
The purpose of this paper is to explore whether students with experience using archives search finding aids differently than students no experience. A usability study was conducted using four different finding aids from four institution with eleven undergraduate students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The participants were recorded completing the tasks and were asked to describe their searching methods and the challenges they faced while completing the tasks during a stimulated recall session. The results found that students used a multitude of searching methods in their attempts to answer the questions. The experienced users used more advanced techniques to find the answers but were less successful than the inexperienced participants on most of the tasks. The participants also struggled with archival terminology as well as the websites themselves while searching for materials. However, the participants were mostly successful in searching the library websites and locating finding aids.

Headings:

Archives

Finding Aids

User Study-- Internet Resources
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON UNDERGRADUATE ARCHIVAL SEARCHING BEHAVIORS

by
Elizabeth F. Shulman

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
April 2016

Approved by

Helen Tibbo
Table of Content

Introduction................................................................. 2
Literature Review.......................................................... 4
Methodology................................................................. 12
Results............................................................................. 20
Discussion....................................................................... 35
Conclusion ........................................................................ 45
Bibliography .................................................................... 48
Appendix #1: Email Recruitment Message to Professors...................... 50
Appendix #2: Email Recruitment to Academic Departments.................... 51
Appendix #3: Task Sheet with Answers................................................ 52
Appendix #4: Stimulated Recall Script.................................................. 57
Introduction

Archivists only began conducting and publishing formal user studies in the past thirty five years. This is because archivists viewed themselves as the custodians of the materials and the concerns of the user were secondary. However, archivists are not custodians just so the materials can sit on a shelf for all of eternity. The documents have little meaning until used by patrons to facilitate their research. By understanding their users, archives can change how they function to cater to the needs of the patron. The collecting policy, reference programing and instruction, and archival description should benefit the user. Many user studies have been conducted since the mid-1980s on how users interact with archives and specifically with finding aids. The main users addressed in these studies are professional researchers and inexperienced patrons. There is very little literature written about an important user group: the undergraduate student.

Undergraduates students are proficient at using various online searching tools to locate materials for their research. This includes library search bars which are used to help find archival materials such as online finding aids. While many finding aids are available online, student struggle to navigate them without assistance from archivists. This is because many students lack the skills necessary to search for information effectively. They search broadly across collections and as a result generate irrelevant results. Students also struggle with archival terminology, which can frustrate them or

---

lead to incorrect search results. As more and more professors bring their classes to archives for instruction sessions or have projects that require archival documents, archives will continue to see a rise in student users. Therefore it is imperative to have a greater understanding of the undergraduate population as archival users in order to better serve their community.

This study is an exploratory study on how undergraduate students search archival websites and finding aids to find information. Though a usability study, the searching methods of students with any level of archival experience were compared to students without special collections experience. Eleven participants, five with experience and six without, answered four questions about collections from four special collections libraries. They were then asked to discuss their searching methods and decision-making process for each question in a stimulated recall session while a recording of their actions while taking the test was played back. Participants were asked about the challenges of the tasks, navigation issues, and vocabulary after the recall sessions. This study aims to understand the searching process used by undergraduates in an archival setting. It also ponders whether having experience factors into the success or failure of the students to find information in archival searches. While the sample size in this study is a small homogenous group, the conclusions can be applied to other novice groups and how they search for archival materials and finding aids.
Literature Review

As archives have become more user focused in the past thirty-five years, archivists have been increasingly interested in learning how to better serve their users.\textsuperscript{2} Several user studies have been conducted analyzing how users interact with online finding aids. However, the vast majority of these studies focus on adult users, such as historians and genealogists. There is only a small sampling of literature which focuses on the undergraduate population. One of the goals of this literature review is to understand the information-seeking behaviors of archival researchers. The other is to analyze and summarize the user studies conducted around finding aids.

