Archival Research Methods

Content and Objectives of the Lecture and Group Work on the Lecture Topic:

Archival theory, methodology, and practice together constitute Archival Science, a professional field that centers around several core concepts, including the Record, Recordkeeping, the Archive, Memory, Evidence and Accountability. Archival Studies refers to the rapidly growing multi- and transdisciplinary body of professional and disciplinary scholarship that addresses these concepts, related concepts, and other aspects that relate in some way to the construction, representations, roles, practices and metaphors of the Archive in society. This lecture will provide an overview of how these concepts have been defined, and then discuss some of the frameworks, methodologies and research designs that have been/can be employed to identify, explain and examine these concepts and other phenomena within Archival Science and Archival Studies.

Objectives:

- Introduce key research studies and methodological approaches in Archival Science and Archival Studies.
- Be able to define and discuss concepts that are central to Archival Science.
- Be able to identify and demonstrate how different methodologies and research designs can be employed within Archival Science and Archival Studies more broadly, especially in order to investigate topics relating to central concepts.

Assignment:
Either:

Prepare a literature review for research proposal:

You will identify literature that you believe might be relevant to a topic you are hoping to research. The literature will quite likely be drawn from more than one field. As you read that literature, use it to help refine your research topic or question – does it provide you with work you can build on? What is already known about your topic? Does the literature help you identify gaps where research is necessary? Does it identify key questions requiring further research? Does it provide you with examples of useful definitions, theoretical frameworks, prior successful research designs? Does it motivate you to work in a particular area? Does it help you narrow down your topic? For some topics, you will find there is a considerable amount of literature and you will need to be strategic about which are the richest and most central and relevant pieces to include in your review. For many archival topics, however, there is a paucity of research literature and you will have to contemplate how to locate it and what to do when little can be found that would be helpful to you.

When you have identified a corpus of relevant and useful literature, write up a literature review in whatever organizational structure would be most appropriate for your proposed research – for example, you might arrange it thematically, chronologically, or by discipline. Try to focus on relevancy, coherency, and the most salient points in the works when you are putting together your review. Also, include a statement that documents your search process so that your readers will know where you looked, and why.

Or:

Prepare a research design:

Your research design should include the following components:

- a statement of what you intend to study (this often takes the form of research goals, research questions, or research hypotheses). Make sure that the scope of work is appropriate for the kind of project you are proposing;
- definitions of key terms and concepts (make sure you indicate how you arrived at your definitions – it is fine to use someone else’s as long as you can justify them as being rigorously conceived and appropriate for your proposed research)
- a statement regarding why your topic is significant and original
- a brief indication of any limitations of the research you are proposing
- a discussion, including a brief literature review, of the method(s) and/or framework(s) you plan to use, including their potential strengths and weaknesses
- if appropriate, a statement about your own stance and background
- a step-by-step outline of your research design, e.g., what would be your research setting and/or population? On what basis would these be selected? How would you gain entrée? What ethical issues might you confront and how would you
address them? What would be the sequence of your research activities? What would be your estimated timeline?

- a discussion of the kinds of data or outcomes you expect and how you propose to analyze or frame these
- a discussion of any other issues you might see arising, e.g., funding or travel requirements, language concerns, technological needs.

Readings:


http://www.mybestdocs.com/cook-t-pastprologue-ar43fml.htm


McKemmish, Sue, Gilliland-Sweetland, Anne, and Eric Ketelaar. "'Communities of Memory': Pluralizing Archival Research and Education Agendas," Archives and Manuscripts 33 (2005): 146-75. Available: