote the *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*. In their groundbreaking work, Feith, Fruin, and Muller established a set of rules that still govern archival work today (Dowdy). The two most important of these rules are provenance and original order. Provenance means that collections must be independent and not mixed with other collections, nor should they be placed in artificial arrangement based on chronology, geography, or subject. Original order means that archival collections must be based on the original organization of the archival collection, which corresponds to the organization of the administrative body that produced it. Documents usually enter an archive in the order in which they were used and proved useful over a series of years for an institution, a government agency, business, or family. Oliver W. Holmes notes that "the archivist preserves and uses the arrangement given the records by the agency of origin on theory that this arrangement had logic and meaning to the agency" (21). Like libraries, archives are interested in providing the public with access to most of the items they house in their collections and try to provide some valuable insight in the process.

A definition of a traditional archive comes from the Society of American Archivists (SAA). Archives are “the non-current records of individuals, groups, institutions, and governments that contain information of enduring value.” The SAA categorizes the modern archival repository as one that includes photographs, films, video and sound recordings, computer tapes, and video and optical disks, as well as the more common materials of unpublished letters, diaries, and other manuscripts. Archival records, in definition, are the products of everyday activities. Researchers use them both for their administrative value and for purposes other than those for which they were created (SAA). People often think of archives as formal, significant collections, but there is significance and importance to the most casual of records. Even the casual researcher has a meaningful purpose in the preservation of historical materials.

Among the most important aspects of the traditional archive are the archival agents, or archivists, because they are the people who select and maintain the collection’s materials. Archivists maintain control, both physically and intellectually, over records of enduring value. Selecting records requires an understanding of the historical contexts in which the records were created, the uses for which they were intended, and their relationships to other sources. Archivists arrange and describe the records in accordance with accepted standards and practices, ensure the long-term preservation of collections, assist researchers, and plan and direct exhibitions, publications, and other outreach programs to broaden the use of collections and to enlist support for archival programs (SAA).

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) describes establishing a traditional archive as a somewhat formal process. The NARA recommends

that the archival agent select a physical location to house the collection and determine what equipment and supplies are needed to accomplish the project for the first year and on a continuing basis. NARA also suggests establishing a steering committee that might help with the historical collection or at least lend support.

Traditional archives exist to answer the questions of not only researchers but also those affected by the research. Richard Cox and Helen Samuels, in “The Archivist’s First Responsibility: A Research Agenda to Improve the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value,” discuss the most effective ways of gathering, organizing, and analyzing archival materials (29). They emphasize that materials included in the archive should not only benefit the researcher, but they should also benefit those touched by the archive. Archives and the materials within them, they note, should be guided by questions that are of a universally applicable fashion. Although a researcher may have a certain agenda, she should ask herself if that agenda benefits a larger audience while she is choosing archival materials.

### *The Clerical Archive*

Businesses and other administrative offices use archives for official record keeping. These collections typically contain chronologically or categorically organized files of important information, such as reports, rosters, minutes, forms, and agendas. There is a historical aspect to clerical archives, but that historical aspect focuses on organization or maintaining order in the workplace. For example, if a departmental chair archives meeting minutes and reports, after the chair exits, a successor is able to analyze the archived documents and have a better understanding of standing procedure. These archives also establish administrative accountability and provide a sense of purpose to

formal processes in the workplace. A clerical archive can give managers perspective and the ability to make decisions confident that they understand their historical context.

Clerical archives typically contain less information than traditional or living archives. Those assembling a clerical archive are highly selective in the data and the documents they collect. Less than three percent of all company records (electronic, hard copy, or visual images) are appropriate for retention in a typical clerical archive because it is often intended to complement other record management or information management systems by assuring the preservation of documents of long-term management, legal, fiscal, communications and marketing value (SAA).

### *The Living Archive*

My conceptualization for a living archive is that it contains some of the materials included in traditional and clerical archives but that it assumes more exploratory, ongoing roles as well. A living archive contains historical materials for preservation purposes, as in a traditional archive, while also maintaining accountability and records, as in a clerical archive, but the living archive is also informed by principles gleaned from composition scholars, which I elaborate upon in the next section. Specifically, composition scholars emphasize that a variety of people can benefit from smaller collections of archival materials, that the archival researcher has an influential role in the archival process, and that the archive itself is a rich source for exploration and discovery.

Sammie Morris and Shirley Rose, in “Invisible Hands: Recognizing Archivists’ Work to Make Records Accessible,” argue that rhetoric and composition researchers differ from most researchers in the amount of context and detail they require about steps taken during processing archival collections. Morris states that the average researcher

may not care about how the repository acquired a certain collection or why the collection is organized a certain way, or what preservation steps the archivist has taken, but rhetoricians and composition researchers need this information in order to draw conclusions from their research (69). Composition researchers are interested in archives as living records, bodies of materials that evolve and change with the times. Inside these archives, researchers give voice to untold stories and uncover materials from the past, which lend to present and future enrichment of the discipline.

Archives are understood as dynamic, virtual concepts (Cook 4). This marks a shift from looking at records as the passive products of human or administrative activity and towards considering records as active agents themselves in the formation of human and organizational memory, a shift from seeing the context of records creation resting within stable hierarchical organizations to situating records within fluid horizontal networks of work-flow functionality. This conceptual shift requires moving away from identifying archives as repositories of static materials and archivists as passive guardians of an inherited legacy to celebrating their roles in actively shaping collective (or social) memory. Stated another way, archival theoretical discourse has shifted from product to process, from structure to function, from archives to archiving, from the record to the recording context (Cook 5). Archival educator Terry Eastwood observes that "one must understand the political, economic, social and cultural milieu of any given society to understand its archives," adding that "the ideas held at any given time about archives are surely but a reflection of wider currents in intellectual history" (qtd. in Cook 11). These wider currents can be found in sources beyond established collections or clerical files.

Learning about the past from these sources provides a richer understanding of what has happened and who we are.