Archival User Studies

Prior to the 1980s, archivists thought of themselves primarily as the custodians of archival materials. There was little formal effort made to understand the patrons and how they interacted with the material as most archivists believed they comprehended the needs of their users. In 1986, Paul Conway conducted the first comprehensive, profession-wide study of users. He harkened back to a statement of the Society of American Archivist Task Force on Goals and Priorities which stated, “Use of the archival records is the ultimate purpose of identification and administration.”\textsuperscript{3} This meant that


archivists need to gain a better understanding of the users and why they were interested in archival research. He found that use transcends just the people using the archive, as the documents housed in the archives could have an impact on society as a whole. By conducting regular user studies, archivists could collect raw data that could be used to influence reference programs, descriptive practice, outreach, and processing. With descriptive practices, Conway wanted to use the user survey data to improve the archival databases and finding aids. These improvements would provide experienced users with the level of independence they desired when conducting research and potentially bring new users into the archives.

By the mid to late 1990s, archives began putting finding aids online, giving users greater access to archival materials. Archivists then wanted to understand how users interacted with finding aids on the Internet. In a study conducted by Wendy Duff and Penka Stoyanova, users were asked to evaluate six different archival information displays encoded in the Canadian standard Rules for Archival Description (RAD). The displays contained the same content but had different appearances. What they learned was that users with different levels of experience wanted emphasis on different things. For example, more experienced users wanted basic biographical information but not long bios. They argued that users should already have that knowledge before arriving at the archive and that more information should be provided in the scope and content. Less experienced users struggled with how to request materials online. What Duff and

---

Stoyanova concluded from their study was that there was a significant correlation between a level of understanding of finding aids and user satisfaction.\(^6\)

In a case study conducted in the late 1990s at Florida State University, researchers stated that they found it a “great convenience” to have the finding aids online. Professors especially thought that online finding aids would be beneficial to their students. Prior to finding aids being online, they stated “locating and accessing primary sources is a continuing problem for students. Having access to finding aids and documents…would greatly facilitate that task.”\(^7\) However, one major concern of users was that the finding aids could be access through several entry points, which could result it novice users becoming easily lost or confused as they browsed finding aids. Statistics drawn from the site indicated that users were searching for and browsing the online finding aids. However this finding gave little indication of the effectiveness of those searches. Based on this study, researchers hoped that they would be able to search for materials more effectively using online finding aids.

In the early 2000s, Christopher Prom conducted a study on how users interacted with finding aids based on their specific areas of expertise. He selected three categories of participants: experienced archival users, experienced computer users, and novice users. The participants were given tasks to find specific materials and were timed to see how long it took them find the result. The novice users took the longest on all tasks while both group of experts were much more efficient. What Prom found was that participants had greater success when they used search options that were not too complex. Most

---

\(^6\) Ibid, 46.

participants said they preferred browsing to using a search bar if they knew what they were searching for.\textsuperscript{8} Participants mainly struggled when archivists used complex archival terms in their finding aids. Overall, he determined that finding aids needed to be designed with the user in mind. He also stated that the finding aids should be simpler, but not at the expense of completeness.\textsuperscript{9}

\textit{Information-Seeking Behaviors of Users}

Richard J. Cox of the University of Pittsburgh wrote that “finding information in archives is not an easy task and designing intuitive systems that meet the researchers’ needs require a thorough understanding of the information-seeking behavior of archival users.”\textsuperscript{10} This is because archivists tend to create finding aids with language that they are more comfortable with instead of utilizing the searching terms used by the researchers intending to use the archives. Archivists have also found it challenging to study archival users because the researchers are unaccustomed to articulating their research need to the archivists.\textsuperscript{11} This has led to a lack of understanding of how users interact with and search for archival materials. As a result, archivists have started conducting user studies on the searching methods of their users in hopes to creating a standard that is beneficial to archivists and researchers.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, 164-65.
Morgan Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel conducted a user study on users and successful searching strategies. They tasked participants with searching for and finding specific content in finding aids from two universities. Participants included graduate students, undergraduates, historians, genealogists, and librarians. The participants tried several different strategies including using search bars, Boolean searches, and browsing. Each group had highly successful and unsuccessful searchers. The unsuccessful searchers had issues with selecting search terms, trouble navigating the finding aids, and a lack of familiarity with archival terminology.¹² Daniels and Yakel concluded that the current finding aid interfaces are much more suited to name-based searching over subject-based searching. They felt that searching would be easier for the users conducting recall searches if finding aids could be modified to suggest related terms or provide guidance for using subject headings while conducting recall searches. Ultimately, archivists need to focus more on building finding aids that take into account user behaviors so that researchers can conduct more efficient and successful searches.¹³

