

# Supporting Teaching with Primary Sources at California State University, Northridge

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

In 2019-2020, librarians at California State University Northridge (CSUN) participated in a multi-institutional research study coordinated by Ithaka S+R exploring how instructional faculty engage and teach undergraduate students with primary sources. Locally, the research team conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with CSUN instructors who teach with primary sources to investigate and make actionable recommendations for how the library, and other campus stakeholders, can best support faculty and students.

## FINDINGS

### Course Design

Teaching with primary sources is a standard practice in some disciplines, particularly in the humanities where scholarship relies heavily on primary source research. Most participants in the study incorporated primary sources into their course design as a way to encourage deeper analysis and critical thinking among their students. As such, most opted not to use textbooks or secondary sources and tended to cobble together their own collections of primary sources for their classes. This was partly out of necessity since published course readers tend to be limited to certain topics and disciplines; and because the participants were conscientious of course material costs for their students.

### Pedagogy & Critical Thinking

Participants described several reasons for teaching with primary sources such as subverting classroom hierarchies and positioning students to interpret material firsthand without outside influence. For many instructors, teaching with primary sources cultivates students' enthusiasm and connection to the material, especially when diverse voices are incorporated. They also wanted students to be confident and capable of applying critical thinking skills outside the classroom. These transferable skills include having meaningful conversations, informed opinions, and understanding context around an issue.

### Student Learning & Primary Sources

Many participants addressed students' discomfort with using primary sources for the first time. They described a steep learning curve for students when finding and choosing sources, including how to use primary sources in their research assignments and how to construct an argument around these sources. Students who are unaccustomed to close, analytical reading and archaic or scholarly language also struggle with focus and comprehension of texts. Faculty report that students are often passive consumers of information who struggle to engage with primary sources beyond recall of surface-level questions. Furthermore, many students don't have the historical or cultural contextual information to effectively interpret primary sources. This

is especially true when dealing with non-Western history or non-textual source material like artefacts and oral interviews. Finally, students often express frustration over the difficulty of learning to use archives and the limitations of archive holdings.

Many participants noted that spending additional time and direction to assist students with context and language can be beneficial. For example, faculty might provide a glossary or spend class time analyzing a text as a class in order to introduce the basics of reading and analyzing primary sources. Scaffolding assignments or introducing primary sources to students through smaller assignments throughout the semester, is another widely reported strategy to build student skills and confidence. While this requires additional work for faculty, participants reported that it was highly effective in building student learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

By examining course design, pedagogy, and common student challenges, our findings revealed three key themes: 1) primary source comprehension strengthens information literacy; 2) instructors need more support when teaching with primary sources; and 3) learning and equity gaps must be addressed through course design.

### Primary source comprehension and information literacy

Participants overwhelmingly preferred using primary sources in place of textbooks for both instructional content and to teach information literacy skills, particularly critical thinking, and cultural and historical contextualization.

### Course preparation and the need for more support

Because participants often taught large general education classes with students of varying academic backgrounds, abilities, and interests, they stressed the need to teach primary source literacy earlier and more consistently. Preparation was a significant hurdle, particularly finding appropriate primary sources and high quality, low-cost or no-cost editions and translations of primary sources. Navigating the vast and seemingly disjointed array of primary sources and tools available online is challenging for students and instructors alike.

### Student-centered course design

In general, those who developed successful course design models usually did so through trial and error or with assistance from an archivist or librarian. Overall, they found that assignments requiring students to conduct original primary source research were less successful particularly in lower-division courses where there was little or no coordination with an archivist or librarian. Students were most successful when scaffolding techniques were used to strengthen their primary source comprehension skills over time.

# OPPORTUNITIES

## Welcome support from the library

Connect with a library liaison when designing or revamping a course. Librarians can help identify appropriate low-cost and no-cost primary source materials. They can also provide targeted information literacy sessions to help students effectively navigate and evaluate information resources, including primary source materials. Instructors can also embed a librarian in a course, ensuring that students have access to specialized research assistance throughout the semester. This is helpful when students are learning new modes of research that require incremental but consistent information literacy training.

## Training and tools

One of the top priorities revealed by this study was the need for more primary source teaching support for faculty. The library is well situated to do this by designing and offering workshops, self-guided training modules and one-on-one consultations to cover strategies for navigating local collections as well as national and international digital primary source databases. Additionally, the library can provide templates and guides to help instructors build effective primary source-centered assignments.

## Looking to the future

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced most instructors to re-examine and, in some cases, completely revamp their teaching practices. Similarly, many library services have paused or shifted to new modes of operation. As such, it is important to note that our initial reflections about how to support teaching with primary sources on an *institutional level* were geared towards pre-pandemic circumstances. One idea that remains relevant is increased investment in digital primary resources – whether through subscription databases or providing more support in digitization and digital collection infrastructures for high use, high impact local collections.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2019, Ithaka S+R launched a Teaching with Primary Sources project exploring how instructional faculty engage and teach undergraduate students with primary sources. California State University Northridge (CSUN), along with twenty-six academic libraries across the United States and Great Britain, were invited to participate in a qualitative study to investigate how to best support teaching with primary resources. The goal of this research is to generate a rich description of instructors' needs for teaching with primary sources and make actionable recommendations for how our library, and other campus stakeholders, can best support faculty and students going forward. This report summarizes CSUN's University Library local findings and major themes identified through interviews with fifteen teaching faculty members teaching with primary source materials.

Located in Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, CSUN is one of twenty-three California State Universities with a population of nearly 40,000 students and 4,000 faculty and staff members. The CSU system is the largest four-year public university in the United States. CSUN is a majority-minority institution and proudly designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and an Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI). The University is committed to seeking "opportunities to celebrate diversity and to forge pathways for access and cross-divisional collaboration in support of inclusion."<sup>1</sup> Findings in this report include themes related to the diversity of our students and signal the importance of equity, inclusion, and accessible primary source instruction materials.

## METHODS

Participation in the study was open to any CSUN instructors who have taught undergraduate students with primary sources. We identified candidates through consultation with the library instruction coordinator and the Special Collections and Archives librarian, who suggested numerous faculty whose courses draw heavily on primary sources. Other candidates were identified from our own instructional contacts and campus networks.

In Summer and Fall 2019, we recruited faculty for this study via email. In our initial conversations with faculty, we asked them to describe how they incorporate primary sources into their undergraduate courses in order to ensure that they were in-scope for this study. For the purposes of this project, we only recruited instructors of record for undergraduate students/classes. Graduate students were not included. In order to determine whether or not faculty courses were in scope, we relied on the definition of primary sources from Ithaka's Implementation Guide:

We are defining primary sources as historical or contemporary human artefacts which are direct witnesses to a period, event, person/group, or phenomenon, and which are typically used as evidence in humanities and some social science research.