### The Archival Turn in Composition Studies

Compositionists focus less on the archive as a source and more on the archive itself as a subject. Over the past ten years or so, there has been a surge of scholarly attention on archives. In *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, Lucille M. Schultz notes that the contributing authors to that collection understand archives not as things, but as “epistemological experiments,” where knowledge is produced rather than retrieved (vii). The collection of essays, like others published over the past decade, emphasizes that archival research should not be restricted to libraries but can be, rather, an intersection of personal experiences, family histories, and scholarly research projects. The essays in *Beyond the Archives* are all written in first-person, which effectively conveys the narrative nature of much of the scholarship. Editor Gesa Kirsch reminds readers that archives are not transparent: not only is an archive established from an interested perspective, it is interpreted from an interested perspective. Also, archives are not interacted with on a temporary basis—archives of one type or another are utilized every day by every person. Whether it is a junk drawer, email folder, or photo album, archives are everywhere, and the “archivist” makes daily decisions about what to keep and what to throw out. These simple, everyday principles can be applied to more formalistic archival research. According to Kirsch, archival research in composition studies includes the following:

a range of research methods and strategies available to scholars, such as using space and location as a way to understand the sites where a historical subject lived; using oral histories and interviews with local

informants or relatives to better understand the actors involved in the shaping the politics, culture, and history of the times and being attentive to unexpected leads or chance encounters that can enrich a research project as well as change its direction and scope. (2).

The current embrace of archival research, or archival turn, in composition studies can be traced back to Stephen North's 1988 landmark, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*. North identifies eight key methodological communities—practitioners, historians, philosophers, critics, experimentalists, clinicians, formalists, and ethnographers—each of which he spends a chapter discussing its inceptions in the field, analyzing its underlying assumptions, common procedures, and finally the kinds of knowledge the community contributes to the discipline. By providing an inside account of each methodological community, North hopes to create a whole image of the field. His purpose is not to limit the boundaries of the discipline but rather to create a dialogue amongst those who situate themselves within, between, and amongst the various methodological communities in what was then the emerging discipline of composition studies.

North argues that composition research should not only benefit its own field, but it should also benefit those affected by the field of composition studies. North states that composition historians have a responsibility to engage in scholarship that enriches not only other historians, but also practitioners, researchers, students, parents, administrators, and so on. Because composition was an emerging academic discipline, he recognizes that composition historians are often “faced with nothing but gaps” (72), so he advocates scholarship that promotes a more communal narrative. North's hope was that

composition historians might have more confidence in their professional identities and seek to answer such questions as, “What has Composition been that it is what it is now?” or “Who have we been that we are who we are now?” (73). In order to answer these questions, North suggests that composition scholars and researchers stray from tidier, established collections and get their hands dirty in stacks of historical materials. North states that “the major limitation in terms of how the rhetoric and composition community in general has handled archival research so far is simply logistical: the body of materials so far assembled is pretty small, and Historians have yet to look all that hard for more” (73). North noted twenty-five years ago that composition’s historians had not sufficiently tried other archives, such as private collections, small town libraries, school collections, attics, garages, and more for written and oral material (74).

John Brereton was one of the first scholars to dig through messier collections of historical materials in order to research the history of composition as a field of inquiry. Brereton’s *The Origin of Composition Studies in the American College, 1877-1925: A Documentary History* is an extensive, sweeping history that traces the shape of American composition in a number of ways. Brereton examined magazine articles, scholarly reports, student papers, textbooks, teacher commentaries, and other important documents to gain a better understanding of the movements that shaped the discipline of composition studies. This examination of loose historical materials rather than established collections was monumental for the discipline and changed the way composition historians considered their research methodologies. In order to become more effective researchers, Brereton says that rhetoric and composition scholars need to “rethink and redefine the composition and rhetoric archive,” highlighting “the interpretive acts needed to make

sense of the archive in the first place” (qtd. in Ramsey 2). This highlighting of interpretive acts is similar to statements made by North, who sought to restore methodological integrity. This analysis of untidy collections of historical materials combined with the echoed sentiments of North sets the groundwork for much of the archival research now being done in composition studies.

Once researchers collect the previously mentioned “messier” materials, then they can begin the process that Robert Connors calls “internal criticism” (qtd. in North 75). This term means that the researcher must examine the source thoroughly to make sure it is understood correctly. Connors’s “Dreams and Play: Historical Method and Methodology” (published in 1992) states that historical research was a minor part of composition scholarship, but that it was evolving into “one of the recognized strands in our burgeoning field” (31). He notes that the most obvious problem historical researchers and writers face is how to make narratives reliable and persuasive. This issue, he writes, “comes down to the way in which induction balances deduction during the research process itself” (32). Connors encourages researchers to develop a hypothesis, then “play” in the archives and find answers (24). By playing, Connors seems to be saying that researchers should neither go into the archive with “blinders on,” nor should they aimlessly enter the archive without purpose or direction (33). Once a loose hypothesis is established, then the researcher is allowed to “play” in the archives and re-examine history. By re-examining history, the researcher may challenge the histories of the past: “There can never be any history so magisterial that it precludes the need for other histories [...] no one narrative can ever, or should ever, shut down the narrative enterprise” (34).

So archival research is not unfamiliar to composition's historians, but there does seem to be a disciplinary vigor to such explorations that has arisen over the past ten years or so. Three noteworthy recent collections are devoted to archival research: *Beyond the Archives: Research as Lived Experience* (Eds. Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan), *Working with the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition* (Eds. Alexis Ramsey, Wendy Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa Mastrangelo), and *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition* (Eds. Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon). These collections recognize that the "turn" in archival research includes turning away from the traditional study of practices at major research institutions. Grand narratives (such as those written by Albert Kitzhaber and James Berlin) were useful as an emerging discipline, and certainly helpful, but missed the finer points of specific contexts. Alexis Ramsey, in *Working in the Archives: Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*, states that part of the rationale for that collection is to answer Brereton's call for redefining the composition archive (2). Furthermore, there are few books or collections of essays that teach rhetoric and composition scholars, both those new to the field and those who are experienced, the basics of archival research or how to assemble the archive from a rhetorical standpoint (1). Ramsey challenges Connors's call for "playing in the archive" as a lighthearted approach that presupposes the researcher's adept capabilities of working in and with the archive. It is not that Ramsey disagrees with Connors (she states that this attitude stands true with any researcher who has uncovered fascinating documents in a collection), but Ramsey argues the need for literature that helps those new to archival research (3). *Working in the Archives* offers a valuable assessment of and guide to the increasingly complex endeavors of archival research.

Ramsey and the other editors state that this collection “will help scholars find, access, analyze, and compile the archival materials upon which diverse histories of rhetoric and composition might continue to be built” (4). Another point the editors emphasize is the need for collaboration and cooperation in archival research. Working in the archives can be overwhelming and solitary. The editors of this collection understand the importance of working with others for the benefit of the archive. Overall, this collection is beneficial for scholars new to archival research because it lays out the most important aspects in clear and succinct detail.

