This exploratory study examines the image seeking and use behaviors of graduate history students. Informal interviews with six graduate students answered the primary questions directing this study: What role do images play for graduate history students? What are their methods and motives for image retrieval? Are there opportunities for outreach by visual resource specialists and other information professionals to serve this population better? Graduate history students primarily used images in teaching and research roles, but the visual literacy methods varied between the two roles. Participants expressed the most confusion over image indexing and showed interest in learning more about how to find images. Because of the exploratory nature, this study provides suggestions (instead of conclusions) of how to serve this population. Lastly, since research concerning image seeking behavior is limited, suggestions for further study are also included.
IMAGE SEEKING AND USE BY GRADUATE HISTORY STUDENTS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

by

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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

July 2011

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Images depict the most abstract to the most literal topics, and the interpretation of images is subjective based on the viewer. When considering the use of images as scholarly resources, the disciplines that come to mind as heavy users include: art history, the fine arts, and design fields. But other fields are using images more and more; one field in particular – and the focus of this study – is history.

Beginning around the 1980s, a “pictorial turn” of historic methodologies began, initiating a scholarly atmosphere that accepts images as equally viable source material for historical analysis (Burke, 2001). This shift continues as historians debate whether images provide similar analytical results as their textual and oral counterparts. Several historians argue that images should not be demoted to secondary, supplementary, or solely illustrative sources since images can offer insights into history that texts cannot (Burke, 2001; Kivelson & Neuberger, 2008; Stafford, 1996). Historians and future historians only need the visual literacy training to analyze sources in a manner similar to text or oral sources (Elkins, 2003). We live in a visual culture surrounded by visual stimulations such as television, film, art, advertisements, websites, graffiti, and publications to only name a few. How will these visual stimulations affect us? How will future historians look at the images we see today and what conclusions will they form?

It is important to define the terms visual resource and images as they are used in the context of this study. In an IMLS report regarding core competencies for visual resource management professionals, a visual resource “includes materials such as photographic, still and moving images, as well as objects and artifacts, microfilm and
electronic media in all formats from analog to digital” (Iyer, 2005-2007) and according to Merriam-Webster, an image is defined as “a tangible or visible representation” (Image, n.d.). With the results of this study, these definitions will be contextualized by the broader definitions provided the participants.

This study examines the methods and motives for accessing and using images by graduate history students. Data gathered from exploratory interviews either confirmed or contradicted past studies on historians’ use of libraries, the role of libraries in the context of image use and visual literacy, and image retrieval and use studies of established historians, graduate students, and undergraduate students.

A review of the relevant literature is followed by the results of informal interviews with six graduate history students in a graduate program at a higher education institution. This study concludes with suggestions of how libraries can meet the most immediate image needs of this population, followed by how visual resource professionals can collaborate with other university personnel to best serve this albeit self-reliant group of researchers that want more information regarding how to find images for a variety of purposes.

Before discussing the literature, it is important to note that most of the participants expressed knowledge of “pictorial turn” in the discipline and shared their perceptions of the field and the use of images:

- P2 expressed that using images was often seen as “history light,” but thought this would change as publishing changes and the use of visual resources become more prevalent and “more respected”.
- There is a “misconception that [historians] don’t use images…that we don’t take images seriously” (P3);
- “It can be perceived as soft history…I like to think it’s not because…using images do add a bit of character…and context to what you’re writing” (P6).

It is important to keep these perceptions in mind when analyzing the literature regarding historians’ perceptions of the value of images and of information institutions, such as libraries and archives.

1. Literature Review

1.1 From the Historian’s Perspective

Several historians and art historians offer invaluable arguments in favor of elevating the perception of images as part of historical analysis. All discuss the noticeable shift toward increasing use of images (what Stafford refers to as the “post-Gutenbergian constructive model of education through vision”) due to a new generation of historians raised in the age of computers; however, the authors also note the perceived difficulties and conceptions that images are harder to analyze than texts, emphasizing the need for integration of visual literacy instruction into graduate history courses (Burke, 2001; Elkins, 2003; Kivelson & Neuberger, 2008; Stafford, 1996, 3).

1.1.1 “Post-Gutenbergian Model”

“In the last generation or so, historians have widened their interests considerably” and “increasing use is being made of a broader range of evidence, in which images have their place alongside literary texts and oral testimonies” (Burke, 2001, 9). Burke
discusses the “pictorial turn” of history beginning around the 1980s, sharing the uneasiness expressed by the participants stating images “are mute witnesses and it is difficult to translate their testimony into words” (2001, 14). But because it is difficult, does not mean images should be overlooked as viable source material for historical analysis. Similarly concerned with the status of images as sources, Stafford’s collection of essays present the “pleasures, beauties, consolations, and, above all, intelligence of sight,” taking issue with the perception that images are not equally viable source materials as their textual counterparts (1996, 4). Stafford’s often colorful and sometimes belaboring language does not fail to expose “the dubious assumption that pictures, their creators, and their beholders essentially lack integrity, or basically are not as cognizant as language purveyors” (Stafford, 1996, 11). Similarly, Picturing Russia is a collection of brief essays exemplifying “ways to use images more thoughtfully and integrate them more productively in historical and cultural analysis, to use images to enhance and not merely to illustrate” (Kivelson & Neuberger, 2008, 1).

The participants’ perceptions that historians weigh the linguistic over the visual support Stafford’s statement that the “totemization of languages as godlike agency in western culture has guaranteed the identification of writing with intellectual potency” (1996, 5). It is all too common that images are used as illustrative accompaniment to, distraction from, or advertisement for the text and do not warrant the indepth analysis given to visual resources’ textual counterparts (Kivelson & Neuberger, 2008; Haskell, 1993). Increasingly the lines between art history and history’s analytical methods are blurring, combating the solely-illustrative misconception of images (Rotberg & Rabb, 1988).
1.1.2 New Technologies, New Historians

A primary cause of this “pictorial shift” in historical research can be attributed to the infiltration of new technologies into the field of history by way of new historians who are raised with computers being part of the educational process and the increasing accessibility of images due to digitization (Haskell, 1993). In the context of this study of image retrieval and use by graduate history students, Burke notes that this seachange in historical analysis will be slow, but eventual as new historians who have “lived in a world saturated with images… approach the visual evidence for the past” (2001, 13). Stafford adds “computers are forcing the recognition that texts are not ‘higher,’ durable monuments to civilization compared to ‘lower,’ fleeting images” and technology “may eventually rid us of the uninformed assumption that sensory messages are incompatible with reflection” (1996, 4).