Fifteen faculty from various departments (including history, political science, anthropology, music, queer studies, English, Chicano/a Studies, liberal studies, and kinesiology) ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/CSUN%20Diversity%20Initiatives.pdf>

participated in the project. Discipline-wise, we had a relatively varied set of participants. The greatest number of participants came from history with six, and two more came from anthropology, but all other participants represented distinct disciplines.

Participants included faculty from different ranks, tenure-track and adjunct. The breakdown was three lecturers, one assistant professor, five associate professors, and six full professors.

Our study was not entirely representative of all the social sciences and humanities disciplines at CSUN. For example, only one of our ethnic studies departments, Chicana/o studies, was included. Moreover, we weren't able to include faculty from potentially relevant departments such as art history, modern and classical languages, and sociology. However, these might provide avenues for future research at CSUN.

The semi-structured interviews took place in October and November 2019. Most interviews lasted about one hour and were loosely guided by an interview guide of key themes and questions. However, the team agreed on flexibility, so we could follow up on unique or unexpected topics that emerged in the course of an interview.

The team opted to use an external transcription service in Spring 2020. Once we had the transcripts, our team made corrections and anonymized the information (removing course names and local references that would potentially identify participants) before sharing transcripts with the Ithaka project coordinators.

Next, we developed codes by reading through the transcripts several times. First, individual team members developed our own set of codes; then we compared codes, combining and grouping sets to achieve a consistent and organized code structure, often referring back to the transcripts during this process. The team manually coded the transcripts and began identifying themes before writing the report, which is organized around major trends and themes found in the transcripts.

## FINDINGS

### COURSE DESIGN

#### Discipline-specific considerations

Teaching with primary sources is a standard practice in some disciplines, particularly where scholarship relies heavily on primary source research. History may have the most direct connection between primary source comprehension and student learning outcomes. Much like detectives searching for evidence to solve a case, historians use primary sources as evidence to answer or examine a historical question. Similarly, within anthropology, primary sources are generated and used as a part of ethnographic research. Although these materials are often referred to as “evidence” or “artifacts” rather than “primary sources,” analyzing original materials is central to students' understanding of cultures. For a course on the cultures of Africa, a participant in the anthropology department plays recordings of Radio Africa broadcasts during class to convey the diversity of voices, experiences and dialects across the continent. Political science is another discipline where primary sources are commonly used in teaching and

research. One participant in the political science department assigns canonical primary source texts like Plato's *Republic* and Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* for a political theory class, but also incorporates legal primary source readings like court proceeding notes and a visit to the University's Special Collections and Archives (SCA) department into an undergraduate public law course.

## Instructor experience

Past experience plays a major role in an instructor's decision to incorporate primary sources into their courses. While primary source comprehension is foundational to research and scholarship in disciplines like history and anthropology, many instructors are not inclined to teach with them. In fact, many do so because they had a positive learning experience as a student. One participant who teaches in the Chicana/o studies department spoke of their early exposure to primary sources as an undergraduate studying history:

I would see my professors in the [archives]...when I was working on my project stuff. So, it created a sort of community around using primary sources. And, at the time...a lot of my instructors, including the graduate students who were my instructors, they really developed assignments that got us using them.

For many disciplines, however, teaching with primary sources is a somewhat novel practice. One participant acknowledged that their teaching methods veered from those of department colleagues who tended to use textbooks and secondary sources as well as assessment tools like multiple choice tests. A sociologist by training, the participant was inspired by their own experience as a student:

I was looking at how these professors would have used their own primary sources from their own research...at the time, it struck me that they were confident enough to use their own research in classes to illustrate whatever points or whatever arguments they were trying to make.

Another participant who teaches in the queer studies department reminisced about working with primary sources as a student:

I myself was a student in undergraduate classes using primary sources...I relish the opportunity to be in those classes and to go through the discovery processes that happened in those classes. I'm fortunate that from the get go, I was given great educational opportunities and witnessed great teaching.

## Course materials

Most participants incorporated primary sources as a way to encourage deeper analysis and critical thinking among their students. As such, many expressed unease surrounding the use of standard textbooks and other secondary sources. One history instructor was careful not to include secondary analysis in students' readings:



There are many times that I will consciously cut out the introduction to a text that I'm photocopying for students and giving to them and because the introduction is more or less telling them what to think about the document and we want them to go in with questions and think about what's going on.

Primary source readers, which are published collections of primary sources, either in full or excerpted, are commonly used in place of traditional history textbooks. In fact, three out of seven history instructors interviewed taught from a primary source reader, whereas instructors in other disciplines usually cobbled together their own collections of primary sources for their classes. Although these readers are primarily used within the field of history, they are not widespread across all historical topics, especially those not widely taught in the US curriculum. For instance, one instructor who teaches a German history course, has trouble finding primary source readers covering post-World War II Germany:

Because the discipline is what it is, we tend to focus on certain aspects, and that is US wide and UK wide. So if you were to look for a similar source book on 1970's Germany, not a chance, right? ... Same thing for East Germany. East Germany is a complete desert in terms of these kinds of primary source books.

Some instructors found that alternative, non-textual formats appeal to their students. One participant incorporates primary source audiobooks into their course to accommodate the many students commuting to campus. Another, who teaches history, uses fiction in the absence of good primary sources to provide a different perspective on a topic or give students a better sense of time and place. One participant who teaches a western civilization history course presents objects to the class to provoke discussion. For one lecture, they present an antique soap saver - something that most students have never seen or heard of - to make a point about the shift from a "culture of frugality to the rise of...throwaway consumerism."

The issue of high course material costs was brought up as a concern among eleven of the fifteen participants. In Fall 2019, 55% of all undergraduates enrolled at CSUN were Pell grant recipients.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Office of the Chancellor found in a 2016 study of the CSU system that 21% of CSU students were food insecure and 8.7% lacked a permanent residence. A second phase of the study conducted two years later in 2018 found a rapid increase to 42% food insecure students and 10.9% without housing.<sup>3</sup> With so many CSU students on federal financial aid and many struggling to meet their basic needs, CSUN faculty are well aware that high course material costs are a concern and often an impediment for many of their students. In an effort to alleviate these costs, participants try to incorporate free and low-cost materials whenever possible. In fact, most compile primary sources that they find in readers and textbooks, while conducting archival research, and from various sources on the internet, which

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.csun.edu/counts/standard.php>

<sup>3</sup> Rashida Crutchfield and Jennifer Maguire, "Study of student basic needs." California State University Basic Needs Initiative. Accessed July 28, 2020. [https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/BasicNeedsStudy\\_phasel1\\_withAccessibilityComments.pdf](https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/BasicNeedsStudy_phasel1_withAccessibilityComments.pdf).

they then distribute through the campus learning management system (LMS) or through other means like self-produced readers or photocopies. This is by no means an ideal workaround. Copyright and ADA accessibility pose challenges when acquiring and distributing course materials in this way. For instance, one English instructor acknowledged the difficulty of sharing course materials piecemeal particularly for sight and hearing impaired students:

I've had multiple instances with students in the past who I have to, you know, make sure that everything's OCR readable, and that's not always possible or easy depending on the text, especially, if they want to bring in new writing from like the *New Yorker* or something like that.

Another major challenge to providing low-cost and no-cost primary source materials is locating quality editions and translations of works. Ebook and audiobook websites like [Project Gutenberg](#), the Internet Archive's [Open Library](#) and [LibriVox](#) seem at first glance to be goldmines of free, public domain digital materials. However, most are older and oftentimes out of date editions and translations of texts. These older texts frequently omit contextual information that may be needed for the contemporary reader. Language and translation styles change over time and if a text is difficult to read or understand, students are less likely to read the material and when they do, they often struggle with comprehension. One participant spoke of this dilemma when assigning students early translations of texts:

The stuff that's in the public domain relies on like 19th century English that's really hard for students to read. And this is actually my current soapbox about trying to reduce the cost of course materials because that pushes you to look for stuff that's in the public domain and those are much older editions and students don't have a 19th century vocabulary.

Given instructors' time restraints, online resources were preferred, though many reported that finding relevant and reliable primary sources whether in-person or online was challenging and time intensive. Participants lamented the lack of time they have to prepare and update their courses each year. One instructor who struggled to find quality translations hoped to conduct and compile their own translations into a reader but was not granted the release time to do so. The correlation between new and innovative course design and instructor course load is not surprising. At a large state university like CSUN where the student to faculty ratio for undergraduates is 30.5 to 1, instructors may be less inclined or simply unable to design the types of classes they might at a smaller university with more resources.<sup>4</sup> One instructor who previously taught primary source research-heavy history courses at smaller universities simplified their course design at CSUN because they could no longer give the same focused attention and guidance to individual students that the assignments required.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.csun.edu/counts/course\\_level.php](https://www.csun.edu/counts/course_level.php)

## Assignments

Most participants chose not to assign projects requiring original primary source research because of the overwhelming amount of preparation and guidance involved in getting students up to speed with their research skills. This is true particularly for lower-division general education courses where critical thinking skills, not primary source research are a key learning objective. Instead, several noted that they provide primary source materials for students to study and use in their research assignments. For instance, the instructor mentioned in the previous section, who simplified their courses when coming to CSUN, now has students write a critical analysis of one of the assigned primary source readings instead of conducting original research. Another participant found that shorter, lower stakes research papers were effective in flattening the learning curve for students who were just learning the research process.

Assignments that test students' ability to analyze and understand primary sources were also common. Shorter, more frequent assignments proved to be effective here. One participant who prefers to assign book-length primary sources initially had students write a paper after reading two primary source texts. Unsurprisingly, students tended to procrastinate reading and writing, resulting in rushed, mediocre papers. When the instructor decided to break it up into smaller assignments following each reading, more students turned it in and the quality of their work had improved substantially. Another instructor had positive results combining short, low-stakes assignments with major papers. Students are assigned weekly "reaction papers" based on the readings, which are not graded for content, but serve to engage the student throughout the semester. Paired with class discussions these assignments are designed to help students analyze and articulate concepts and ideas that they can later bring to their final papers.

## Collaboration

Whether sharing syllabi or collaborating on course design, many participants have sought the guidance and assistance of others when teaching with primary sources. Nine participants mentioned doing this in a somewhat casual, information-seeking way such as sharing and borrowing syllabi or workshopping ideas with colleagues. Fourteen worked with a librarian either for general information literacy instruction or to visit SCA. One history instructor reported being pleasantly surprised by students' enthusiasm during their SCA visit, but unsure of how to effectively incorporate the collections into the course beyond a class field trip. Another instructor brought their public law class into SCA to view materials in the Vern and Bonnie Bullough Collection on Sex and Gender to demonstrate the concept of legal obscenity. Having the students view the materials in person was especially important for the instructor who felt having a visceral reaction was "central to understanding what the legal definition of obscenity is trying to capture."

Most SCA visits, however, are designed around students' active use of collection materials rather than a simple show and tell. For the 2018-2019 academic year, SCA reported 25 total instruction sessions, 18 of which had an optional or required use of SCA materials after the session. In fact, two interviewees reported collaborating with SCA on course design. One queer studies instructor noted that the capstone course was designed in cooperation with the special

collections librarian and has a primary source research requirement built into it. Although the instructor did not design the course, they explained that the objective was for students to “choose a research question that relates to queer studies, but which can be answered via a deep dive adventure...in the archive and that being all primary sources, and then link that to secondary sources in theory.” Another participant who teaches in the English department works with the special collections librarian on public humanities service learning projects for upper-division English courses.

There was also some collaboration reported among faculty. Two participants noted separately that they designed their courses in concert with one another. Both courses - one focused on anthropology and the other, landscape archeology - are anchored in a study of the local region. The instructors saw the potential to show students “that the sub-disciplines of anthropology actually resonate” by looking at both the archeological angle of a project as well as the cultural perspective. They organized field trips, guest speakers, as well as projects where students from both classes had the opportunity to work with one another. It later inspired a practice within the entire anthropology department to teach around a particular theme each academic year.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Throughout the interviews, instructors emphasized the importance of establishing clear student learning outcomes (SLOs) and course objectives. Whether their students were majors or non-majors, participants had clearly outlined goals and academic standards for how students should progress. In fact, thirteen out of fifteen syllabi collected included clear SLOs or course objectives. As one interviewee expressed, “my number one goal is to have them be better thinkers, better readers, better writers... because that’s, you know, those are the skills that they’re going to get from a history course.” This sentiment was conveyed amongst all participants regardless of discipline. It was clear throughout all interviews that primary sources played a pivotal factor in developing these skills. Subtopics related to SLOs that will be discussed in this section are: Upper-Division vs Lower-Division, Critical Thinking, Understanding Context, and Real World Application.

### Upper-Division vs Lower-Division

Overall, student learning outcomes were inherently different for lower-division versus upper-division students. In general, participants expressed fewer expectations for lower-division students. They assigned shorter reading assignments but still had to be very particular about the content. If too laborious, they risked students not engaging with the material and skipping the reading. With upper-division students, most interviewees assigned more challenging, longer course readings, and expected students to find their own primary source materials for their writing assignment(s). In some courses, upper-division students were responsible for creating their own discussion questions and leading the class through that week’s readings. This added another level of participation, engagement, and enthusiasm for classroom discussions when peers are in leadership roles in the classroom.

As one participant outlined, the main goal for lower-division students was that they become critical thinkers who “won’t get duped eventually by numbers, or you know, fake information fake news”. However, the goal for upper-division students (with the same professor) was to learn Latin American history as a discipline. Participants in social and behavioral sciences and humanities had pedagogical aims for upper division students to conduct archival research and in some cases expectations to use the Library’s archive. Navigating an archive and getting hands on experience appeared to be discipline-specific objectives.