A user study conducted by Susan Hamburger attempted to gain a better understanding of the search strategies used by researchers when seeking manuscripts and archives online. The study also tried to determine if users took advantage of controlled vocabulary or if they used less precise keyword searches.¹⁴ The respondents to the survey were a combination of faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and other researchers. Although most of participants were computer literate, the majority

---

¹³ Ibid, 564.
stated that they located manuscripts using footnote and citation searches. When presented with a list of tools, they stated that the most useful tool was the online library catalog. This resonated with the undergraduate respondents where the highest percentage stated they primarily used the library’s online catalog followed by the library’s website to locate manuscripts. The undergraduates also ranked the online catalog as the most useful tool for their searches.\(^\text{15}\) Unfortunately, the respondents in this study said nothing about their search terms or how they search for archival materials in this study.

Wendy M. Duff and Catherine A. Johnson conducted a user study to understand the information-seeking behaviors of historians. They found that even expert researchers such as historians find archives to be initially overwhelming. To reduce their uncertainty and confusion when they arrive at an unfamiliar institution or use a new collection, they examine finding aids. Historians also use secondary sources to locate citations for archival collections. By initially searching broadly and then narrowing their scope, they are able to create a context for the collections within their research. Having this contextual knowledge allows them to search more efficiently and locate more archival resources.\(^\text{16}\) Ultimately, Duff and Johnson found there are four information-seeking activities that researchers utilize to find archival materials. They are: orienting oneself to archives, finding aids, sources, or a collection, seeking known materials, building contextual knowledge, and identifying relevant materials.\(^\text{17}\)

Several studies have been conducted to understand the information-seeking behaviors of novice users and their struggles with archival research. Novice users,

\(^{15}\) Ibid, 85-87.  
\(^{16}\) Duff and Johnson, 481-486.  
\(^{17}\) Ibid, 492.
particularly undergraduate students, have some information literacy skills but have little
to no familiarity on how to use archival finding aids.\(^\text{18}\) Archival instruction attempts to
provide students with the navigational skills they need to use archival collections to their
full potential. However, most novice users struggle with the concept of finding aids.
According to Christopher Prom, inexperienced users typically spend more time trying to
find results than searching for archival materials because they use high recall search
engines such as Google as their main mechanism for conducting research.\(^\text{19}\) In a study
published in 2004 by Elizabeth Yakel, students were asked to complete four tasks using
finding aids from the Historic Pittsburg Project. Student participants struggled with these
tasks, frequently using the “anywhere” search to find the answers because they did not
know how to conduct other types of searches. These high recall searches detrimentally
affected the search results, producing a high rate of irrelevant results.\(^\text{20}\)

Novice users also struggle with the archival language used in searching and
finding aids. Users in Yakel’s study were also confused by terms with similar definitions
such as “abstract,” “scope and content note,” and “historical sketch.” The use of archival
language within the searching database also perplexed the participants.\(^\text{21}\) In a study
conducted by Wendy Scheir, novice users were confused by archival terminology such as

\(^{19}\) Prom, 250.
\(^{21}\) Ibid, 74-75.
“finding aid,” “creator,” and “extent.” However, despite their lack of archival knowledge, the users did not have too much trouble completing the tasks in the study.\(^{22}\)

This study explores the searching behaviors of a novice user group: undergraduate students. Some of the participants in this study have used special collections before, some are inexperienced. Do they struggle with some of the common pitfalls that the novice users faced in the studies conducted by Yakel and Schier such as archival jargon? Do they find the library search catalog to be the best way to search for and find information from archives like the undergraduate participants in Hamburger’s study? As there is limited literature which explores the searching behaviors of undergraduate students, this study borrows elements from the studies conducted by Christopher Prom, Wendy Schier, Morgan G. Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel. The intent is to gain a better understanding of the searching habits of undergraduate students using archival websites and finding aids.