1.2 Visual Literacy

These historians’ and art historians’ arguments are part of a larger discussion of interpretation and analysis methods to draw deeper meaning and insights from images, known as visual literacy. Because visual literacy is multidisciplinary in scope, there are numerous definitions, but for the purposes of this study, the definition used was presented at the American Library Association’s 2011 conference in New Orleans, Louisiana in a draft of *Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*:

> a set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media. Visual literacy skills equip a learner to understand and analyze the contextual, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, intellectual, and technical components involved in the production and use of visual materials. A visually literate individual is both a critical consumer of visual media and a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture (Hattwig, Burgess, Bussert, & Medaille, 2011).
Elkins argues that as part of the pictorial shift that began in the 1980s, visual literacy instruction began to appear in the form of visual studies departments in numerous higher education institutions (2003). Elkin’s work walks through the history and practice of visual literacy in higher education, albeit with a skeptical approach to the disjointed status of the field, and suggests that part of graduate course work should focus on the examination of visual resources in the context of the disciplinary field (history in this case) and provide students with “a common vocabulary of images provid[ing] a nascent list” to be built upon and used in their continuing studies (2003, 140).

1.3 Role of the Library

Knowing that there is a “pictorial shift” in history and that images are increasingly used by historians, it will be important for libraries and archives (and the staff supporting them) to be aware of image sources in both online (e.g. subscription-accessible image databases and open access online collections) and physical formats (e.g. print resources, slide collections, etc.). Librarians must ask what their role will be in providing access to images and how they will contribute to visual literacy instruction. Nelson explored this very issue and found that “teaching visual literacy goes beyond the librarian’s role – for the following reason: unlike the concept of information literacy, the concept of visual literacy revolves around the content analysis of images, their meaning, not so much about the technical skills of finding them and their qualitative evaluation in terms of authenticity, currency, etc.” (2004, 8). Nelson concludes that the role of the librarian in this context should be limited to image access instruction, leaving image analysis instruction to discipline specialists (historians in this study).
In her analysis of user instruction in digital libraries, Snavely stated that one of the most important components of digital user instruction was a dynamic information site containing “instructions on finding and accessing the content, and then possibly even a tutorial to help hesitant users get started” (2005, 28). For in-person instruction, Harris offered several effective strategies that integrated image retrieval methods into discussions of text retrieval instructions, but – in agreement with Nelson – leaving instruction on how to analyze images for discipline specialists (2007).

More generally, in a study of how academic libraries are supporting image needs of multiple disciplines, Mayer and Goldenstein surveyed 225 institutions to find what purposes images served for students and faculty from the perspective of librarians and other library staff. Students predominantly used images for assignments as part of their course work; however, it is not clear whether this group includes only undergraduate students, graduate students, or a mix of the two. Faculty image use was split between instructional and publication needs. Of particular interest to this study, Mayer and Goldenstein also estimates that the history department was second only to the art department in requests for image retrieval assistance (2009).

1.4 Future Historians

Very little research has been conducted on the information retrieval habits of graduate history students, but studies more broadly examining the behaviors of graduate humanities students offer valuable insight into this user group since students of history are also students of the humanities. Delgadillo and Lynch’s study (1999) of future historians examined three questions: 1) Do graduate students present similar information retrieval behaviors as established historians? 2) Does this user group use online sources
and new technologies more than established historians? 3) And how much do graduate history students rely on librarians?

Delgadillo and Lynch found that established historians (who acted as advisor and course instructors for this user group) influence the information retrieval behaviors of graduate history students. “What the faculty member does is what the student does” (1999, 257). In response to the second question, Delgadillo and Lynch could not offer a clear conclusion about whether this user group adopted new technologies and utilized online sources more than established historians, postulating that in the years following the study, the answer to this question would be much clearer. Lastly, graduate history students again mimicked the behaviors of faculty and sought help from “specialists, subject bibliographers, curators, and special collections librarians who could guide them in their specialized information needs. They did not seek out – and in many instances avoided – the general reference librarians” because they were perceived to be ill-equipped for requests (Delgadillo & Lynch, 1999, 256; Tibbo, 1994).

In his exploratory study examining graduate students of the humanities, Barrett asked how the information seeking behaviors of this user group differ from those of faculty and undergraduate students. Barrett found that graduate humanities students were distinct in two ways because of the reliance on faculty advisors for guidance during the thesis process and uniquely full schedules due to expectations for graduate students. Additionally, Barrett argues that it is “potentially misleading to consider graduate students to be a single user group. Rather a more accurate depiction would be a group constituting a unique series of stages” (2005, 330). Depending on how far into the
program, graduate students were either more or less similar to undergraduate students and faculty.

Twelve years after Delgadillo and Lynch’s study, it is still unclear whether graduate humanities students use electronic sources more than print. Barrett concluded that the widespread influence of the internet increased the use of online sources by graduate students, but Wu and Chen concluded that significantly more of the sources cited in graduate student theses were print resources (2010). Online search engines (such as Google) were not the initial or primary method of conducting research for the thesis, instead Wu and Chen found that graduate humanities students relied more on libraries to gather information.

Common among the studies of graduate humanities students was the influence of faculty over this population’s information seeking behaviors (Barrett, 2005; Delgadillo & Lynch, 1999; George et al. 2006; Wu & Chen, 2010). In order to improve understanding of graduate students, it is important to understand the established scholars advising and teaching them.