## Critical Thinking

Using primary sources to exchange ideas and draw conclusions through critical reading and writing was a major theme across disciplines. A majority of participants indicated that primary sources were the best type of source to engage students and an effective way to build critical thinking skills, mainly through classroom discussions and writing assignments. As one instructor noted, “I want them to think about historical processes and find ways to articulate their ideas about those processes in both, you know writing and orally.” Most participants use classroom discussions as an opportunity for direct student engagement with primary source material and have a dialectic exchange of ideas that would cultivate enthusiasm for their class.

Some participants determined that primary sources were the ideal vehicle to build critical thinking skills mainly due to the very nature of the material. Students can interpret the material first hand without undue influence and participants value the different student points of view. The emphasis for many participants, especially those in history, was not simply reading and memorizing a text, but for students to be able to connect to the material in meaningful ways. Students must engage with the material more thoughtfully and become attentive readers on how they approach texts in order to understand the nuance of the material.

One interviewee shared that they will often not include the introductions or secondary sources because that material might hinder students from developing their own analysis. They want students to form their own opinions and secondary sources and introductions inhibit the reader from fully developing their own thoughts and critically analyze the texts to form their own conclusions or make their own argument. This sentiment was felt among many of the interviewees in conjunction with a sense of being critical and skeptical of the material.

I think primary sources give them an opportunity to think critically about specific processes, but apply to the people experiencing those processes... I don't think you can teach history without primary sources...

One participant shared that these discussions subverted classroom hierarchies and created a level playing field, one without authoritarian rule. This concept was important for the instructor because it empowers students and creates a more inclusive learning environment. For example, in a classroom discussion analyzing primary source texts, while the instructor might be a more agile or experienced reader, their students often come up with different interpretations. This in turn empowers students to discover their interpretative speaking voice. A shared connection among many participants was that one of the goals of learning is empowering students.

I found that the use of primary sources assists the students in learning to make an argument, which I think is a really important skill in a lot of my classes, and it gives students a sense of empowerment... and I really like students to feel that they are creators of knowledge in the classroom.

There were some challenges with building students' critical thinking skills. Participants noted that students often struggle with the primary source material. What is notable is that interviewees want students to struggle with the material and feel this is part of higher education and the goals of the classroom in developing better critical thinking.

Kant is really hard to read, but that's kind of the point... I want them to really bear down and have an experience where they're struggling to make something out sentence by sentence to get them to practice doing that. That's the main challenge.

Another aspect of critical thinking is the issue of transparency and bias in primary source material. Primary source material can be biased and holds different meanings depending on time period or cultural perspective. This came through in with a history faculty member whose readings include the Bible, Quran, and other religious texts.

They're not used to reading a religious source as a historical document. So, we also end up talking about how to read a source, right... what I want them to get from the source is not what they're going to get in a Sunday school or Mosque school like Madrasa.

For this class in particular, they spend a lot of class discussions understanding and interpreting pieces of religious texts, sometimes taking it line by line or even word by word depending on the translations. To overcome this issue, the instructor compares three or four different translations to show how it changes. This comparative analysis helps students understand the complexity and nuance of primary source materials that are not transparent and can be interpreted differently depending on the context of the cultural moment.

### *Understanding context*

Participants shared that students struggled participating in discussions and with written projects if they did not understand the historical context of the primary source material. They found it is necessary to put primary sources into perspective by contextualizing the information and relating it to a broader framework of the discipline. As one participant stated, they use class discussion to build these skills because students "need enough understanding of the context to be able to make sense of the documents."

It came as no surprise that primary source material is biased and can be difficult to teach. Interviewees expressed that undergraduate students, especially lower-division or freshman students, had difficulty unpacking what they perceived to be problematic materials. From the faculty's perspective, they needed to guide students through these uncomfortable conversations that were centered around race, rape, lynch culture, gender dynamics, nationalism, slavery, sexism, and/or class status. These classroom conversations surrounding (sometimes offensive)

material were focused on recognizing the cultural and historical context of the material, the implications on the culture at the time and in some cases the impact on today's society.

A political science participant shared that their students' initial view of Aristotle was negative and they did not want to continue engaging with the material because of his sexist views on women. The instructor had to challenge the students to think more broadly about gender dynamics of that period and influences on modern culture and politics. Because students' initial reaction to the material was outrage and immediate withdrawal, the instructor needed to provide that context in order for students to grasp the nuance and implications on today's culture.

An interviewee from anthropology uses a report written by Lord Lugard that mandated in a systematic, best practices approach, how to colonize Nigeria. "I find the piece really interesting to deconstruct and to expose students to the way people were thinking in the colonial period." The instructor challenged students to look for contextual clues in order to identify the audience and understand why it was written in this manner in the 1920's. They find it a powerful piece because it was widely circulated among the British colonial administration and was a reflection of the time period. The purpose is not to engage in the arguments portrayed in the primary source, but rather to understand the mindset of how people were thinking and how those ideas may remain today.

Another participant designed a course around English anthologies from the 18<sup>th</sup> century literary canon and used primary sources to contextualize historical themes stemming from the novels. Primary sources help provide their students the cultural perspective and "understand debates about slavery, debates about women's rights, heated debates about property, and things like that." An issue that often comes up is that students don't know the background of some of these authors, not understanding that Harriet Tubman was writing long after Olaudah Equiano. The connections between these examples is a lack of background knowledge from the student's perspective and the need for instructors to demonstrate and train students how to become critical thinkers. As one instructor stated:

You need to get a little deeper, it's about close readings and mining for obscure details and thinking cooperatively. I mean, I'm very into collaborative environments in my classroom and so I think that it's always a group discussion. And I think that produces the best sort of critical thinking and that's always been my real goal.

Participants also noted that students often don't know the historical context outside standard K-12 United States history. A sentiment that was also felt among interviewees teaching in subject areas that were probably not covered in high school.

Students come from varying educational backgrounds and most likely don't have prior experience working with primary sources. As described by one interviewee, students learned history passively, sitting through lectures or answering multiple-choice questions but never given the opportunity to critically analyze primary source material. "Students come in pretty much devoid of prior knowledge and also prior techniques of dealing with primary source." The challenge is to prepare students to work with these specific resources since they have not

encountered them in their K-12 education. In addition, typical high school history courses are western civilization focused with an emphasis on the United States. This adds another layer for instructors to provide historical context for unfamiliar subject areas and geographic regions not previously learned.

World History in high school tends to be very Europe-focused and I tend not to be very Europe-focused. And so, I try to make sure that they get that we have a fairly heavy emphasis on other parts of the world.

Another participant added that even if students have basic historical knowledge, their understanding was very black and white. When learning about World War II in high school, students will know the general outcome and understand that Americans are portrayed as the heroes and Nazi as villains; they typically know the Who? What? Where? When? But won't understand, Why?

[referring to Nazis] Why would young people think this is great to be in this movement? That kind of attitude, which historians have to understand; not to condone, but to understand is something that students, I think, don't get when they just get the basic textbook version.

A common thread throughout the interviews was the idea of using primary sources to delve deep into a topic – drawing connections to the time period, and understanding the context of political, religious, and other movements.

## Real World Application

Another learning outcome that participants desired students to acquire is the capability to apply what they are learning outside the classroom. This real world application broke down into three main categories: developing transferable skills, participating in a cultural dialogue, and remembering key texts.

### Transferable skills

One example of transferable skills that goes beyond the classroom came from a political science interviewee. While the course work is not training students vocationally, they would like students to apply some of these skills outside the university. Since many of their students are political science majors, many will go on to work in a bureaucracy where they will be responsible for understanding bureaucratic forms and policies that can be challenging to interpret. The critical thinking skills students learn by analyzing legal documents could be advantageous for those leaving the classroom setting and beginning to advance their careers, especially those who pursue government employment.

Peppered throughout the interviews, participants conveyed many types of transferable skills that they want students to be able to incorporate into their daily lives. This includes, having meaningful conversations, informed opinions, understanding context, the ability to conduct



interviews, manage group work, and evaluate the world around them. The underlying message is that faculty want students to use the same skills they use analyzing primary source text(s) and apply it to the real world.

Another prime example of applying these skills to current events was from a kinesiology professor showing a recent cartoon depiction of Venus Williams after she got upset with a judge. The “Australian newspapers depicted her in a very, very problematic, condescending -- and I would even argue -- racist manner. Again, look at those linkages historically, how things have changed, but are pretty much the same.” Seeing the connections between the historical depictions of race or gender on today’s society adds to the value of primary source material and impact being felt through generations. This creates an opportunity for students to critically analyze materials while creating a dialog with the community about the cultural significance of those depictions.

### Cultural Dialogue

Understanding the larger role that higher education has on society, some interviewees highlighted skills they felt were important for students to bring to the community. An important learning outcome for many of these participants was the ability for students to engage in academic conversations, make informed decisions, and be a global citizen. “We have to remember sort of what the original point of a college degree was, which was to construct a thinking citizen.” For this instructor, it was important that their students were capable of having dynamic conversations and exchange ideas with other college graduates, even from elite universities.

In these courses, primary sources played a part in creating an educated citizen. A few ways expressed in the interviews included being able to evaluate information, verify the authenticity of sources, and be critical thinkers. “I think one of the jobs we have, if we want an educated critical citizenry, is to have young people understand that what they see is not necessarily real.” This led to a broader conversation about the current political climate in the United States, addressing real news versus fake news, and the function of higher education in teaching students how to gather evidence and evaluate it.

### Remembering Key Texts

Instructors noted that some primary source readings are significant from a cultural perspective. They want students to understand cultural references to these primary sources and the lasting impact of these works. These references are often found in popular works such as newspaper articles, magazine articles, film, television, or social media and could be lost on novice readers who don’t understand the broader cultural connection.

Then I also feel that there’s some books that students really must need to come out of college having read... large chunks of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament because it’s something you need to have read, just to, sort of, be part of the conversation.

Lastly, participants noted there were some fundamental texts that students should come out of college having read. One participant described this content as “timeless texts that are part of our culture.” Some examples highlighted in the interviews include Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Homer’s *The Essential Odyssey*, Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and Plato’s *Republic*, various religious texts, and works by Descartes, Voltaire, and Plutarch, among others.

## STUDENT LEARNING AND PRIMARY SOURCES

This section will focus on the challenges and habits of students (as reported by faculty interviewees) while being introduced to primary sources, especially how they contextualize, read, analyze, and choose primary sources.

### Learning Curve in Using Primary Sources

A common theme discussed in many interviews was students’ level of comfort with using primary sources, and the learning curve involved in beginning to use primary sources. The main points were the challenges around finding and choosing sources, preferences for familiar platforms or websites, forming an argument, and difficulties using archives and the limitations of archives themselves.

### Finding and Choosing Sources and Research Topics

While some instructors said that their students are relatively proficient at finding sources, others report that their students struggle with finding full text (as opposed to excerpts) and navigating databases or library catalogs. Others described how their students will gravitate towards choosing the easiest, non-challenging source, or will choose ones from the wrong era.

The issue of picking non-authoritative sources was another common trend. Students struggle with distinguishing authenticity, especially with online sources, although one participant said that they believe students to be more skeptical of online information now than they were ten years ago. Similarly, using appropriate search terminology is another challenge. For example, students might use anachronistic or modern terms while searching for nineteenth century sources.

One topic that came up in multiple interviews was student reluctance to venture beyond their usual websites or platforms for finding information, and their struggles to navigate new platforms. For example, they prefer to use familiar websites, or just one website, for their research assignments. One participant described how students continue using their preferred database even after being informed that it doesn’t have appropriate materials for their assignment. When exploring new resources, like licensed databases or platforms, they often encounter issues around logging in and navigation. They also expect that everything they need is accessible on Google or documented somewhere, which can lead to frustrations and hinder progress for student research. Faculty also described how students are willing to search for sources, and even to read lengthy documents, on their smartphones.

Learning how to construct a solid argument based on primary sources was another common topic in interviews. Participants reported that students need to learn to build an argument around a primary source instead of selecting an argument and then finding sources to support it. Some students will choose a difficult or tricky topic, not understanding that the primary sources or artifacts won’t easily lend themselves to the subject. For example, one participant described

how a student wanted to explore Greek myths as part of an archeology research assignment. The student didn't initially understand that archeological sources wouldn't provide easily accessible information on Greek mythology, and that it would take some creativity to connect the two subjects. However, after several conversations with the participant, the student was able to successfully reframe their research assignment.

### Searching Archives/Archives Accessibility

Interviewees described that students often express frustration over the difficulty of learning to use archives and/or the limitations of archive holdings. For example, a participant from queer studies said that students were often discouraged at the perceived inefficiency of locating and going through archival materials:

It's mind boggling in the beginning. Well, perhaps all the way through with all the boxes that come out when you request a topic and yet you have no idea what's in the box. Even the archivists may not necessarily remember completely what's in a particular box. How could they, there's so many boxes, right? So, it's super time consuming and sometimes completely futile, because they don't necessarily find anything of interest to work with and then they have to start all over again, and there's a certain frustration.

The same participant remarked that their students feel that the archive is incomplete, and that they shouldn't be required to use it for their assignments. Students perceive that they're not necessarily represented in the collections (although after searching the archives, others found more diversity than they had expected); they might also be surprised about the inclusion of explicit and/or controversial materials in the archives. Many of these issues relate to students' general unfamiliarity with archives and special collections.

Participants were sensitive to the fact that students don't necessarily have the time, or transportation, to visit off-campus archives. This of course limits the scope of primary sources to which students have access.

### Reading, Focus, and Material Comprehension

Another significant theme that emerged from interviewees was student struggles with focus and/or reading ability when engaging with primary sources. They described how students' busy schedules limit the amount of reading they can reasonably do, and how students are more accustomed to scrolling as opposed to deep reading and analysis of texts. Others are disengaged with the course materials for a variety of reasons and in various ways. Students who are seniors, or those taking a class outside of their major, are often disinterested in the assigned readings and topics. Especially for those studying primary sources in a class outside of their major or subfield - for example, anthropology students taking an archeology class, or kinesiology students taking a class on the sociology of sports - students might not expect or be prepared for the shift to a new discipline.

The challenges around material comprehension are related to this. Student struggles with working through difficult texts, including interpretation and identification of the main argument, came up more than once. As mentioned previously, when dealing with materials that they perceive as problematic, students sometimes have strong initial reactions to the content and have trouble taking a nuanced approach or understanding the wider context.

Interviewees also remarked on students being very passive consumers of primary sources, insofar as they can't (or choose not to) answer analytical questions about a text or a video after having read or watched it, which limits the effectiveness of class discussions. For example, one participant described how students couldn't complete the first sentence of *The Communist Manifesto* in class, even when prompted:

But as I just said, they couldn't complete the most basic first sentence, famous first sentence of the Communist Manifesto, right. When I had displayed on the board, on the screen, something about class struggle. I mean, the phrase class struggle was staring at their face...And they didn't pick up on it.

The same participant (a History professor teaching a western civilization class) was unsure whether this was because of the particular class dynamic, or difficulty with the content itself. However, participants suggested various ways of improving or working through comprehension issues; for example, one history interviewee provides the structure of reading questions and supplementary materials like a glossary when appropriate:

I will be a little more like directive and didactic, like pose specific reading questions ahead of time. Tell them, "Okay, here's the glossary for keeping track of the characters and the names, you know, for reading Homer, you know, maybe try and give him more of an introductory lecture. You take the temperature of the room a little bit more.

A subset of the material comprehension issue is wrestling with archaic language and handwriting. One interviewee mentioned that students have difficulty reading handwritten text or cursive. Others outlined that students have to grapple with understanding older English, as was briefly discussed in the Course Design section. Translations dating from an older period, like the Victorian era, which tended to produce very wordy translations, can prove challenging. One person who teaches Middle Eastern history remarked:

Yeah, I mean, I think the single biggest thing is modern translations, right. Particularly for Middle East, there's actually a lot of things translated. But a lot of them were translated in the early part of the 1900s and well, that's -- I'm perfectly happy with that. As a researcher, it doesn't make a difference, but students aren't used to, you know. I had one student say to me, "It's like reading Shakespeare." I am like, "It's not," but I take your point.

Scholarly language in general is something that students have to work through, but multiple interviewees mentioned that struggling through these comprehension and language issues is part of the process and leads to growth for their students. Similarly, learning to engage with challenging or provocative materials is another major avenue for learning.

Aside from issues with basic comprehension, students are often unaccustomed to forming their own arguments and articulating their own ideas instead of merely summarizing information. Faculty mentioned that students are accustomed to multiple choice questions or basic recall questions, and they have trouble responding to more in-depth or sophisticated prompts. Because these skills are key student learning outcomes, faculty are very focused on developing these abilities in their classes.

## Lack of Preparation and Background Knowledge

As was discussed in the Student Learning Outcomes section, many faculty said that students lack experience working with primary sources or conducting research, and they don't necessarily have the background knowledge to contextualize primary sources. In some cases, even students enrolled in a capstone class, or those in their last year of college, have not engaged very much or at all with primary sources. For other participants, they expressed surprise that students hadn't been asked to do research assignments earlier in their undergraduate studies. Moreover, participants reported that students often have their first visits to the library or Special Collections and Archives in their class.

Even differentiating between primary and secondary sources proves to be challenging for some students. Almost all participants make a point to define primary and secondary sources within their classes, but this can prove to be a challenging distinction for some students. Some faculty report that their students will still mistakenly select a secondary source for their assignments even after they have explained the distinction.

Engaging with and searching for primary sources presents a particularly steep learning curve. For example, students in anthropology or musicology classes don't always realize that they can glean information from non-textual sources like artefacts and interviews. While describing the challenges in asking students to conduct interviews to gather information, one participant said the following:

...it's like a light bulb pops up in their heads like, wow, there is another way of getting information. It's not just from books, not just from a website, [I] can actually talk to people.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, students are often unfamiliar with history. This is especially true for non-European or non-U.S. history, which provides background material for classes and primary source analysis. Other students don't understand or differentiate between different historical contexts, and might for example inappropriately compare sources from different areas or eras. Especially for non-history majors, students don't see the broader social or historical backdrop. Taken together, this often means that faculty have to spend extra time filling in those gaps, or figuring out how to present the material in a different way to account for the lack of background knowledge. It also means that faculty have to teach the basics of reading and analyzing primary sources.

Not having read much primary literature before, students often come to these texts with various preconceptions. They might have stereotypical ideas of the people or cultures involved, and they don't expect to see diverse voices in primary sources. One participant described the value in having students read primary sources, especially texts by women of color compared to those by white women from the same era. This helped students form their own opinions on course topics instead of relying on second-hand information.

## Addressing Student Challenges

In order to address students' lack of exposure and background knowledge with primary sources, interviewees suggest that scaffolding assignments can be highly effective. More specifically, they suggest assigning shorter readings and/or smaller writing assignments to help students get acclimated to critical reading and writing. Breaking assignments into these smaller steps also

aids students in tackling larger, more in-depth research papers. For example, one participant (a historian) said the following:

I'm a firm believer in modeling and scaffolding and all these strategies to show how historians for example, got there to understand primary sources. It's not something that students will naturally have, but it's not something they can't learn. And I think that's very rewarding when after 15 weeks or so, you see, the students understand it and do better after they've done it a few times. So I think the primary sources is a real stepping stone concept for students to go beyond simply being passive recipients.

This quote in particular highlights the unique role of primary sources as a catalyst for encouraging deeper engagement and critical thinking in students.

As was touched on in the Course Design section, faculty approach scaffolding in different ways. One participant, who teaches a capstone class in which students ultimately present a research project, has students complete various assignments throughout the semester. The assignments include putting together a personalized reading list and an annotated bibliography as well as several drafts of their paper, all of which ensures that they will make continuous progress toward their project. While this approach translates into additional preparation and grading for faculty, it seems to work very well for preventing procrastination and incrementally building skills throughout the semester. Overall, participants were very pleased with the results of this approach.

## CONCLUSIONS

Interviews for this project were conducted during the fall semester of 2019 before CSUN shut down nearly all in-person operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In early May 2020, California State University announced that it would suspend in-person classes across all 23 campuses for the fall semester, making the CSUs the first major American universities to announce a move to virtual instruction for the 2020-2021 academic year.