In *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition*, Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Flesher Moon are concerned with finding and analyzing historical materials from smaller colleges and universities in order to uncover narratives from the past that enrich our understanding of the present and future. Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori, in her foreword, explains that there are crucial problems of historical understanding in compositional archival research, and the collection, she says, seeks to “extend, challenge, complicate, and thereby enrich the narrative” of composition history within the American college and university system (3). The essays highlight historical compositional topics outside the realm of English A at Harvard, arguing that smaller colleges, HBCUs, liberal arts school, and other academic institutions have significant historical information that enriches our understanding of the discipline. This enrichment is important not only to scholars and researchers, but to practitioners as well.

Exploration and discovery takes place not only in the archive, but also in the narratives surrounding the archive. In Donahue and Bianca Falbo’s “(The Teaching of) Reading and Writing at Lafayette College,” the authors show that significant pedagogical

change occurs outside major institutions that can influence scholarship and the work of practitioners as well as challenge preconceived wisdom about the history of English A, or the first-known required composition class. They offer a partial narrative of how reading and writing were taught at Lafayette College, originally founded for first-generation college students, in the nineteenth century (38). Their project focuses on Francis A. March, whom they call “a widely celebrated figure about whom a great deal has already been written [...] but a considerable body of lore has accumulated around March, transforming him into one of the most resilient of pedagogical stereotypes, the ‘great teacher’” (39). March is primarily known as a noteworthy professor of literature, but Donahue and Falbo’s research shed more light on March’s illustrious career.

This research, however, could not have been conducted without consulting sources outside the traditional archive. Initially researching March and the classes he taught proved to be a challenge for the authors since no primary texts were used in classrooms during the nineteenth century. Donahue and Falbo interviewed retired faculty in order to promote and further their research. It was through this interview process that one retired faculty member suggested sorting through old college catalogs for information on March’s classes (40). Donahue and Falbo found that, if the catalogue dates are reliable, Lafayette College had required writing courses taught by March that predate English A at Harvard by twenty years (41). The structure and content of these classes make March a pioneer of composition studies due to his emphasis on the interaction between literature and writing. Although March is best known as a pioneer of literary studies, he earned this reputation because he used writing to teach reading (52). Perhaps, Donahue and Falbo speculate, “this facet of March’s contribution has been

ignored because the record of evidence is so hard to read. His was a highly specialized expertise and is, therefore, subject to being misread, misconstrued, and misrepresented” (53). The inclusion of a figure like March enlarges the parameters of the history of composition, and the presence of March at Lafayette College in the nineteenth century underscores the fact that significant curricular and pedagogical innovation can occur anywhere reading and writing are taught and practiced, but only if our assumptions about what constitutes proper evidence for such innovation are reexamined (54). This essay also makes the point that seeking outside voices and creating a narrative surrounding the archive can lead to beneficial discoveries inside of the archive. Without consulting the retired faculty member, Donahue and Falbo would never have made their noteworthy discoveries.

Other composition scholars support the contention that the most enriching material can be found in unlikely places, or even places that some deem outdated and useless. Traditional materials can be helpful, of course, but archival research benefits from the discovery of unheard voices and materials. Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz, in “Archives of Instruction,” emphasize textbooks as modes of historical inquiry, finding that these books are traces of history combined with new then-current theories. They borrow, adapt, redistribute, and revise passages to describe old and new interests, beliefs, and attitudes. Every textbook is an archive of instruction—it holds traces of past books and traditions, sometimes literally and sometimes in deeply hidden ways (117). Although it can be difficult to appreciate textbooks, it is noteworthy that what actively survives in the present is only a small part of the total archive. While current material may highlight noteworthy advancements from the past, an archive is able

to give a fuller, richer essence of the past. This archival inquiry can help rhetoricians and composition researchers rethink pedagogical and critical practices: “By acknowledging the stratifications of past practices, we are better able to see layered investments in present materials [...] we would like this project to recall the value of attending to the material archive, both past and current, in which we are always immersed” (116-117).

Student papers and other teaching materials also hold a wealth of information for practitioners, although some may question what benefits are derived from examining historical materials as common as student papers. Kathryn Fitzgerald, in “The Platteville Papers Revisited: Gender and Genre in a Normal School Writing Assignment,” argues:

From the perspective of cultural studies, the value of examining the writing of common people through the distanced lens of history is to recognize the effects of practices not visible in our interested, contemporary context. Teachers immersed in white, middle class American culture (the vast majority of teachers and professors) tend not to question goals and methods that their mainstream ideologies support. (115)

Holding a lens up to currently held beliefs is a popular mission of compositionists, many of whom believe that this challenging and questioning of preconceived beliefs highlights and remedies shortcomings in the field on instruction and scholarship. It is through these types of archives and archival research that voices are given to the voiceless. The work of Fitzgerald, and others, illustrates the point that the examination of common materials leads to innovative implications that extend beyond the source to contemporary classrooms. These smaller collections of materials have the greatest possibilities for social progress and exploration (117).

Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch, in “Invigorating Historiographic Practices in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, state:

the positive results of these types of archival research are at least threefold. First, the results comprise a variety of versions of what histories are and should be, implying that there is no dominant history, but, rather, many histories, each with merit and importance. Second, such studies stimulate one’s thinking in terms of which historical moments, people, and places merit our scholarly attention. Third, these studies reflect the way historiographical practice shifts in relation to the “questions and imperatives” of the present moment. (12)

As Thomas P. Miller and Joseph G. Jones note, “Our histories are not what they were but neither are we.” The historiographies resulting from archival studies demonstrate how history, “once compiled and written, falls apart, only to be recompiled and rewritten, regularly and purposefully” (Miller and Jones 436).

### Creating an Archive, Creating a Narrative

I was forced to examine my biases and put myself directly into this archival project when, while speaking with a department administrator about the goals of a possible Department of English archive, the administrator asked, “What do you want out of a departmental archive?” I was taken aback by the question and surprised at my inability to answer. I stammered a few lines about benefits for teaching assistants and historical materials, but the words felt rehearsed and inauthentic. Upon analyzing the odd exchange, I realized that I was hesitant because I only wanted out of the archive what I knew other composition scholars wanted out of an archive. Deciding what only I wanted seemed selfish and ignorant considering the other factors at play, but I wanted my compositionist agenda to be a part of any archival creation. The Department of English is home to not only faculty, but also staff, students, and teaching assistants, each with different desires. Reaching out to these various groups is a challenge not always undertaken, so I decided to conduct interviews and surveys in order to assess their departmental archive wants and needs. Through these interviews, conversations, and surveys, I have created my own narrative, which is a blend of their wants and needs and my own scholastic agenda. As my discussion of the archival turn suggests, those of us in composition studies both argue for and enact archival research; we necessarily become part of the narratives we compose.