1.5 Information Seeking of Historians

Much has been written about the information seeking behaviors of humanist scholars, some of these studies focus specifically on historians and their retrieval behaviors. Studies examining the types of sources used, methods of accessing and using sources, and overall motives for gathering information characterize the history scholar as someone who is a heavy user of the library, but figures things out on his or her own (Case, 1991; Fabian, 1986; Weintraub, 1979). When research assistance is needed, the historian first asks peers or subject specialist library or archive staff (Tibbo, 1994).
Fabian’s eutopian ideal of a library is one that is systematic and accesses a complete encyclopedic collection. Although grandiose overall, Fabian’s emphasis on the library performing a “dual function by providing the researcher with both the raw material and the results of research” promotes the notion that the library should understand users’ needs and reflect those needs in services, including image retrieval services (1986, 83; Weintraub, 1979).

In Case’s analysis of historians’ motives for information seeking, he argues that historians “scan the environment for stimuli that match certain characteristics – a landscape that consists of text: books, periodicals, and original source documents (such as letters, diaries, and archival material) – supplemented by non-textual materials, such as pictures, photographs, and films”, but often waste time and effort due to a lack of understanding by the library of their information needs (63). However, Case agrees with the findings of several studies concluding that humanities scholars’ search criteria consist of subject, time period, and geography limitations and that researchers are often confused about how sources are indexed (Bates et al., 1993; Bates et al., 1995; Tibbo, 1993; Tibbo, 1994).

1.6 Image Seeking

Research concerning image retrieval and use is still very much in its infancy; however, studies have looked at these issues more broadly (Jorgensen, 2003; Martinez, 2009). Martinez offers a concise – yet effective – introduction into many of the issues that this study will touch on, including: historians’ perceptions of images, use of images, and visual literacy. Martinez finds that although images are used increasingly in humanities scholarship, “many humanities students and scholars struggle to devise
strategies or protocols for interpreting images that are as rigorous and rewarding as those used to interrogate textual sources” (Martinez, 2009).

Few studies have been conducted on image retrieval, access, and uses by specific user groups, but of the studies found, only one specifically focuses on historians and image retrieval (Choi & Rasmussen, 2002). After surveying 38 historians and graduate history students on criteria used to determine relevance of images retrieved, Choi and Rasmussen concluded that “in image information environments, most users look for an image that represents what they want. Who created the image is not considered. What matters is what an image represents, although in areas such as art or fashion design, creators and producers may play a greater role for relevance” (2002, 714). Choi and Rasmussen also found that other search criteria affecting relevance included title, date, subject descriptors, notes provided, and the emotional reaction to an image. Although discussing art history students, Chen’s conclusions in studies analyzing image retrieval and queries correspond with Choi and Rasmussen’s, showing that art history students also base image relevance criteria on topicality of the image (2001).

In a study examining how services could be improved for undergraduate image seekers, Bridges and Edmunson-Morton concluded that libraries should first “promote and advertise their services heavily to increase awareness of collections” and second, “work to raise the rankings of their images in search engines such as Google and Google Images” since participants in the study overwhelmingly chose to use Google for image needs (2011, 31). Because the field is relatively new, studies concerning image retrieval, access, and use only partially touch on the research needed.
2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design and Primary Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to explore how graduate history students find and use images, aiming to highlight rudimentary suggestions on how to best serve this population’s need while also pointing to areas needing further study. Because study of image retrieval habits of specific user groups is still very much a burgeoning field, a qualitative study with data collected from informal interviews was chosen to answer the core questions structuring the study:

- What role do images play during the course of study for graduate history students?
- What are their methods and motives for image retrieval? and
- Is there an outreach opportunity for visual resource specialists and other information professionals to serve this population better?

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, suggestions on how to meet the most pressing needs of this population will be offered, as well as identify areas needing further study. The limited number of participants precludes the ability to form clear cut conclusions of graduate history students and their image needs.

2.2 Interviews

Interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes and followed schedule used to direct free-form discussions with participants (See Appendix 1). Main topics discussed included: the methods used to find an image, the intended purposes for images retrieved, the role of images in a participant’s position as a graduate history student, image retrieval
instruction, and awareness of image resources and other visual resource databases available to students and faculty.

To ensure participant anonymity, each participant was assigned a random number based on the order of the interviews (for example, the first interviewee’s recorded responses and data are labeled P1). To ensure confidentiality, names and specific facts that could be used to identify participants – such as dissertation topics – will not be included. The participants’ fields of study will be discussed more broadly (such as modern European history) to represent the diverse backgrounds of the participants and how this might affect their image seeking and use behaviors.

2.3 Participants

A recruitment email was sent to all of the graduate students listed on the History department’s website of a major university. Of the respondents, participants were chosen if they completed their first year of study as a graduate student and could meet within the time frame of the data collection phase of the study. Four respondents were conducting research out of the country and were ultimately not chosen to participate because in-person interviews were most beneficial and appropriate to the style of this study.

Each participant is part of a graduate program which includes both graduate and undergraduate students; however, this study focuses on only graduate students. The program is notable for supporting diverse fields of study and various theoretical methods for historical analysis. As part of the flexible degree requirements, each graduate student chooses one primary field of study of the nine major fields (ancient history, European history, history of science, history of women, global history, Latin American history, military history, Russian and East European history, and United States history) and one
secondary field of study chosen from one of the nine major fields listed above or African
history, Middle Eastern history, and Asian history. Students may either complete an M.A.
within the graduate program or be accepted with an M.A. from another institution and
begin work on a Ph.D. Students without an M.A. in history must take Hist 700 Thinking
Historically and Hist 900 Crafting a Historical Project during their first year of study.
Hist 700 introduces students to a variety of historical methods and the sources used by
said methods, whereas Hist 900 charges students to write a research paper utilizing the
methods and skills taught in Hist 700. It is important to note that it is optional for Ph.D.
students to take these introductory courses as they will be discussed further in the Results
section of this paper.