With such a rapid transition to virtual, it remains to be seen just how this will affect the project participants' ability to continue teaching with primary sources in the ways outlined in this report. This will be particularly challenging for courses designed around in-person experiences like field work and special collections and archives visits. As such, it is important to note that our conclusions reflect pre-pandemic modes of teaching. Subsequent research should examine how instructors shifted their course design in response to these changes and the ways in which cultural heritage communities and their partners respond. Likewise, with the increased reliance on online resources and digital collections, further research should address issues of usability and ADA accessibility.

This report highlighted the complexities of teaching with primary sources in one of the largest, most diverse public university systems in the United States. By examining course design, student learning outcomes, and common student challenges, our findings revealed three key themes: 1) primary source comprehension strengthens information literacy; 2) instructors need more support when teaching with primary sources; and 3) learning and equity gaps must be addressed through course design.

## Primary source comprehension and information literacy

Most participants chose to teach with primary sources even when it was not a required element of their courses. Prior experience was a major driving force, with many citing their own positive experiences as undergraduates and the impact using primary sources had on their critical thinking skills and comprehension of a subject.

They consistently preferred using primary sources in place of textbooks. In addition to being costly to students, textbooks often include secondary analyses which can inhibit students from fully developing their own ideas and conclusions. It is important to note that many instructors use primary sources not just for instructional content but also as tools to teach students important information literacy skills such as how to think critically and better understand a historical or cultural milieu. This is echoed in the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* which maintains that “primary source literacy intersects with other ‘literacies,’ including information literacy, visual literacy, and digital literacy, and concepts like collective memory, cultural heritage, and individual/cultural perspectives.”<sup>5</sup>

## Course preparation and the need for more support

Despite the merits of teaching with primary sources, participants expressed frustration about the amount of preparation it required. This is compounded by the fact that many are teaching large general education classes with students of varying academic backgrounds, abilities, and interests. Upper-division classes tended to be easier in this regard, as students were more invested in the subject matter and often had more advanced critical thinking skills. Nevertheless, the need to teach primary source literacy earlier and more widely was echoed among the participants.

Some participants used primary source readers, when available, but most compiled their own collections of relevant primary sources. Finding appropriate sources was a significant challenge across the board, as was finding high quality, low-cost or no-cost editions and translations of primary sources. Navigating the vast and seemingly disjointed array of primary sources and tools available online is challenging for students and instructors alike. Broadly, more cooperation and standardization across the cultural heritage community is needed to improve discoverability for researchers. Locally, instructors need more guidance and support for their primary source research.

## Student-centered course design

In general, those who developed successful course design models usually did so through trial and error or with assistance from an archivist. Only two participants in our study required their classes to conduct on-site primary source research at an archive. Additionally, each designed their courses in close collaboration with the archivist using scaffolding techniques to incrementally introduce archival research tools and strategies to students over the course of the semester. In general, they found that assignments requiring students to conduct original primary source research were less successful, particularly in lower-division courses where there was

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<sup>5</sup> ACRL RBMS-SAA Joint Task Force on the Development of Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy, “Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy,” Accessed July 26, 2020, <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/GuidelinesForPrimarySourceLiteracy-June2018.pdf>

little or no coordination with an archivist or librarian. Students were more successful when assigned several short, low stakes assignments that progressively strengthened their primary source comprehension skills. Again and again, the interviews reflected the importance of scaffolding when introducing students to new ways of learning and the need for a more structured curriculum to build students' primary source literacy.

In addition to addressing students' learning gaps, participants also considered their diverse social and economic backgrounds, pointing to a need for more diverse voices in primary source material and low-cost or no-cost modern editions and translations. While costs are primarily attributed to course materials, they also include less obvious requirements such as visiting outside archives or conducting archival research on campus, both of which incur transportation costs and are typically time-intensive and difficult for students with numerous responsibilities outside of the classroom.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Findings from this research suggest areas where CSUN's University Library can better support faculty who teach with primary sources and encourage more faculty to incorporate primary sources into their teaching in order to meet their student learning outcomes.

### Communication and outreach

- *Communicate with new faculty.* Introduce new faculty to the archives at New Faculty Orientation by providing an overview of services and collections as well as helpful tips and examples of teaching with primary sources.
- *Improve communication and collaboration within the library.* SCA and liaison librarians must work strategically together to coordinate essential outreach functions. Liaison librarians need to be familiar with SCA collections and services so that they can identify and assist faculty who are interested in or may benefit from teaching with primary sources. Furthermore, SCA should regularly communicate with liaison librarians regarding new tools and resources available locally and in the larger archival community.
- *Target faculty in key disciplines.* Establish communication with faculty in disciplines like history where primary source comprehension is a key SLO as well as faculty in multidisciplinary departments like queer studies, Chicana/o studies, gender and women's studies and Africana studies.

### Training and tools

- *Provide training opportunities for faculty.* Partner with SCA to develop training workshops for faculty who want to incorporate primary sources into their teaching. These can be standalone workshops or attached to existing Faculty Development workshops and could also cover strategies for navigating tools like the Online Archive of California (OAC), California Digital Library (CDL) and Digital Public Library of America (DPLA).
- *Develop assignment planning tools.* Create an assignment guide to share with faculty with ready-made assignment ideas based on subjects and learning outcomes. These can be very general and incorporated into any course or tailored to specific courses.



## Institutional changes

- *Develop credit bearing courses for primary source research.* A course or series of courses that focus on primary source literacy for students would take the weight off instructors who find their students unprepared to work with primary sources. These courses would give students the necessary skills and experience to effectively work with primary sources.
- *Explore ways to help faculty develop course materials.* Given the limitations of existing course readers, editions and translations, and the numerous demands on faculty time, the library should look into ways of supporting faculty who want to develop their own course materials or find better resources for teaching with primary sources. Partnerships with the digital services librarian and the web services coordinator could enable the library to curate relevant content through open source platforms like Omeka or Scalar.
- *Increased investment in digital primary resources.* In order to address equity gaps, SCA and the library as a whole should prioritize making high-use primary sources available digitally in order to ensure access for all students. This is especially important in light of the recent shift to remote learning for fall semester 2020. Because digitization and supporting digital collection infrastructures is so time- and resource-intensive, digital project planning and development should be conducted with student use in mind and in consultation with faculty.

# APPENDIX A: Sample recruitment email

*Subject.* Oviatt study on teaching with primary sources

Dear [first name of instructor],

My name is [name] and I'm a librarian here at CSUN. I am reaching out to you and a handful of instructors on campus to participate in a study on teaching with primary sources. I'm specifically looking at how instructors engage *undergraduate students* with primary sources – for instance, through research, analyzing sources as evidence or curating collections of sources.

The study is part of a suite of parallel studies at 25 other institutions of higher education in the US and UK, coordinated by Ithaka S+R, a not-for-profit research and consulting service. The information gathered at CSUN will also be included in a landmark capstone report by Ithaka S+R and will be essential for CSUN to further understand how the support needs of instructors in teaching with primary sources are evolving more widely.

If you have ever taught with primary sources and are willing to set aside an hour or so to share your experiences and perspective, I'd love to hear from you (complimentary coffee and pastries will be provided!) Interviews will be conducted during the fall semester. Additionally, if you have any questions about the study or your eligibility, please don't hesitate to reach out. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
[your name]

# APPENDIX B: Informed consent form

**California State University, Northridge**  
**CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

**Supporting Teaching with Primary Sources**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

**RESEARCH TEAM**

**Researchers:**

Liz Cheney, Jamie Johnson, Nicole Shibata  
Department of Research, Instruction, and Outreach Services  
Department of Collection Access and Management Services  
18111 Nordhoff St.  
Northridge, CA 91330-8327  
(818)677-4729  
elizabeth.cheney@csun.edu

**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to examine humanities and social sciences instructors' practices in teaching undergraduates with primary sources in order to understand the resources and services that instructors at California State University, Northridge need to be successful in their work.

**SUBJECTS**

**Inclusion Requirements**

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a CSUN instructor at least 21 years of age or older who teaches undergraduate students in the humanities and social sciences departments.

**Time Commitment**

This study will involve approximately 60 minutes of your time in the form of a one-time interview.

**PROCEDURES**

Your participation in the study involves a 60-minute, audio-recorded interview about teaching practices. As part of this interview you will be asked to show the researcher a syllabus from a course in which you teach with primary sources as a prompt to discuss elements of course design. The researcher may ask to keep a copy of the syllabus for research purposes. If a copy is provided, the syllabus will not be shared or reproduced except for internal research purposes. Sharing a syllabus is optional and you can still be interviewed if you decide not to share one.

## **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

## **BENEFITS**

### **Subject Benefits**

The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study include increased insight and awareness into teaching practices and support needs.

### **Benefits to Others or Society**

The possible benefits to society may include greater insight into the breadth of practices around teaching with primary resources as well as identifying potential ways for libraries, archives, and other stakeholders to support these practices.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

## **COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**

### **Compensation for Participation**

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study. However, participants will receive light refreshments (coffee and pastries), not to exceed \$10, during the interviews.

### **Costs**

There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

## **WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately.** The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

### **Subject Identifiable Data**

Pseudonyms will be immediately applied to the interview transcripts, the metadata associated with the transcripts, and the syllabi if provided. Public reports of the research findings will invoke the participants by pseudonym and not provide demographic or contextual information that could be used to re-identify the participants.

### **Data Storage**

Recorded interviews will be stored as digital audio files by the principal investigator(s) in a non-networked folder on a password protected computer and transcribed by the investigator(s) listed on this protocol and a third party transcription vendor bound by a confidentiality agreement. These files will be

destroyed immediately following transcription. Course syllabi will be stored as paper copies in a locked file cabinet only accessible to the investigator(s) and/or as digital files by the investigator(s) in a non-networked folder on a password protected computer.

**Data Access**

The researcher(s) named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

**Data Retention**

Immediately following transcription, the audio files of the interviews will be destroyed. Per the policies suggested on the CSUN Research Integrity website, the informed consent forms will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

**Mandated Reporting**

Under California law, the researcher(s) are required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information in the course of conducting this study, she may be required to report it to the authorities.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research and Sponsored Programs office, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, by phone at (818) 677-2901 or email at [irb@csun.edu](mailto:irb@csun.edu).

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

**I agree to participate in the study.**

I agree to be audio recorded

I agree to share a copy of a syllabus from a course I teach

-----  
Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
----- Printed Name of Researcher

# APPENDIX C: Interview guide

## ***Background***

Briefly describe your experience teaching undergraduates.

- how long you've been teaching
- what you currently teach
- what types of courses (introductory lectures, advanced seminars)

How does your teaching relate to your current or past research?

## ***Training and Sharing Teaching Materials***

How did you learn how to teach undergraduates with primary sources?

- formal training
- advice from colleagues or other staff
- trial and error

Do you use any syllabi created by others or do you make your own? Same goes for:

- assignment plans,
- collections of sources
- or other instructional resources (Canvas)

## ***Course Design***

I'd like you to think of a specific course in which you teach with primary sources that we can discuss in greater detail.

- Do you have a syllabus you're willing to show me? I will not share or reproduce this except for research purposes.
- Tell me a bit about the course. *Examples: **pedagogical aims, why you developed it, how it has evolved over time***
- Explain how you **incorporate primary sources** into this course. *If appropriate, refer to the syllabus*
- **Why** did you decide to incorporate primary sources into this course in this way?
- What **challenges** do you face in incorporating primary sources into this course?
- Do you incorporate primary sources into all your courses in a similar way? Why or why not?

In this course, does anyone else provide instruction for your students in working with primary sources? *Examples: co-instructor, archivist, embedded librarian, teaching assistant*

- How does their instruction relate to the rest of the course?
- How do you communicate with them about what you would like them to teach, how they teach it, and what the students learn?

### ***Finding Primary Sources***

Returning to think about your undergraduate teaching in general, how do you find the primary sources that you use in your courses? *Examples: Google, databases, own research, library staff*

- Do you keep a **collection of digital or physical sources** that you use for teaching?
- What challenges do you face in **finding appropriate sources** to use?

How do your students find and access primary sources?

- Do you **specify sources** which students must use, or do you **expect them to locate and select** sources themselves?
- If the former, how do you direct students to the correct sources? Do you face any challenges relating to students' abilities to access the sources?
- If the latter, do you teach students how to find primary sources and/or select appropriate sources to work with? Do you face any challenges relating to students' abilities to find and/or select appropriate sources?

### ***Working with Primary Sources***

How do the ways in which you teach with primary sources relate to goals for student learning in your discipline?

Why is it important for students in [discipline] work with primary sources?

- Do you teach your students **what a primary source** is? If so, how?
- Do you encounter any challenges teaching primary sources? *For example: Students accessing, finding, comprehending primary sources material.*

In what formats do your students engage with primary sources? *Examples: print editions, digital images on a course management platform, documents in an archive, born-digital material, oral histories*

- Do your students **visit special collections**, archives, or museums, either in class or outside of class? If so, do you or does someone else teach them how to conduct research in these settings?



- Do your students use **any digital tools to examine, interact with, or present the sources**? *Examples: 3D images, zoom and hyperlink features, collaborative annotation platforms, websites, wikis*
- To what extent are these formats and tools pedagogically important to you?
- Do you encounter any challenges relating to the formats and tools with which your students engage with primary sources?

### ***Wrapping Up***

Looking toward the future, what challenges or opportunities will instructors encounter in teaching undergraduates with primary sources?

Is there anything else I should know?