Identifying the diversity and merits of the archive leads to painting brighter pictures of history. This identification inevitably creates a personal connection between the archive and its creator. Heidemarie Weidner, in “A Chair ‘Perpetually Filled by a

Female Professor,'” argues that established notions about history need to be questioned in order to create a fuller narrative and bring life to an entire period (58-59). Weidner advocates creating a narrative based on broad inquiry from archival sources such as minutes, university catalogues, lecture notes, diaries, faculty publications, student themes and journals, student magazines, and alumni memoirs. The researcher’s personal involvement with primary sources in the archive has the possibility of creating an eerily real type of time travel (59). Contextualized searches create histories that at times reflect, at times supplement, and at times complicate established historical narratives.

Creating these archival narratives can be thought of as modes of storytelling. Patrice Gray argues that storytelling often reveals more about the storyteller than the story itself, for the storyteller can only interpret the past through the lens of her own personal experiences and beliefs. Archives are never neutral spaces devoid of stories. The storyteller analyzing or examining the archive determines what is significant and what is of value and then shapes the space accordingly (178). The archival creator (or storyteller) does not have to abandon her roles as she establishes the archive, but an awareness of these roles is beneficial. Historiographical theory in composition studies conceives the archival creator as part of the project—a participant whose ethos is evident in her archival selections and choices. This relationship between the archive and the creator or researcher is often problematic because the creator has her own interests, prejudices, questions, and biased information. The creator should be honest and make these biased factors known to her audience. This honesty about personal goals helps the creator and the audiences affected by the archive define the scope of the project (Gaillet 36). Unearthing and interpreting facts, layering stories of rhetorical engagement, bringing to

light multiple histories and perspectives that reveal the complexities inherent in humanistic study, weaving facts and research into persuasive narratives is interesting and exciting work. Through this work, the archival creator becomes a filter and a lens—an integral and recognizable component of this archival project (37).

## The University of Memphis Department of English: An Archival Example

The University of Memphis Department of English has a rich and vibrant history, as it is one of the oldest departments on campus. Understanding and knowing this history is valuable because it tells how the department began and evolved into what it is now, but it is difficult to locate much history beyond the basic history of the university. The university itself was founded in 1909 as a part of a land grant awarded by the Tennessee Legislature. West Tennessee State Normal School opened its doors in 1912. In 1925, the name of the college changed to West Tennessee State Teachers College. The college changed names again in 1941, becoming Memphis State College. In 1950, graduate studies were initiated, and in 1954 the school switched from a quarter to a semester system. In 1957, the state legislature designated Memphis State full university status. In 1959, the university admitted its first black students, and the first doctoral programs began in 1966. In 1983, Memphis State University became the first public university in Tennessee to gain accreditation of its entire curriculum. In 1994, Memphis State University became the University of Memphis (English). The University of Memphis has undergone many historical changes, and, through almost the entire century that its doors have been open, it has housed a Department of English. The English department is one of the oldest departments on campus, and first-year composition has been a required class for undergraduates for decades. The English department, housed in Patterson Hall, has a rich historical tradition, has mentored many scholars, and has been home to several esteemed faculty members. It is challenging to find much information on the department,

its students, or former professors, however, because historical information about the department is scattered and limited.

The department does not have a formal archive, and, to the best of the current faculty's knowledge, has not undergone any steps to develop an archive in past decades. The department does keep track of student theses, dissertations, employment records, sample exams, faculty scholarships, and minutes from important meetings, but these are handled and kept by the office administrator in Patterson Hall. Eric Link, the Chair of the Department, is the first known initiate establishing a departmental archive, but the project is new and first steps are just now being taken.

Link hopes to create what I would deem a clerical archive to house documents such as minutes from meetings, minutes from committee gatherings, reports, forms, and other administrative paperwork in an organized space so interested parties can access the files if needed. Link wants paper copies of such materials due to the changing nature of technology and computer compatibility (Link interview). Perhaps, also, there is more allure to hard copies of materials rather than digitalized collections. As Ramsey states in "Viewing the Archive: the Hidden and the Digital," although an article of clothing might "look beautiful on screen, for example, if we cannot hear how the fabric sounds as it moves, or smell the fabric, or cannot observe the rips, stains, or stitching up close it loses its uniqueness" (85).

The only ephemera housed in Patterson Hall right now are old papers, files, and textbooks, which are in the process of being weeded through and discarded if deemed unnecessary. There is not a central location for the materials either, as they are scattered between classrooms, faculty offices, and other storage spaces. The department did once

publish a newsletter, which is considered by some to have information about this history of the department, but it is no longer published and past editions are now held by Dr. Gene Plunka (Plunka interview).

The only other place historical materials concerning the Department of English are located is the University of Memphis Special Collections Department. The purpose of the Special Collections Department (also known as the Mississippi Valley Collection) is to collect, organize, and make available information in many formats concerning the history of the University as well as the Mid-South area of Memphis and Mississippi (Preservation). The Special Collections' holdings include printed materials (books, maps, and periodicals), photographs, oral history interviews, postcards, and manuscript collections, but these materials are more related to the university's region rather than specific departments on campus. Although Special Collections has a wealth of information, there is not a unified, cohesive collection of materials related to the history of the English department.

Also absent from the department is a collection of teaching materials. Many faculty members readily and generously share syllabi, lecture notes, and other similar items, but there is no centralized location of materials. There is an instructional class for University of Memphis Graduate Teaching Assistants, which gives the instructors sample syllabi, assignment prompts, grading scales, and the like, but these are only available to participants enrolled in the class. Link does collect syllabi from each instructor on a semester basis, but these syllabi are kept in a location not frequented by faculty, staff, and graduate students (Link interview). Most do not know the location exists (Battle interview). Not only do most not know the location of the syllabi, they do not know why

the syllabi are collected. Some believe the syllabi are used for surveillance, but these notions have been neither confirmed nor denied by the department.

*University of Memphis Department of English Faculty and Staff*

I began my inquiry with a few senior faculty members of the department. I sent each an email stating that I was a graduate student of the department, conducting research for my M.A. thesis in Composition Studies. I told the faculty members that I was hoping to collect information about steps taken, if any, by past department chairs to implement a departmental archive, as well as any interest they had in the creation of an archive and what types of materials they felt the archive should possess. The answers from the professors varied. Some wanted a more official archive, while others mentioned the need for an archive that focused on student learning and departmental accountability. Gene Plunka, professor, responded that the department has never had its own in-house archive. He mentioned that it did have a departmental newsletter, of which he was the editor. He keeps many of the newsletters in this office but does not know what to do with them after he leaves the department. He stated that he is interested in a departmental archive that would offer a history of the department since its inception. When asked if he wanted a repository to store copies of his newsletters, he said, "I wouldn't want to keep the archive myself; otherwise, I would be interested" (Plunka interview).

Teresa Dalle, professor, had a response similar to that of Plunka. She said that as far as she knew the English department does not have, nor has ever had, a departmental archive. She, too, mentioned the former departmental newsletter and added that the newsletters might hold information of value to the history of the department. She said, "If we were to have an archive, I think we might consider placing all articles that related to

our department or its students or faculty, any books published by students or faculty, and any pictures we could take and keep” (Dalle interview). John Bensko, professor, also mentioned focusing a departmental archive on student needs. He stated that though he did not have anything to do with it, there is an archive with meeting minutes and other items of that nature. There are some things, he wrote, such as recordings of visiting lectures and readings by authors that would be very nice to have in an archive (Bensko interview).

Also focusing on student needs was Reginald Martin, professor, who believes that a departmental archive should benefit “student learning curves.” Martin wrote that the department has not had a historical archive in the past 37 years (the amount of time he has been with the department). Martin interestingly added that the archive should not contain anything that could be used in litigation concerning any faculty member (Martin interview). This legal focus was something not mentioned by any other faculty member, but it is an issue addressed by the Society of American Archivists, who state that confidential information, such as student grades or social security numbers should not be available in an archive of student materials due to privacy laws and protection of intellectual property (SAA).

Stephen Tabachnick, professor and former Chair of the Department, mentioned the need for clerical materials. He stated that official record-keeping documents should be housed in the English department, and he understands that some may want to include other important materials to help support an ongoing history of the department, but he is not sure if it is important to keep those types of records. He could be persuaded if someone made a good case for an inclusive archive, but, to date, no one has come forward to do so (Tabachnick interview). This comment stayed with me more than any

other made during the email exchanges because it was refreshingly honest and true. Many faculty members were open to the idea of an archive with a historical, exploratory focus, but no one wanted to make the first move for fear, perhaps, of having to tackle the project themselves.

Each professor had unique opinions about the history and future of the departmental archive, but none seemed to have a strong, confident knowledge of where current archival materials are housed, or how things were handled in previous decades. Although the professors mentioned above had beneficial thoughts and observations, perhaps the most valuable information came from James Newcomb. Newcomb is an associate professor of English who received his Ph.D. in English with a concentration in criticism from the University of Iowa. He has also taught at Loyola University in Chicago and at Huazhong Normal University in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. His research interests are critical theory, film history and criticism, and American popular culture. Newcomb has been with the department 40 years and is transitioning into emeritus status. I had the opportunity to speak with Newcomb and ask him about his previous experiences in the department, as well as ask him what he would like to see happen in the future concerning the implementation of a departmental archive. Newcomb had a great many thoughts and opinions concerning the matter, beginning with a list of needed archival materials.

Newcomb believes that a well-rounded departmental archive should have three focuses: administrative, academic, and historical. The administrative section of the archive should include annual budgets, minutes of department meetings, minutes of all committee meetings, department memos, correspondence between chairs and the dean,

copies of self-studies, copies of external reviewers' reports, copies of consultants' reports, equipment inventories, codifications of procedures addressed only generally in the English Department Policy and Procedures Manual (e.g. search procedures), and departmental rosters. The academic section of the archive should contain class schedules by terms; course syllabi; curriculum history; concentration histories; degree histories; and working papers of deliberations leading up to implementation of degree programs, curriculum, and other changes. These working papers, Newcomb states, should be included in the archive so a new chair or other faculty member can see the processes that take place before official documents are in their finished form. The historical part of the archive should contain department advertisements, press releases, ephemera of department history (e.g. printed programs of department events), news clippings, and a file of graduates—both graduate and undergraduate—including names and concentrations, and departmental newsletters.

Newcomb stressed the importance of including all three aspects in the departmental archive in order to facilitate faculty, staff, and graduate students. Newcomb recalled a time when he was asked to teach a literature course that he had never taught before. He wanted to stay true to the department-mandated learning outcomes, but he could not find a syllabus for the class. Newcomb had to create his own learning outcomes for the course as a result of the lack of information. This is not his only story of coming up short when searching for important documents. Newcomb also recalled a time 20 years ago when the department began its Ph.D. program. For years, Newcomb said, the department lacked procedures for student dissertations. The problem was remedied, but Newcomb said that the department lacked procedures for other things, such as hiring

faculty or awarding tenure. Newcomb believes that the University of Memphis Department of English has better faculty than it deserves because of its loose faculty-candidate wooing policies, but he warns that these loose rules could create inadequate candidate courting with a stricter chair.

When asked about the limitations of creating a departmental archive, such as lack of archival staff or limited location, Newcomb shook his head in defiance. When pushed further about why he wanted a departmental archive, Newcomb replied, “It’s not ‘do you want it’ [...] it just has to be. You need space? Make it. You need staff? Find it.” He said that some people might fight systematized data because that limits wiggle room and creates more accountability, but he stressed the need for one voice for the English department. When asked what his argument would be in favor of a comprehensive departmental archive that included not only the administrative documents but also the historical, Newcomb responded, “I don’t have to argue for it. Tell me the arguments against it. To have any reservations about this type of archive is obscurantist. You know what that means, right?” he asked me pointedly, “Because I want that point to get across. It is purely obscurantist not to want a living history” (Newcomb interview).

Newcomb mentioned former River City Writing Series speakers, such as Seamus Heaney, Eudora Welty, and John Updike: “I doubt many people here know that we had guest speakers of that caliber. I realize that, once I pack up and leave, that all of my knowledge about the department—about its history—is gone.” I asked Newcomb what he plans to do with his collection of papers, books, and other ephemera once he retires, and he said that he does not have a formal plan at this time. I asked him if he would consider leaving anything to the department, and he shook his head. He stated that he would have

a difficult time giving treasured items to the department right now because he does not know what would be done with them. If there were an established archive, however, he would be open to the idea of leaving something behind because he knows it would be taken care of and appreciated. This is what attracts attaches Newcomb to the archival project—his appreciation of history and what it gives to those in the department. He says that it is difficult to implement archival change because “there are people who don’t know their history, and people who don’t want their history known.” But, he adds, those barriers should not distract from the needs of the department. “It can be done,” he states, “All you need is support” (Newcomb interview).