Methodology

The aim of this study was to understand if students with any experience using special collections search for information in finding aids differently than students without that experience. This study borrows concepts from other finding aid user studies discussed in “User Interactions with Electronic Finding Aids” by Christopher Prom, “First Entry: Report on a Qualitative Exploratory Study of Novice User Experience with Online Finding Aids” by Wendy Schier, and “Seek and You May Find: Successful Searching in Online Finding Aid Systems” by Morgan G. Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel. Where this study diverges from those studies is that it specifically focuses on undergraduates as users.

For this research study, a sample size of eleven was selected because it was large enough to gather significant data but small enough to be manageable for graduate level research. Jakob Nielsen also determined that with quantitative usability studies, the best results come from no more than five participants and running a number of small tests. This is because as more users are added, researchers learn less they continue to see the same results.23 The end goal of this study was not to improve the institution’s finding aids but to understand the searching habits of undergraduate students and how they interact with finding aids.

In order to gain an understanding of student searching habits, a test was created for them. The test consisted of four questions about finding aids housed at four different institutions. Eleven volunteers were selected to participate, all undergraduate students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). Five participants had used archives before and six had no experience at all. Each participant completed the test while a screen capture recorded their actions. The recording was replayed for the students who were asked to explain how they went about searching for the information and about the challenges they faced while completing the tasks.

Recruitment

The target participants for this study were UNC undergraduate students with and without special collections experience. Students were recruited from the humanities and social sciences departments from two sources. The first were the UNC departments themselves. A recruitment message was sent out to the staff members from eighteen UNC departments focusing in the humanities and social sciences. The majority of the departments contacted sent the recruitment message to their undergraduate students. The second were UNC professors who had brought their classes to Wilson Library for an instruction session within the last year. Those professors were asked to send the recruitment message to their current and former students and most were willing to send out the message. Volunteers were offered twenty dollars upon completion of the study. While there were more than enough students without special collections experience, only eleven responded that they had experience using special collections. However, this number was the correct number of participants as the researcher saw similar trends
amongst the participants with how the reacted to the test questions. Due the volume of responses, participants were selected using a random number generator.

The Task

Selected student participants made appointments to meet individually in a computer lab on the UNC campus to complete the task and answer interview questions. The participants used a computer equipped with the screen recording software Camtasia and were presented with the task sheet. The task sheet contained four questions which asked the participants to find a specific piece of information or collection. Students were given links to the home page for each special collections library. The questions were created from four different finding aids from four different institutions: Montana State University, Duke University, Princeton University, and Virginia Tech. These repositories were selected because of their websites’ searching capabilities. The researcher designed all but one of questions would be fairly simple. The single challenging question was meant to force participants to think creatively about the information requested.

Prior to starting the test, students were asked their year, their major, whether they had experience using special collections, and if so, whether they had had attended an instruction session at a special collections library. This information was gathered to see if there was any correlation between any of these pieces of information and how participants answered the questions. Students were also informed that they were to spend no more than five minutes on each question and were presented with a timer. This was to prevent the entire session from going longer than an hour. The researcher sat at a table in the same room and was available to answer questions. She also kept time for the
participants who were asked to notify her when they had recorded an answer for each question. Participants were also asked to notify the researcher when they finished the test.

Once the participants completed the test, the screen capture of them completing the tasks was played back to them and they were recorded discussing their thought process while completing the tasks. The methodology used was stimulated recall which is “a family of introspective research procedures through which cognitive processes can be investigated by inviting subjects to recall, when prompted by a video sequence, their concurrent thinking during these events.” 24 The reason for selecting stimulated recall was the assumption that the participants would provide more information in their post-test interviews if they had stimuli to help them recollect their behavior while completing the task.

During the stimulated recall sessions, participants were instructed to recall the methods they used to locate the finding aids and find the piece of information requested in the question. The researcher did not ask any specific questions during the recall session, only those to help clarify decisions or to generate conversation. The participants were informed that the conversations were being recorded and the researcher used verbal cues to help match up the audio recordings with the screen captures. The test and stimulated recall sessions took less than forty-five minutes to complete.

Participants

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Used Special Collections</th>
<th>Had Instruction Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Public Policy and Economics</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Political Science and Global Studies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Information Science and Linguistics</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Comparative Literature</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Human Development and Family Studies</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Political Science and English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Global Studies and Religious Studies</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The eleven participants for this study were selected from a large pool of UNC undergraduate students with and without special collections experience. Because of the number of responses, the participants were assigned a number in the order they responded and were selected using a random number generator found on Math Goodies. This random number generator was selected because it was free and allowed the researcher to place number limits for each category. Twenty students were contacted about participating in this study and eleven responded to the researcher to schedule appointments. While there was no academic year restriction, the majority of the students who responded and were randomly selected were upperclassmen. One reason that more

upperclassmen responded might be that the majority of the participants receive notification for the study through their departmental list-serv and must be a member of that major to receive those emails. Since UNC students do not need to declare their major before the second semester of their sophomore year, the recruitment emails might not have reached as many underclassmen.

In the recruitment emails forwarded to undergraduate students from department administrative assistants and professors who had brought students to Wilson Library, the students were asked to specify whether they had used special collections before. Of the forty-nine responses received, thirty-eight claimed they had never used special collections. The eleven students with special collections experience explained in detail how and where they got their experience. As the researcher received responses to the recruitment email, she sorted them into groups based on the experience level stated by the student.

Limitations of the Study

As with most user studies, there are limitations to this study. The biggest limitation of this study is that it only focuses on UNC undergraduate students and any conclusions drawn from this study cannot be applied to the general population. In fact, this study is not representative of the entire undergraduate population as most of the participants were upperclassmen and solely from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. However, this study can be used comparatively with other finding aid user studies to illuminate issues that other user groups face. In addition, the finding aids
selected for the test in this study are only a minuscule fraction of those available to the general public. They do not reflect the multitude of types and styles of finding aids found at special collections libraries. The researcher selected these four finding aids because the host libraries had decent searching functionality and the sites represented a diversity of finding aid styles.

The testing methods used by the researcher and testing of participants in a lab setting also place limitations on this study. Because the researcher sat in the same room as the participants while they completed the tasks, the participants might have altered their behaviors. They also might have felt pressure or anxiety about potentially answering a question incorrectly and being perceived as inadequate. The use of stimulated recall by the researcher could also have impacts that could question the results of this study. The limitations of stimulated recall include “immediacy of recall, potential for secondary ordering of cognitions, and potential bias in responses.”26 In this study, the participants might not have remembered why the searched in a specific manner or responded with information they thought the researcher wanted to hear. Still, stimulated recall is the best method for measuring cognitive processing without resorting to simulation.27

Another limitation that questions the real world application of this study is the time constraints during the test. The researcher placed a five minute time limit on each task in order to limit each session to a maximum of one hour. However, there are no time limits when users search for information in finding aids. Several of the participants

26 Lyle, 871.
27 Ibid, 873
stated that they felt constrained by the time limit and that they likely would have found the answer to the task had they had more time.

Lastly, the participants in this study are not indicative of the searching capabilities of the undergraduate student population. While they came from a number of different humanities and social sciences departments, the majority of the participants were upperclassmen. The research habits and searching methods of upperclassmen could be very different than those of underclassmen. Also, the study was limited to undergraduate students from UNC. Students from other universities in the Research Triangle area or from around the country might have different results than the students at UNC, which could limit the application of this study to the general undergraduate population.
Results

Test Performance Results

The participants’ results on this four question test were fairly varied and experience using special collections did not correlate to a higher success rate. While the majority of the participants were able to answer the questions posed in Tasks 1 and 3, most struggled Tasks 2 and 4. The researcher designed the question for Task 2 to challenge the participants to think creatively and recognize that the author of a collection may not always be the author of the item being sought. With Task 4, the participants struggled with the layout of the special collection home page as the location of the link to the search bar was not very obvious.
Figure 2: Participant Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Used Special Collections?</th>
<th>Montana State</th>
<th>Duke</th>
<th>Princeton</th>
<th>Virginia Tech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- correct answer?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, wrong regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- correct answer?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, ran out of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- correct answer?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, different collection with correct answer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- correct answer?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, different collection with correct answer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- correct answer?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, wrong regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- correct answer?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, ran out of time</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7- correct answer?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, ran out of time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, ran out of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8- correct answer?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9- correct answer?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, different collection with correct answer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, wrong regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10- correct answer?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, wrong regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11- correct answer?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, different collection with correct answer</td>
<td>No, ran out of time</td>
<td>No, wrong regiment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Task 1: Montana State University

Figure 3: Montana State University Special Collections & Archive Home Page

Special Collections & Archives

The Merritt G. Burlingame Special Collections of the Montana State University Library is the location for finding comprehensive information on select subject areas. With a comfortable service area in the Burton K. Wheeler Reading Room on the second floor of Renne Library, Special Collections is committed to assembling primary and secondary scholarly materials on specific topics supporting MSU curricular and research needs.

Search Special Collections Finding Aids

Areas of collecting emphasis for which finding aids are available:

- Montana Agriculture and Ranching
- Montana Engineering and Architecture
  - Montana Architectural Drawings
- Montana History
- Montana Native Americans
- Montana State University History
- Prominent Montanans
- Trout and Salmonids
- U.S. Senator Burton K. Wheeler
- Yellowstone National Park and the Yellowstone ecosystem

The collections are currently comprised of more than 34,000 volumes and 1200 linear feet of manuscript materials. In addition there are microforms, sound recordings, video recordings, and maps pertaining to all of the above subject areas. Materials are collected in all formats, including original papers and documents, publications, maps, photographs, and videotapes. A record of MSU Library's holdings are available via MSU's online catalog, WLN, and the World Wide Web.

Special Collections is committed to standardizing our finding aids for all of our manuscript holdings. These finding aids will include a statement of provenance, scope and content note, series descriptions, and in most cases, a folder level inventory. New finding aids will be added as they are completed.

In the question for this special collections library, participants were asked to locate the finding aid for the Alexander Leggat Collection and record his date of birth and location of birth. This special collections library was selected because it has several search bars located on its home page, making it fairly simple to locate finding aids. The collection was chosen because the information is easy to find in the biographical note of
the finding aid. Ten out of the eleven participants answered this question correctly and only one was unable to locate the finding aid or information.

Figure 4: Alexander Leggat Collection Finding Aid

All of the participants used the search bars located on the main page to search for the Alexander Leggat Collection. The central search bar took them to a page that listed the search results which linked to content description. The search bar on the left side of the main page led to search results that opened the collection’s finding aid. All of the participants who used the central search bar scanned through the content description that did not list either of the complete answers to the question. However, they learned that he was born in 1876 somewhere in Michigan. From the content description page, the majority of the participants who used that page clicked on the finding aid URL which opened the collection’s finding aid. From there, the participants were able to determine that Alexander Leggat was born on “December 22, 1876 in Owasso, Michigan.” Three of the participants including two with experience did not use the finding aid URL and
instead went to the content description for the Alexander Leggat Pamphlet Collection. On that page, the content description mentions the date and place of his birth. The participant who answered the question incorrectly did not locate his exact date of birth or the correct location where he was born. They knew what year he was born because creator note mentions his lifespan. However, this participant assumed that he was born in Grand Haven, Michigan, the town where the Leggat family lived before they moved to Montana. The participant stated that the source of their struggle with this search was not knowing the meaning of the term finding aid.
Task 2: Duke University