Six graduate students participated in this study, three male and three female of
different ages. All participants except P2 were currently working on obtaining a Ph.D. P2
graduated just prior to the interview taking place and due to this recent change in status as
a graduate student, I determined that the information provided was still relevant to this
population study. Table 1 displays the year completed, status in graduate program,
number of M.A.s received prior to joining the graduate program, and fields of study.
“ABD” refers to the status of a participant and denotes that the participant has completed
all course requirements, as well as taken comprehensive exams and defended a
dissertation prospectus, but is currently working on a dissertation. If a participant is ABD,
the year completed and whether a participant entered the graduate program with a M.A.
gives evidence as to how long a participant has been working on his or her dissertation.
For example, P5 completed five years of study and is ABD, but did not have a prior M.A.
so P5 is currently researching and writing a dissertation, whereas P1 also completed five
years and is ABD, but entered the graduate program with prior M.A.s so P1 has almost completed a dissertation.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Year Completed</th>
<th>ABD</th>
<th>Previous M.A.(s) from Other Institutions</th>
<th>Fields of Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>5th Year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3 in History</td>
<td>Early Modern European History and History of Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Finished PhD (5 Years)</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Modern European History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>3rd Year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1 in History</td>
<td>Early Modern European History and Intellectual History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1 in History</td>
<td>Russian/East European Cultural History and East Asian History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>5th Year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>United States Women’s and Gender History and African American History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>8th Year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>United States African American History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Results

3.1 Definition of a Visual Resource

Compared to the definitions previously discussed, the definitions provided by the participants reflected a much broader scope for what constitutes a visual resource and an
image. All participants struggled to give a succinct definition, but rather listed types of visual resources they used in the past: photos, paintings, drawings, maps, charts, films, news reports, physical objects, and physical spaces. Both P2 and P3 stated a visual resource being “really anything” that is “nontextual” and “what ever fits the bill”. Most pointed to photographs and paintings first as examples, but broadened the definition as they contemplated, even including physical spaces such as an individual room in a house (P4) or an actor performing a monologue for a class (P1).

3.2 Use of Images

I identified three primary roles of use for visual resources based on the discussion of what purposes images serve in their positions as graduate history students: course work, teaching, and research. Course work use refers to the use of images in the graduate level courses each participant must take as part of the graduate program. Teaching refers to the use of images during courses solely taught by participants or when participants acted as Teaching Assistants (TAs) or guest lecturers for a faculty member or another graduate student’s course. Research refers to each participant’s use of images in his or her dissertation, whether these sources are part of the final draft, the prospectus, conference presentations, or simply as a memory tool. Each role will be discussed individually, followed by a discussion concerning the important influence of the history department faculty regarding the retrieval and use of images by graduate students.

3.2.1 Use – Course Work

Overall, participants described course work assignments as predominantly writing assignments (book reviews, historeographical seminar papers, source criticisms, and
online discussion postings) with a student-lead discussion component centered around text-based sources like monographs and articles. P4 described course work as producing “oral and written digests” and all participants stated visual resources did not play an prominent role (if at all) in the majority of their courses. However, P2, P5, and P6 identified the Hist 700 course (previously discussed) as one in particular that included use of images and visual literacy instruction.

Since it is not a required course for graduate students entering the program with at least one M.A., only three participants took Hist 700, but all explained the course is taught to introduce students to the graduate course format and seminar style. The course examines a variety of historical methods, as well as how to critique and use sources effectively, including a discussion on images in the context of every other kind of source touched on throughout the course. The “pictorial turn” in historical methods is examined; P2 expressed the in-defense of images tone of the discussion: “just because [it is] an image, doesn’t make it any less important”. In connection with this idea, students are also asked “How might you read an image?” (P5), pointing to Kivelson and Neuberger’s argument “that images have been used differently and function differently than do texts. Such differences lead us to ask: What is being conveyed visually at any given time? What is being said visually that could not or would not be articulated in words or in print?” (2008, 8). These questions are commonly asked as part of the “pictorial turn” towards visual literacy, where students are not only told images are a viable source, but also instructed how to gather valuable information from them and use them to bolster an argument.
3.2.2 Use - Teaching

Unlike their own courses, all participants used images often as lecture illustrations, additionally P2, P3, P4, and P5 each took the opportunity to conduct visual literacy exercises with students during lectures by asking students to “read” images in a similar manner to how P2 and P5 critiqued images in the Hist 700 course. P2 described heavy use of images before, during, and after class. As students entered the room and prepared for class, a projected slideshow played to get students in the mindset for the lecture. Throughout the lecture, visual resources were used as cues and discussion points – and after class – P2 provided access on a online course management page to the same images for reference. All participants felt that student engagement during lectures increased when using visual resources. P3 noted students “enjoy the break” visual resources offer and P5 stated the use of images “makes the lecture so much more interesting for students and [the] TA”.

Participants expressed the need to grab the attention of students and keep the attention with the aid of images. Stafford argued that unless instructors offered arguments conceptualized on not only textual, but visual sources, “in-class instruction [would] vanish if it is not thoroughly reconceptualized and the value of mediated encounters stressed” (1996, 13). Participants did not express the same doom’s day attitude for in-class instruction as Stafford does, but they did articulate the important role images play in their lectures.

Participants utilized a variety of digital and analog technologies to show images during classes. All, but P1 used a digital slideshow program/service like Microsoft Powerpoint or Prezi to organize and show visual resources. P1 was the only participant
to utilize the university’s physical slide collection to make a slideshow, using a slide projector during the class lecture. P1 expressed the quality of physical slides was better than digital versions and therefore more interesting to students. Perceptions of quality and preferences for digital vs. physical visual resources will be discussed in more depth in the next section, but it is important to note that the quality of images affects the level of use by graduate history students working as TAs and guest lecturers.

3.2.3 Uses – Research

All participants stated using images in some aspect of their research (conference presentations, dissertation, publications), but the level of use and textual examination of an image relied on the level of comfort with visual literacy and the amount of relevant images found to support an argument. P2, P3, P5, and P6 stated the extent of images used in their research was what P2 referred to as the “bad way of using them”, as illustration and the dissertation’s argument predominantly relied on textual resources because it it is often difficult (or nearly impossible) to find enough images to support an argument (P3). In addition to using images as illustration, P2 and P5 stated images were a helpful memory tool by allowing them to humanize content through forming a “personal connection” with names and events read about over and over again (P5). Even if these memory tool images were not used in the final dissertation or presentation, they help to keep chronology, faces, names, locations, and events in order.

Unlike the other participants, P4 was the only one to anticipate using many images in the dissertation and not solely as illustration, but as main sources for the argument. P4 was also the only participant to have extensive training in visual literacy and felt comfortable with “close reading of [an] image”. While completing an M.A. at a
different institution, P4 took a course focused on the “use of images as historical evidence”. Students read Burke’s *Eyewitnessing* and Kivelson and Neuberger’s *Picturing Russia*. Additionally, the course required students to write historeographical essays based on visual resources and present an image or series of images with a lecture analyzing them. This type of visual literacy training is similar to Elkins’ suggestion (2003). The participants’ experiences with visual literacy will be discussed in more detail, but it is important to note the correlation between increased use of images and the comfort using images to support arguments and not solely illustrate them.

3.2.4 Faculty Use

Gleaned from all interviews was that the use of images in all three roles (course work, teaching, and research) relies heavily on faculty influence. For course work, five participants could name faculty members that they believed used images comfortably, but due to the seminar-format of graduate history courses, images were rarely used during courses. The Hist 700 course was the only course of the graduate program mentioned that specifically included images and visual literacy instruction; however, discussion focused on image source criticism is subject to faculty choice and could easily not be included. Only P2 designed and taught a course, whereas all participants acted as TAs or guest lecturers for faculty-led classes where the content and scope of the course is decided by the faculty member. Input from TAs is welcome, but the ultimate decision to include images lies with the faculty member teaching the course. In research, all participants noted that comfort with using images in the dissertation came from learning by example from faculty and being advised by a faculty member who uses images often in research. P4’s advisor – for example – heavily influenced the decision to use many images in the
dissertation. The data concerning faculty use of images was only briefly discussed because of the broader scope of this study, but based on the interviews conducted, closer examinations of established scholars’ uses of images would reveal more about graduate students’ needs and uses.

3.3 Sources

Each participant was asked what sources were consulted when seeking images and whether specific sources are prioritized over other sources depending on a variety of factors including: purpose of image, specificity of image, and ease of access to the source. Chart 1 displays each source discussed and the corresponding number of participants that stated using that source. Several sources will be discussed in more detail as to reason for use by participants. Additionally, the participants’ preferences for digital versus physical sources will be discussed.
3.3.1 Sources – Google Images

Four participants stated first using Google Images as a doorway to more legitimate and trustworthy sources. Of these participants, all expressed the sentiment that Google Images was the most accessible and often fastest way to browse for and find specific images. Additionally, Google Images acted as a “discovery tool” (P5), often leading participants to other sources discussed, including: online collections (OCs), online archival finding aids, and print resources.

3.3.2 Sources – ARTstor

ARTstor is a subscription based service offered to non-profit institutions that provides access to over one million digital images shared across 1,350 subscribing institutions (ARTstor Inc.). The online image database caters to multiple disciplines including history. I specifically asked about the participant’s knowledge and use of ARTstor because their institution is a subscriber, new images continue to be added that are relevant to historical research, and the online database offers several useful tools to export and save images to a user’s ARTstor image group, presentation, or personal computer. Three participants used ARTstor to varying degrees. P1 used ARTstor often because lesser known works are included alongside widely known works. Additionally, multiple views of the same work can be found. P2 primarily used ARTstor for teaching purposes and P4 plans to use it more in the future to find images for the dissertation. It is important to note that after learning about ARTstor during the interview, P3 and P5 were interested in learning more about the source.
3.3.3 Sources – Ebay

P2 stated using the online auction site Ebay as a good source for difficult to find images, such as postcards of small towns. The participant used Ebay mainly for teaching and saved images directly from the site, but also purchased visual resources for use in the dissertation.

3.3.4 Sources – Creates Own

Four participants produced their own original images taken of a physical site or object, in an archive, or directly from a print resource with a camera (digital or film) or a scanner. Research for the dissertation was the primary purpose for producing unique images, but participants also used the unique images for teaching as well.

3.3.5 Sources – Online Collections / Specialized Image Databases

Four participants stated they used online collections hosted by individual archives and libraries (such as the online collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives\(^{ii}\), as well as subject specific image databases to find images (such as the Index of Christian Art\(^{iii}\)). The Library of Congress’ online collections were mentioned most often; however, participants found individual Library of Congress collections and other subject specific collections often through an initial Google Image search.

3.3.6 Sources – Digital vs. Physical Source

Four participants discussed their preferences for either digital or physical source materials. P2 preferred digital images found online because they are easier to access, search, and import into word processing and presentation programs. Speaking specifically
of individual institutions’ online collections, P2 added that a digital representation of what can also be found in the physical space of the institution was useful in deciding whether or not to make trips to archives or libraries. Conversely, P1, P3, and P6 preferred the physical source. P3 and P6 mentioned tangibility was important when researching both texts and images because they felt they synthesized information better when they could touch the physical records. P6 did share the sentiment though, that seeing digital representations of what can be found in the physical space was extremely helpful in planning research trips. P1’s preference for physical sources was based on the color quality of the image, expressing that the quality of color in digital representations was “not as true to the actual colors” as the originals. P4 and P5 did not have a preference for either format, but P5 also expressed wanting to see some digital images representative of what else can be found in the collection before making the often cross-contintental trip to individual institutions.

Print sources, online course pages, journals, microfilm, and archival finding aids were all described as “happenstance” (P6) sources because the primary motive was textual research, but participants “stumbled across” useful images. The idea of happenstance is also exhibited in the overall image searching methods described by the participants in the next section. It is important to note though that both digital and physical sources share a sense of unintentional discovery for graduate history students seeking images.

3.4 Discovery as Method

When speaking more generally of how participants found sources for images and individual images, all participants described discovery as a method for finding. P1 stated
“I’m finding out all the time about new places” to seek images, never knowing when, where, or how a new source will be discovered. All participants described happenstance as the primary way of finding new sources, but participants differed on how to turn discovery of a new source into later use since a newly discovered source may not be pertinent to the current research task, but could be useful in the future. P2 and P5 specifically mentioned bookmarking online sources for later exploration when initial sources (such as Google Images) are exhausted or newly discovered sources appear to be particularly relevant to the topic of research. P3 described later exploration when discovering from a faculty member the Slavery, Abolition, and Social Justice resource while acting as the TA for the faculty member’s course. Although the source was not relevant at the point of discovery, P3 later needed images depicting the slave trade for a lecture and went directly to this source, ultimately finding the images needed.