As my conversation with Newcomb continued, I could not help but think of the scholarship of North, Donahue, and Falbo. North describes historical inquiry as more than events in an agreed upon temporal order (69). North states that historical inquiry takes place in two stages: the empirical and the interpretive (71). In the empirical stage, the historian seeks to simply establish the facts. In the interpretive stage, the historian creates her narrative. I had done my research, and now I was having my own narrative moment, much like Donahue and Falbo did while researching Francis March’s contributions to composition at Lafayette College. I realized that this was the reason I, too, felt strongly about the implementation of a departmental archive that not only housed clerical materials or established collections, but also a “living archive” – that collection of historical materials that tells the stories of who we are and how we got here. Answering the question of what I wanted out of an archive no longer felt selfish or forced by years of reading composition scholarship. I finally understood the importance of collecting, examining, and interpreting multiple histories past what I had read in published work.

Newcomb had additional suggestions for the departmental archive. Keeping all of the archival materials in one room could be difficult since there are two unrelated purposes. He advocates moving historical materials to the departmental library, housed on the second floor of Patterson Hall. Many do not know that this room was specifically built for housing archival materials. Two married English professors who possessed the largest-known privately held collection of William Blake texts and ephemera designed the room. The English department wanted to keep the collection of Blake materials in Patterson Hall, but the couple would not move the materials into the building until a room was constructed to their specifications. Understanding the need to properly preserve the collections, the department complied, building paneled walls to keep out moisture and a temperature setting ideal for preservation purposes. The collection stayed for some time, but when one of them was denied tenure, the Blake collection left Patterson Hall, and as Chairs came and went, the departmental library changed designs to reflect the trends of the time. Although it is not the architectural structure it once was, it is still an ideal location for housing archival materials (Newcomb interview).

After reaching out to senior faculty members, I sought the opinions and recommendations of other faculty and staff members. In order to reach out to these groups, I created a short online survey through Qualtrics that asked about frequency of archival use, interest in archival use, and suggestions for archival materials needed in the English department. Ten faculty members completed the survey, seven citing needs for archives in scholastic research, and three citing needs for clerical archives. More than half of the survey participants in this subgroup stated that they would find archival materials housed in the English department helpful and enjoyable. While some faculty

members stated that archival research was paramount to their scholarship and needs to be easily accessible, others commented that in-house materials were of no interest to them because digital archives sufficed for their academic needs. When asked to choose what items would be most beneficial in a departmental archive from a predetermined list, 88% said M.A. guidelines, Ph.D. guidelines, and sample course syllabi would be beneficial. The second most popular included materials were departmental history, teaching materials, lists of past English majors and graduate students, minutes from meetings, and faculty and staff rosters. Only two participants showed interest in the inclusion of textbooks in the archive. A few faculty members included their own suggestions of beneficial materials, such as the various reports generated by the department for accreditation purposes, a list of B.A. graduates who go on to graduate programs, and a list of Ph.D. graduates who received jobs (locations included).

Not only did the faculty members have suggestions for departmental archival materials, they also had explanations for why they wanted such an archive. One faculty member wrote that it would be a benefit for the department to have important and historical documents gathered in one place for future reference because work in the department tends to disappear over time. Many agreed that an archive would help preserve the history of the department as well as serve as a useful resource. One faculty member wrote:

I think the archive will help build a ‘true’ history of the department’s evolution as a southern, urban research university’s primary department of literature and composition. Moreover, it will provide current and future

faculty, staff, and administrators with the data that will help them understand the department's culture and population.

Another faculty member had a more student-centered reason, writing that she wanted to help students be more effective on the job market. Because faculty members have to frequently produce reports that require researching old students and course schedules, a departmental archive is something they would find beneficial to help them with these reports and other self-studies.

Two staff members participated in the survey, and, although both said that they do not use the archives for scholastic or clerical purposes, they both showed interest in the possibility of a departmental archive. One staff member stated that an archive would be more interesting than useful to her: "As a part-time/adjunct/temporary instructor, I would rarely have need of such material, but I also believe such a collection would benefit many others in the department." When asked what types of materials they would like included in a departmental archive, the two staff members cited a need for historical materials related to the English department, sample course syllabi, and teaching materials (i.e. lesson plans, lecture notes, assignments prompts, etc.). When asked to elaborate on their interests, one staff member wrote:

It would be good to know who the past chairs were and their contributions to the English Department, how the English Department has evolved from a small unit to one of the biggest on campus. Past course syllabi are always helpful when a student is trying to compare what is being taught now compared to what might have been taught in the past.

*The University of Memphis Department of English Graduate Students*

Not only was I interested in hearing the opinions and suggestions of faculty and staff members, I also wanted input from Graduate Teaching Assistants because they are often the most active department members, being not only instructors but also students and researchers. Their perspectives were, as expected, informative and the opinions they gave were intelligent and thorough. Six Graduate Teaching Assistants participated in the online survey, half stating that they used archives for scholastic research purposes.

Although only half mentioned a need for archival scholastic research, all were interested in the implementation of a departmental archive. Perhaps predictably, the Graduate Teaching Assistants were most interested in an archive that includes teaching materials, such as course syllabi, lecture notes, sample papers, assignment prompts, and grading criteria. One survey participant wrote that it would be nice to have a library of some of the best writing, both classic and current, and books on writing instruction. Another participant gave similar reasoning for seeking these types of teaching materials and stated that having an easily accessible archive of teaching materials would be immensely helpful in keeping teaching methods from becoming static. The same participant also stated that she felt a lack of guidance for graduate students. She added, “While I suspect it would take time to assemble the kinds of materials to make such an archive most useful, the effort wouldn't be for nothing.”

Some of the Graduate Teaching Assistants echoed the responses made by faculty members for department preservation. One Graduate Teaching Assistant wrote:

Aside from the practical aspect of aiding in research, I think the university should conserve our history in every department and that we should have

more available than just the little museum room in Brister, or the old year books [sic] in the library. I think it would give the people in our department more of a sense of belonging to a place with traditions and a heritage. It would lend an air of importance beyond the daily work.

Other participants interested in departmental ephemera mentioned a desire for faculty-authored publications and past and present faculty rosters complete with pictures and biographical information.

I was also able to speak directly with three Graduate Teaching Assistants about the implementation of a departmental archive. All agreed that they wanted teaching materials included in the collection. When asked what types of materials were most beneficial, they mentioned course syllabi, lecture notes, lesson plans, and a few sample assignments. One teaching assistant recalled a time when she was asked to teach an upper-level writing class. Since this class was not a general education requirement, there were fewer materials at her disposal than, say, with a freshman composition course. She asked some faculty members for old syllabi, lecture notes, and sample assignment prompts, and, though they were all helpful, there was difficulty locating anything of substance. The only syllabus she could find pertained to an online version of the class she was teaching. This did not translate well into an interactive classroom, and she was forced to re-do her syllabus in the middle of the semester, as well as change a few assignments. Although her class handled the changes well, she wished she had a place where she could go to obtain pertinent teaching materials. When asked if she preferred to access those types of materials in a print or online format, she replied that either would suffice, so long as there was public knowledge of the materials' location.

### Establishing a Living Archive

As I spoke to faculty and staff members and conducted my own research, I realized that creating the departmental archive is a project that cannot be undertaken and completed in a matter of months. Of course, by its very nature, a living archive is never finished because of its ongoing, evolutionary nature. A living archive has the potential to serve all facets of the English department, which is challenging due to the department's various, changing needs. The obstacles to establishing a living departmental archive, however, should not prevent creation of this type of collection. While a departmental archive may not bring departmental harmony and advancement, a living archive can benefit the department members on many levels. In this section I outline a plan for establishing a living archive.

To begin conceptualizing a living archive for the Department of English, it is necessary to first think of the project in terms of spaces. Not all of the material can be contained in office files, nor can it all be compressed and uploaded to an online cloud. Newcomb's advice to divide the material into three distinct spaces—administrative, academic, and historical—provides a useful framework. This division makes possible addressing the various needs of faculty, staff, and students. The administrative space of the archive would address the department's clerical needs, such as keeping records, files, and other documents. The academic space would house resources for instructors, such as assignment prompts, syllabi, and other teaching materials. The historical space of the archive benefits a larger audience and would preserve the English department's past and its legacy. Materials included in the archive should not only benefit the researcher, but

they should also benefit those touched by the archive. Archives and the materials within them should be guided by questions that are of a universally applicable fashion. Although a researcher may have a certain agenda, she should ask herself if that agenda benefits a larger audience while she is choosing archival materials.

### *First Steps*

Organizing and codifying archival materials is a challenge for even the most experienced archival agents. Methods of storing, coding, and retrieval that work well for one type of archive are not necessarily appropriate for the management of another. Also, the implementation of digital archives adds another layer of complexity to the archival process. If archival management were simple, there would be no need for the type of research and theorizing undertaken by those in composition studies (Gaillet 37). Often, trying to establish an archive sends the creator back to the archives for assistance.

The Society of American Archivists provides suggestions and guidelines for setting up an academic departmental archive. They suggest beginning the archival process with the creation of a collection policy. This policy states the purpose and goals of the collection and will assist in the selection of materials. This is a formal step typically utilized in the establishment of traditional archives, but it is still relevant to this project. Articulating a set of goals for the living archive is important because there is not a lone staff member assigned to the project. Since many hands will touch the departmental archive, it is helpful to have a list or guideline of acceptable materials. For example, while it may be interesting to a few departmental members to peruse old textbooks, many members might not find these resources useful. If textbooks take up

physical space in the archive but are not being utilized frequently, it might be best to have a rule excluding textbooks from the departmental archive.

In order to establish these goals and policies, I recommend creation of an ad hoc departmental committee who can convene and identify acceptable contents and guiding principles. There should be representatives from each track within the department (ESL, Textual Studies, Composition Studies and Professional Writing, and Creative Writing), staff members, and teaching assistants so needs are met for each group. The committee should also create a policy statement, which takes the mission statement a step further. This document describes how the mission will be carried out (General Commission on Archives and History). Having a specific mission or goal is beneficial to success in the archives. Many archival organizations suggest creating a mission statement that explains the benefit of the archive and why it exists.

After guidelines have been established, a guide to the collection should be created. In archival terms, this guide is called a Finding Aid. Sometimes conceptual, sometimes not, it can be a fairly simple list of subjects and where each is located, or it can be a more detailed list of file series, sub-series, folders, and items in each folder. The Finding Aid can be created as a hard copy, an electronic database, or both. The degree of detail in a Finding Aid and the format used depends on who will be using the archive and where it is housed (SAA). Although finding aids differ greatly across archival repositories in form, style, and layout, the most successful finding aids contain certain basic elements: introductory and administrative information; a biographical or historical sketch of the author or creator of the collection; a scope and content note providing a

brief overall summary of the collection; and a container list or inventory of the contents of the collection (Morris and Rose 67).

After the committee has established principles, acceptable materials, and a Finding Aid, an archival agent should be appointed. This does not have to be a full-time obligation, but there does need to be someone responsible for the archival arrangement and preservation process. This archival agent does not need to be someone newly hired by the department with a background in library science; rather, the agent could be an interested faculty member working with a few graduate assistants who can use the guidelines and Finding Aid to select and discard materials as well as keep them organized and updated. This does not have to be a complicated job if the proper primary steps are taken.

#### *Administrative Space*

The administrative component of the living archive meets the needs of department administration. The Department of English's main office produces countless documents and materials. The department saves its documents and materials, and when particular documents and materials are no longer needed or relevant for daily operations, they are removed. Despite their unusable status, many of the documents and materials have legal, fiscal, administrative, and historical importance, and should be included in an administrative archive.

This space or section of the living archive has a practical value because it holds information about past policies and decisions. If there is a policy dispute or change in departmental leadership, for example, this archival space and its records provide a valuable source of administrative continuity and accountability. This administrative

archive should contain both print and digitized materials. With the constant changes and advancements in technology, it is not wise to have only digital materials. Saving documents on a jump drive or in an online cloud may seem efficient at the moment, but one must remember that it, at one time, it was technologically advanced to save information on a floppy disk. Important documents should be accessible in both print and digital form to insure protection from outdated.

### *Academic Space*

In order to create an effective departmental archive with an academic focus, all involved with the archive need to be aware of its importance and how their roles contribute to the success of the archive. As Julie Garbus points out in “Vida Scudder in the Classroom and in the Archives,” college students can be inconsistent record keepers because “most students throw away what course notes they have taken, not valuing them and assuming no one else would be interested either” (91). Scholars and practitioners who are interested in these types of documents and teaching materials, Garbus states, have a duty to “preserve existing records, make others aware that they might be important, and make sure of existing archival materials at our own institutions” (91). Few, if any, professors want their offices stuffed with student papers and other teaching materials, and university archives do not want the large tasks of handling this type of archive for the sole use of one department. Activist academics, as Garbus calls them, might not see the value in these types of academic materials as they would with other materials contributing to more direct social change, and overworked instructors and uninterested students might throw away interesting documents (92). This is the challenge presented to advocates of the living archive. Archival records that remain can be familiar

and noticeably incomplete, but, with a heightened awareness of the value and benefits of a living archive, perhaps these important materials can be given a voice and a place within the English department rather than a descent into obscurity.

