

Book Review

Tarez Samra Graban and Wendy Hayden, eds. *Teaching through the Archives: Text, Collaboration, and Activism*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2022.

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A collaborative project, co-edited and with many chapters co-authored, *Teaching through the Archives: Text, Collaboration, and Activism* reflects on how the archival turn operates in rhetoric and composition. The book is motivated by a desire to trace the disciplinary evolution of rhetoric and composition while simultaneously exploring how teaching and learning through archives can transform the field—and, in turn, academic practice. More than a methodological handbook, the volume presents a provocative challenge to the way scholars conceptualize archives, knowledge production, and pedagogy. However, the book's specialized language and frameworks may make it less accessible to readers from other disciplines, hence limiting interdisciplinary engagement.

Beyond its collaborative approach, the book challenges existing archival research practices, including the status quo of the “recovery and redemption” paradigm, which has traditionally defined archival research in rhetoric and composition. The book is a manifestation of its editors and contributors’ desire to move past the reverence to archives that the paradigm calls for; an invitation to think of “the archive as collaborator, not master,” as a space of epistemic possibility (xiii); and a series of propositions that consider “archived objects and historicized spaces to function both as critical subjects and as critical agents” (4) and explore a dialectic relationship between archival research and rhetoric and composition pedagogy.

The book is structured into three sections: “Archives as Text,” “Archives as Collaboration,” and “Archives as Activism” (7). Each chapter is an example of how teaching about, for, and through archives teaches different skills to students, with each contribution narrating a unique experience of teaching a course that grows with and from a pedagogy of archives (2). Even though the book’s structure risks

compartmentalizing what are inherently interconnected approaches to archives, it also allows for the exploration of archival pedagogies from different perspectives. The contributions recount the making of writing courses that model the use of archival research about diverse topics, archival research about rhetoric and composition, and writing about or for archives. Many of the contributions are reflections on how teaching with archives is iterative and creates a new temporality within the course and between its different versions every time it is taught. Woven in the texts are references to student feedback as learning opportunities to change archive-informed pedagogies. Although deeply rooted in a disciplinary discourse, the book's contributions are relevant to all writing-based disciplines since writing is inextricable from the experience of teaching and learning at the university level. The invitation to critically engage with archives as spaces that construct knowledge and are not free from biases, to think about, with, and through them, can benefit people who teach and research outside rhetoric and composition.

The first section, "Archives as Text," opens with a chapter by Lisa Mastrangelo about a course that invites students to learn about local histories through university collections, encouraging them to grapple with research questions that may not have discrete answers and the complexities of what they may have understood as failure or as impossible. Subsequent chapters in this section offer additional nuanced approaches to archival research. Lisa Shaver's chapter reflects on a course that aims to teach about feminism through university archival collections, specifically thinking with critical imagination not only to "understand the past, but also to illuminate contemporary contexts" (49). Through this archival research, students examine the history of feminism in the university and create a dialogic relationship with the women they encounter in the archives. Jane Greer's chapter explores emotion and affect in archival research and what they enable in archival relationality and pedagogy. The text considers the students' experiences—as shared with the author—of learning about their present and future through the past.

The ethical dimensions of archival work also emerge in Katherine E. Tirabassi's chapter, which focuses on a course that uses archival assignments to help students face the ethical challenges of writing stories, "to develop a collaborative code of ethics about creating stories about the past" (76). By working with archival documents, students confront complex questions of temporality, examining how the stories they write might fill, perpetuate, or subvert archival gaps. By inviting rhetoric graduate students to examine rhetoric and composition archival documents in university collections, the course described in James P. Beasley's chapter leads the students to consider their own professionalization as future professors in the field and their position within the institutional space. Rather than focusing on the archive as a space to frame the primary source, which the recovery paradigm centres, the authors posit that the invitation to think about the archive as a space that illuminates the secondary source teaches the students even more about rhetoric and allows for a recontextualized reading of the primary sources.

The second section, "Archives as Collaboration," understands archives as collaborative spaces of knowledge production. It starts with a chapter by Jennifer

Enoch, Megan Keaton, Ellen Cecil-Lemkin, and Travis Maynard detailing a course that invites students to take part in cataloguing and curating an archival collection. Through the internship program, student interns learn and practice writing styles specific to archives, which they can later use in various professional settings. Shirley K Rose, Glenn C. W. Newman, and Robert P. Spindler's chapter explores archival research as a space for interdisciplinary collaboration between graduate students and faculty across departments. The text focuses on listening to the archives and collaborators, and the ethics of care such listening implies and teaches students (121). The productive tensions between archival preservation and rhetoric principles of "heteroglossia" and "recursive context and continuous circulation" emerge in Jenna Morton-Aiken and Robert Schwegler's chapter (136). By reading archival practice as a rhetorical exercise, the chapter embraces the inherently changing nature of archives, highlighting their gaps and absences as productive spaces of learning—a useful lesson for graduate students in both rhetoric and composition and library studies. Understanding archives as a space of collaboration calls for breaking the closed archival circuit, encouraging students to see their interventions as part of a symbiotic relationship between the archive and the user or visitor.

By bridging students' everyday digital practices with professional archival technical work, the course described in Erin Brock Carlson, Michelle McMullin, and Patricia Sullivan's chapter reimagines archives as dynamic, multi-modal spaces of knowledge production. The assignments allow students to understand "archive-as-container," "archive-as-discourse," and "archive-as-database" (160), in turn building a complex understanding of recordkeeping, which contributes to developing their ability for collaborative projects and communication. The authors also invite teachers to consider archival and recordkeeping practices as already integrated into their pedagogy. Jonathan Buehl, Tamar Chute, and Laura Kissel's chapter reflects on their experience teaching proposal writing through professional writing in the archives. The course teaches students about writing in the workplace for diverse purposes, all while contributing to the archives by assisting archivists in their writing tasks for "acquisition, description, preservation, and access" (179).

The book's third section, titled "Archives as Activism," focuses on what students can contribute to archives of activist movements and how they can use archives for activism and social transformation. Through situated research practices, students learn to critically interrogate institutional narratives and their positionality within broader historical contexts. Laura Proszak and Ellen Cushman's chapter describes how students learn to negotiate their sense of place within the institution and with non-institutional partners, collaborators, and communities. The students engage with archival research, both within the university and considering the university's role in neighbouring communities. Drawing on Walter Mignolo's "epistemic delinking" concept (2009, 197), the chapter presents archives as a tool for unlearning institutional narratives.

Janice W. Fernheimer, Beth L. Goldstein, Sarah Dörpinghaus, and Douglas A. Boyd's chapter examines how, through the process of logging and indexing interviews, their course taught students listening and recordkeeping, providing

them with ethical methods to learn from and preserve materials. Questions of ethics are also explored in Courtney Rivard's chapter, which recounts a series of course assignments involving Wikipedia. One of the intentions of the course is to fill in the gaps of Wikipedia's archive and question the power underlying knowledge platforms available to students. The assignments also allow students, through creating and revising articles, to learn that writing is not fixed, that it can constantly change, and that it is a fluid exercise.

The afterword, written by Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Katherine H. Adams, reflects on the purpose of the book project. A wide range of contributions for various strategies of archival instruction, the chapters present students as archival researchers, curators, rhetors, and audiences (300). More than a collection of pedagogical strategies, this book represents a critical intervention in how we teach archival research, challenging scholars to see archives not as passive repositories, but as active, transformative spaces of intellectual engagement. By repositioning archives as collaborative, activist spaces of knowledge production, the collection offers a nuanced framework for understanding how historical materials can actively shape scholarly and pedagogical approaches. The archives offer a space to rethink and redo rhetoric and composition praxis, modelling what they could also offer to other disciplines. To that end, the book's appendices provide documentation to support the chapters, including templates for assignments, feedback forms, writing prompts, and resources that the reader can use for their work or in the courses they teach.

References

- Mignolo, Walter D. 2009. "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought, and Decolonial Freedom." *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (7–8): 159–81.