Similar to the discovery of new sources, participants described browsing for images. When searching, participants prioritized search criteria on the subject of the image, as well as the time period and geography. Because of these search criteria, participants browsed through image results until finding the specific image that met their needs. Only P1, P3, and P6 described ever searching for a specific image and only did so because they first saw the images while performing textual research. All participants stated that the majority of their visual resource search methods relied on discovery, imagining an image depicting a particular subject and seeking one that meets the need. Lastly, only P2 further narrowed image results by limiting technical specifications such as image size, file format, and resolution.
3.5 Educational Outreach and Visual Literacy

Participants were each asked about their knowledge and experiences with educational outreach hosted by a library, archive, or similar institution regarding visual resources, then asked to reflect about their personal comfort with using images, and finally their suggestions for educational outreach in the future. These responses were most revealing about what direction visual resource professionals should take when trying to serve this user group.

3.5.1 Institutional Educational Outreach

I first asked each participant if they attended a seminar, workshop, or class hosted by an information institution such as a library, archive, historical society, department of an educational institution (art history department for example), or other similar institution providing access to images. Four of the participants attended some type of workshop or seminar that included information about how to find images and sources available. As new students without an MA, P2, P5, and P6 attended a library tour with a sit down session about what sources (including image sources) are good for history students to consult. P2 also attended workshops at individual archives where a photo archivist would explain the “nuts and bolts” of using the archive, but was “not there to teach contextualization”. P4 was the only participant to attend a workshop focused on ARTstor. Lasting one hour, topics included how to search ARTstor, technical specifications (file types, file sizes, exporting images), and copyright/fair use issues.

Participants were also asked about their awareness of information professionals around campus that could assist with visual resource needs. Only P1 was aware of and consulted with the Visual Resources Curator working out of the art history department;
however, P2, P3, and P4 assumed there would be someone on campus with that position. Both P2 and P6 asked the Photo Archivist for assistance in finding images, and four participants said they consulted with library and archive staff not specifically associated with visual resources, such as subject liaisons and general reference librarians. Speaking about the library tour, P5 stated “it was useful to have [the librarian] walk through that, but I think the more useful thing was knowing he was a person I could come talk to”.

Participants were also asked about their awareness of the subject guides developed and maintained by the campus libraries, including a newly developed subject guide devoted entirely to images. Previously, information regarding finding images spread across a variety of disciplines including art history, journalism, and medicine. Only two participants, P2 and P3, were aware of the libraries’ subject guides and of those, neither knew about the image guide. P2 expressed the information from the institution about how to find images is “very fragmented,” iterating the confusions caused by tucking away sources into different disciplines. When informed of the image guide, all six participants saw value in the guide and were interested in using it in the future.

3.5.2 Visual Literacy

Participants were asked about their visual literacy experience. Those who took Hist 700 had at least an introduction to visual literacy and how visual resources can be used for historical research. P1 and P3 both had some visual literacy instruction while completing their M.A. before entering the graduate program. Even with visual literacy training, P3 tried not to use images “out of element” because “as a graduate student, as a researcher, as a historian, I know just enough about visual culture and art history to know
that I am not quite qualified enough to use images indiscriminantly” because of knowledge needed for higher level visual literacy.

Conversely, P4 having the most experience using visual resources through course work, felt comfortable with a “close reading of image[s]” alongside a textual source analysis. If an image is used as historical evidence,

“as a historian you have a responsibility to discuss the implications of the source [you are] using and not just to leave unspoken assumptions about what the image does for your argument, but to conscientiously and articulately make a point, because you are making a point with the image and so I think in order to be academically responsible you need to be explicit about the point your image is making”.

Comfort with using images and analyzing them in a manner similar to textual resources relies on extent of visual literacy education; however, visual literacy education may fall outside of the purview of visual resource professionals (and information professionals at large). Lessons regarding the interpretation of sources currently lie with history faculty and should probably stay that way since information professionals are not experts on specific subjects, but rather on finding information related to a specific subject.

3.5.3 Educational Outreach Preferences

Each participant was asked first, if they would be interested in learning more about finding visual resources and second, how would they prefer to receive this information. All participants resoundingly said yes, they would like to learn more about visual resources and how to find them, but time available and energy to do so play primary roles in the decision. All stated that because of time constraints, it would not be possible to attend a seminar or class. In response to proposing a visual resources research
workshop, P3 responded “in a fantasy world, it would be great, but also thinking about our daily lives, would we want to spend another day, another afternoon in a course when we have four courses, TA loads, [and] everything else we do”. Additionally, P3 also explained that it is difficult to find the energy for supplementary research for images because the time commitments devoted to graduate work are so strenuous.

As alternatives, participants mentioned three suggestions for effectively delivering information to this user group while also fitting into an already busy schedule. P2 and P3 suggested a handout with introductory information about how to find visual resources. After hearing about the online image guide, four participants suggested publicizing the guide to populations that might find it useful, including graduate history students. Lastly, three students suggested someone who works for the university and specializes in visual resources, speak during the Hist 700 course or TA training to introduce themselves as someone the students can contact for questions and present relevant sources for images. P3 explained if information is simply and concisely given to graduate students, then visual resource professionals have done their jobs; graduate students will take it upon themselves to seek further information if needed.

3.6 Most Confusing or Difficult Issue Related to Visual Resources

I asked each participant, “what do you find most confusing or difficult about finding and using visual resources?” to get a sense of what is most problematic for this population. Surprisingly, five participants said they found how images are indexed or cataloged most confusing and difficult to understand since it is often different based on the source used. For online sources, participants described difficulties in knowing what search terms to use and what these terms will search. Participants’ search criteria is based
on subject, time period, and geography, but the participants do not know what information has been attached to a image and therefore do not know if they are inputting the proper search terms. P5 stated “it all depends on how it’s been tagged” and that is often unknown, especially when searching Google Images.

This confusion also translates to images only available in physical format. P6 specifically discussed difficulties searching for images in archival collections using finding aids, stating cataloging and descriptions of image records differ from institution to institution, ranging from extensive descriptions of individual images or image groups to no mention at all of visual resources in the collection. Because of varying cataloging and indexing standards for visual resources, these participants shared a sense of never exhausting sources because of a lack in confidence in search terms used.