The academic space of the living archive should contain teaching materials helpful to instructors and faculty members. The question, of course, is which materials should be included, and where should they be stored. Academic materials are best located in an online archive because the items are more current in nature and quickly evolving; therefore, they can be better managed in an online space. Also, an online space for the academic archive is acceptable because the documents included in this archive are not ones with notable physical attributes. For example, it is not necessary to note the frailty of an old syllabus or the smell of lecture notes. This archive's main goal is the transmittal of information through quick and efficient means. Online archival collections are capable of holding a wealth of information and content and are easily accessible to a wide population. Elizabeth Yakel, in "Searching and Seeking in the Deep Web: Primary Sources on the Internet," states that most archives have a web component to them. Some websites list contact information or available hours, while others list their comprehensive holdings (103). Other online archives have documents readily available.

Although there is no online archive for the University of Memphis Department of English, there is a plan to create a website for The First-Year Composition Program. This website will be accessible through a link from the Department of English's main website and will include materials helpful to both students and faculty. There are concerns, however, about which materials should be made public and which, if any, should be password protected. I suggest making assignment prompts, assignment explanations, and

grading criteria accessible on the public website so that students are able to comprehend the assignment and its purpose. Sample assignments (for example, an A paper, B paper, C paper, etc.), lesson plans, lecture notes, sample course syllabi, and other similar teaching materials should only be accessible to the instructors. Password-protecting these documents protects instructor credibility. If a student sees that her instructor is copying materials from a website, she may falsely assume that her instructor is only a messenger from a larger department head or organization. Although some would argue that students benefit from seeing sample papers and lecture notes, this often leads to imitation rather than inspiration. Sample papers should only be accessible to instructors, as they are the ones who often have difficulty with the subjective nature of grading.

### *Historical Space*

The historical component of the living archive has the largest scope and potential to serve faculty, staff, and students. The preservation of historical materials protects the legacy of a department. This may not be a benefit that most departmental members think about on a regular basis, but when those members inevitably leave the department, the ephemera is all that is left behind. Serving as trustees for the future provides wisdom for future generations. Assuming this responsibility cannot be accomplished through short-term thinking and lack of planning. Furthermore, creating an archive that holds noteworthy historical items has the ability to become an ongoing foundation of the department's academic identity.

In creating an archive documenting the history of a department, items to consider will contain information about faculty, staff, and student projects, special programs and events, departmental restructuring, interesting correspondence, accreditation processes,

self-studies, exhibits, photos, important visitors, newsletters and brochures, memorabilia, and important milestones for the department (SAA). There should also be space allocated for publications authored by faculty members from the department—both present and past. My survey of graduate students indicated the “desire to see such publications,” not knowing if a space currently existed that contained these types of texts.

Another consideration stemming from my investigation came from faculty members nearing retirement. As one can imagine, a faculty member who has been with the department for several decades has quite the collection of books, papers, and other similar items. Faculty members nearing retirement currently do not want to leave their possessions with the English department because they do not know where their items will be kept, who will look after them, who will see them, etc. The faculty agree that they would be more willing to share their personal collections with the department if there was a publically known, well-tended space designed for historical materials. This does not mean that everything donated by retiring or retired faculty members must be kept in the living archive. Including all of the materials from a donor into a given collection has the potential to create an archive that is too cumbersome and overwhelming for the available physical space. Rather, the Finding Aid and established principles would serve as guidelines of what is and is not pertinent to the aims of the departmental archive. If both the donor and the archival collector know where the materials will be kept and what types of materials will be kept or discarded, this mutually beneficial understanding would lead to a more prosperous collection.

Although there is some debate about the department’s capabilities for holding large quantities of physical materials, there is space available in the departmental library.

As Newcomb mentioned, this space in Patterson Hall was built specifically for housing archival materials. Although it has undergone some alterations that make it less suitable than it used to be for these materials, it still has the structure appropriate for archival preservation. Some argue that digitizing these historical documents is necessary and valuable because it preserves fragile documents, staves off future damage, and keeps the archive relevant to the online researcher, but there are some limitations to digitizing archival items (Ramsey 83). Money, technology, and copyright complications are all things to consider when deciding whether to create a digital archive. While some believe that not digitizing archival items leads to holes in history, that stance assumes that history is already complete, when, in reality, history is already riddled with holes. Also, there is something tangible lost in the digitalization of documents. Being able to touch and smell documents, according to Alexis Ramsey, are important aspects of archival work because these sensory experiences allow the researcher to become a part of the collection (84). This is an intimate connection with the archive that cannot be achieved through an online platform.

## Final Thoughts

Archives preserve smaller histories that contribute to a larger narrative that has the ability to shape specific intellectual projects and yield a rich and complicated historical story. This story is composed of smaller, local histories that hold the potential to test practitioner and academic theories as well as shape departmental identity through the examination of our past identity and future possibilities. Where we are going and who we can become can be created in part through the proposed living archive.

Often, the past, present, and future have complicated relationships within the archive. Such complications become rewarding through what Carolyn Steedman calls “particular practices of reading,” ways of piecing together fragments of the past and paying attention to small details and underlying values (Moon 236). Jacques Derrida writes, “As much as and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should call into question the coming of the future” (qtd. in Moon 237). Archives allow documents to speak and bring into visibility what was once forgotten or removed from view. Jean Ferguson Carr, in her Afterword to *Local Histories*, states that reflection on the past and how it articulates potential for the present and future is a rewarding practice because it requires making distinctions that shape teaching and learning, and that frame disciplinary practices and values: “As Derrida pointed out, archival work pressures the ‘coming of the future’, suggesting new avenues for research and inquiry, jostling settled patterns to make way for new connections or threads” (238).

New connections and threads can be found within the proposed living archive—which reaches out not only to academics but also to practitioners and administrators

through its hybrid nature and purposes. The living archive is rich because it contains not only ephemera of past generations, but also more current documents and items that have more immediate benefit. By reaching out to all facets of the English department, the living archive has the potential to shape departmental identity through an assessment of departmental needs and requirements, an examination of the department's past practices, and an assessment of the department's future values and goals.

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