The main difficulty for P3 was expecting images to be digitized because so much is “patently available” online. The participant admitted not finding a digital version of an image may rely on not using the correct search terms, but also the image might just not be available in digital format. Confusions over indexing standards and difficulties finding digitized visual resources point to the same issue of lacking confidence in the search.

4. Discussion

The data collected during this study revealed several areas where visual resource instruction could be developed and improved to better serve graduate history students. In this section, I present two sugestions that could quickly improve services to this user group followed by a broader discussion of how visual resource professionals can better serve this user group, emphasizing collaboration between the history department, visual resources professionals, and other information professionals. I conclude with suggestions
of further studies because the research into the image seeking behaviors of this user group (and other relevant groups) is limited.

As mentioned in the introduction of this study and in support of the arguments made by Burke (2001), Elkins (2003), Kivelson and Neuberger (2008), and Stafford (1996), participants were aware of the “pictorial shift” taking place in the field of history. Although the participants primarily used images as illustration, their interest in learning more about finding images and reflections of the Hist 700 course suggests that perhaps future historians are open to elevating the status of images as viable sources and equivalent to texts.

4.1 Outreach

It is clear from the participants’ responses that they definitely would like more information about how to find visual resources, but because of extremely busy schedules and lack of energy to take on additional work, this user group is unable to attend entire workshops or seminars (as Harris suggests) devoted to finding visual resources. Just as Barrett concluded, graduate students’ busy schedules set them apart from undergraduates. Similar to Case (1991), Fabian (1986), Tibbo (1993), and Weintraub’s (1979) perceptions of established scholars, participants in this study showed signs of being self-reliant researchers and preferring to explore sources on their own time. Self-reliant researchers with full schedules means a limited initial interaction with this user group is best, then if individual students desire more help, they will consult the appropriate people or sources in the future.

Initial contact should be in the form of an information document (whether a physical print out or email) listing the most important information regarding visual
resources and the primary people to contact if help is needed in finding an image. The most relevant sources for historic visual resources should be included as well as the contact information and job descriptions of the visual resources curator/manager, photo archivist, and any other information professional on campus uniquely suited to assist in visual resource needs. Tibbo concluded historians trust and are more likely to ask subject specialists for assistance more than general librarians. Consistent with this conclusion, if visual resource professionals identify themselves as image specialists, graduate history students will be more likely to approach them for help with their image needs. Most importantly and in agreement with Snavely, the image guide available online (most likely through the library’s website) should be publicized and presented as a portal for additional and current information regarding visual resources. Although the information document should be provided to each incoming graduate history class, the information is static once provided, whereas the image guide is dynamic and should be updated as often as necessary (when new sources become available, new or different visual resource professionals are hired, updates to previously available sources, etc.).

Pulling all sources relevant to image-based research into one central online image guide is a useful tool for not only the user group discussed in this study, but for user groups of a variety of fields that need and use visual resources. The image guide should be multidisciplinary in scope by listing and briefly annotating each source, as well as again providing the contact information for visual resources professionals. Since graduate history students would like more online resource instruction and had a strong grasp for finding physical sources, the online guide would primarily feature and provide instruction
for online sources. Perhaps the most important function for the image guide could be instruction on how to effectively search for visual resources.

Confusion over visual resource indexing and cataloging was the most common problem for the participants of this study and including this information within the image guide could prove to be a useful tool. Agreeing with previous studies, the participants’ responses supported these findings that subject, time, and geography are the primary search criteria used by this user group, so it might be useful to include information about common metadata schemas (such as VRA Core®) utilized by institutions with visual resources, but not supplying overly technical information (Bates et al., 1993; Bates et al., 1995; Chen, 2001; Choi & Rasmussen, 2002; Tibbo, 1993; Tibbo, 1994; Weintraub, 1979). There is not a uniform indexing and cataloging standard utilized by all institutions with visual resource collections yet. Because of this, it could be helpful to briefly discuss the metadata schemas most often used by institutions such as archives and libraries so as more institutions conform to the same standards, this user group will be more and more familiar with choosing the correct search terms.

Letting this user group know of whom to contact for image needs could also improve this user group’s confidence in performing exhaustive searches. Being able to contact a visual resources professional about whether there are additional sources to consult would allow this user group to efficiently search for visual resources without wondering if they could have searched more and found what they needed. Additionally, if an image is not yet digitized, a visual resource professional may know who to contact in order to get an image digitized and accessible.
Perhaps the most important function of providing an information document and maintaining an online image guide is both to elevate graduate history students’ (and ultimately students of other departments) awareness of image sources available and people to contact for help. This study exposed the lack of awareness this user group has about the visual resources available to them as students of a higher education institution, but also the interest in learning more about these sources. This study also identified possible collaborations that could be beneficial to both historians and visual resource professionals.

4.2 Emphasis on Collaboration

Because a visual resource can be “anything that fits the bill” (P2) for graduate history students, this in-definition leads to a broader job description for visual resource professionals. Graduate history students will ask for help with image needs from anyone they think will be able to supply the information, including faculty, librarians, archivists, visual resource curators and managers, and even other graduate students. This means that collaboration with other departments and people with varying expertise will be essential to reaching this user group. As a visual resource professional, it will be important to make your presence and your position known to relevant parties and departments, so they know whom to go to and in-turn whom to send students to in case of an image-need.

In agreement with other studies, this study showed that faculty members of the history department have significant influence over graduate history students’ choices to use visual resources and where to find them. Based on the data, I disagree with Mayer and Goldenstein’s conclusion and suggest that graduate students are more closely aligned with faculty uses and not undergraduate uses. Additionally, the participants in this study
also suggested integrating information about how to find images into the Hist 700 course and/or the Teaching Assistant training. It seems useful for visual resource professionals to reach out to the faculty, explain what services they provide, and offer help for visual resource needs – overall making their presence known. Similar to graduate history students, faculty would choose to include the information in their interactions with students, creating a trickle down of information to the relevant parties.

Based on the responses of participants, it is my opinion that visual literacy instruction should be left to the discipline specific experts, in this case the history department’s faculty. I agree with the conclusions of Elkins (2008), Harris (2007), and Nelson (2004) that instruction regarding the analysis of images should be left for the faculty to cover, whereas instruction on how to find images should be integrated into library instruction. In addition to reaching out to faculty, it is important to let other information professionals serving this user group know the role of visual resource professionals and how they can help to improve services.

5. Conclusion

This study revealed that graduate history students seek and use images for two main purposes: teaching and research, but the use of images is still very much illustrative. Only one participant stated images would be analyzed just as texts would – giving equal wait in the body of the dissertation. Participants used a variety of digital and physical sources and the majority of them stated Google Images was the first source consulted. I cannot agree with Wu and Chen’s conclusion that Google is not the first place searched by graduate students because in the case of this study and in the context of images, it was. However, I cannot conclude whether this population uses online sources more than print
sources since this issue was only a passing point throughout the discussion. Therefore more studies need to be conducted specifically focused on the preference for digital versus physical sources by not only graduate history students, but students of other disciplines as well.

Lastly, since use of images by historians is increasing and this study agrees with previous studies’ conclusions regarding the importance of faculty influence over graduate student access and use of information, more research about how established historians find and use images must be conducted. Understanding the image-seeking and use behaviors of historians would reveal further information about the user group of this study. More studies regarding the presence of visual resources in information institutions need to be done across the board, but the field of research directing visual resources management is still new and perhaps focused suggestions of study are best when trying to build a body of knowledge.

Notes

i Prezi is an online service which allows users to create non-linear slide presentations that reveal how and what ideas connect slide content. http://prezi.com/index/.

ii USHMM Photo Archive Online collection contains 85,000 historical photographs, 15,000 institutional photographs, and 10,000 digital images of artifacts. http://www.ushmm.org/research/collections/photo/ .

iii The Index of Christian Art contains over 100,000 digital images and 80,000 records for individual works of art. http://ica.princeton.edu/index.php.
iv This resource includes digitized images, maps, essays and manuscripts related to slavery and social justice over the extensive time range of 1490-2007.

http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/

v VRA Core is a standard developed by the Visual Resources Association to describe visual resources. http://www.vraweb.org/projects/vracore4/index.html.
References


Appendix 1

Interview Schedule:

Opening:

Introduction: I am a master’s student in the School of Information and Library Science conducting research about the visual resource-seeking habits of graduate-level history students. My faculty advisor for this study is Deborah Barreau, Associate Professor in the School of Information and Library Science. Her contact information is provided in the consent form you signed.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to explore how graduate History students find and use images. The interview questions and discussion will focus on topics including: the methods used to find an image, what is the intended purpose for an image, the role of visual resources in your position as a graduate student in the History department at UNC, instruction on how to find visual resources, and awareness of image resources and databases available to UNC students and faculty.

Timeline of Interview: This interview will last approximately an hour and will be audio recorded, but you reserve the right at any moment to ask me to stop recording. I have a list of questions, but I would prefer for this interview to freely flow from topic to topic in hopes that this will reveal the most valuable information. The questions act as an interview guide so that I ensure I ask you about the discussion points of my study. Periodically, I may take a moment to write down notes about your responses.

Questions:

Academic Interests:
These questions pertain to your academic interests and will help me to better understand your individual visual resource needs.

— Are you a Master’s or PhD student?

— How far into the program are you?

— Do you have any other graduate degrees?

— Could you discuss your academic interests?

— What is your primary field of study?

— Do you have a secondary field of study, if so, what is it?

— Can you discuss the assignments you have to complete for your courses (lead discussions, papers, presentations, etc.)?

**Role of Visual Resources:**

— What is your definition of a visual resource?

  o Where can you find visual resources?

For the purposes of this study, a visual resource is defined as an image accessed physically (printed, original works, etc.) and/or online and can be an original or a reproduction thereof.

— Can you discuss the role visual resources play in your position as a graduate History student?

— Would you say you use visual resources often as part of your studies at UNC? Do these resources act as significant resources?

  o If so, can you explain how you use them? What purposes do images serve? How are images used by you? Research, teaching, presentations, inspiration, etc.? Try to think of the last time you looked at an image in the
context of your position as a graduate student, what were the reasons for finding this image? Did you simply look at the image, or did you use it for an additional purpose?

- **If not,** could you explain why you think images do not play a significant role? Does your field of research not typically rely on visual resources? Do you feel visual resources are not beneficial to your studies at UNC?

**Methods to Find Visual Resources:**

- Think again about an instance when you had to find an image, can you explain the steps you took to finding the image?
- What source did you first consult? Why did you choose this source first? Was this source adequate or did you have to consult additional sources?
- Have you ever used one of the image databases available through UNC such as ARTstor, UNC Digital Collections, Camio, etc.?
- Have you ever needed an image that was unavailable online and made a scan or taken a photo from the print source or the original item?
- Do you save images for future reference or use? How and where do you save them? When you save them, do you save the contextual information about the image provided such as Subject, Date, Location, Title, Creator, Medium, and Use Rights?

**Educational Outreach for Visual Literacy and Visual Resources:**

For this study, visual literacy is defined as the ability to interpret and draw meaning from images, similar to textual literacy and drawing meaning from written materials.
Can you discuss any educational outreach you received related to visual resources and visual literacy?

- Have you ever attended a class, seminar, or similar event focused on visual literacy or finding visual resources sponsored by either UNC or another institution?
- Have your professors ever included information about using visual resources or visual literacy?
- Have you ever asked UNC library staff (at Davis, Wilson, or any of the branch libraries) about how to find visual resources?
- Do you feel that information regarding finding and using visual resources is easily accessible? Where would you go for this information?
- Are you aware that UNC employs a Visual Resources Curator and photographic archivists?
- What do you find most confusing or difficult about finding and using visual resources?
- Would you be interested in learning more about visual resources through information sessions hosted by professionals? How they can be beneficial to your work, where you can find them, what to know when you want to use them?

**Final Comments:**

- Do you have any additional comments regarding visual resources?
Thank you for participating in this study. In my data analysis, I will not use any identifiers that could connect you to your responses. Please contact me by phone or email if you have any questions or comments regarding this study.