Figure 5: Duke University Rubenstein Library Home Page

The question for this special collection library entailed finding the collection that contained an 1863 letter from General Braxton Bragg to Jefferson Davis. The Rubenstein Library was selected because of its centrally located search bar. This task was the most realistic question because it required the participants to find a collection rather than a specific piece of information. It was designed to see if they could locate a collection where neither of the mentioned parties were the author of the collection. The participants struggled with this task with one answering correctly, four finding another collection that correctly answered the question, four answering the question incorrectly, and two running out of time before finding an answer.
The searching strategies varied on this task. Some searched for “1863 Letter Braxton Bragg Jefferson Davis.” Others had never heard of Braxton Bragg and searched for him because he was less well known than Jefferson Davis and would likely generate fewer results. While this question was designed by the researcher to see if the participants could locate a collection where neither of the people mentioned were creators of the collection, four participants were able to locate a collection which listed Jefferson Davis as the author of the collection and contained a letter from Braxton Bragg written in January 1863. This letter was mentioned in the collection summary found in the catalog record of the Jefferson Davis Papers which is part of the Harry L. and Mary K. Dalton...
Collection. While this was not the answer the researcher was looking for, the participants did correctly answer the question asked. Most of those who answered the question incorrectly cited the Braxton Bragg Papers which are also part of the Dalton Collection. While there are letters written to Jefferson Davis in these papers, there is no mention of any of them being written in 1863. One participant accidentally limited the search bar to digitized collections and located the Confederate Imprints which mentioned Bragg. After narrowing the search to Braxton Bragg pamphlets from 1863, the participant found two battle reports written by Bragg and assumed they were sent to Jefferson Davis. The only participant who found the Alfred and Elizabeth Brand Papers did so by searching through the collection guides for Braxton Bragg.

For this task, the searching strategies used by the more experienced users helped them narrow down their searches. Two of the experienced users knew that finding aids referred to archival materials and reduced the number of results by limiting their searches to archival materials. As a result, one of them was able to locate the Jefferson Davis Papers. The other clicked on the Jefferson Davis Papers but was unable to locate any concrete evidence that the collection contained a letter from 1863 from Braxton Bragg and ran out of time before answering the question. When restricting the search to archival materials, the Alfred and Elizabeth Brand Collection also appears as a result. The less experienced users attempted Boolean searches with terms such as “Braxton Bragg AND Jefferson Davis.” While both of the correct answers appear in this search, the participants’ inability to locate the correct answers had less to do with their searching ability within the catalog and more to do with their inability to find information within
that search result. Overall, this task was designed to be the most difficult searching task and it proved to be the most challenging one for the participants.
In the question for this special collections library, participants were asked to find the box in the F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers that contains an autographed manuscript of *The Great Gatsby*. The Princeton Department of Rare Books and Special Collections was selected because it has good visuals on its home page and an easy to locate search bar. A finding aid from Princeton was also selected because users are able to search for specific terms within the finding aid with a search bar. The F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers were chosen for this study because most of the participants would likely be familiar with F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby*. Seven out of the eleven participants were able to locate which box contained the autographed manuscript of *The Great Gatsby*. Of the
four that did not complete the task correctly, one found the digitized copy of the autograph manuscript, but not its location, another never found the box, the third found the wrong collection, and the fourth ran out of time.

Figure 8: F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers Finding Aid

All of the participants in this study used the search bar located in the top right corner of the library’s main home page. Almost all of them searched for “F Scott Fitzgerald” or “F Scott Fitzgerald Papers.” The results in the middle of the page led them to the collection’s finding aid. A few of the participants typed “Great Gatsby Autograph Manuscript” into the search bar at the top of the finding aid which led them to the correct
answer. Other participants clicked Writing, then Novels, and then found the correct box for the autograph manuscript. However, one participant did not see *The Great Gatsby* mentioned in the description on the search page and searched for “The Great Gatsby.” This led them to a digitized copy of the Autograph Manuscript. However, the description of the manuscript did not give its physical location in the collection. Another participant initially attempted to search without using the search bar. They first clicked on “Collections and Divisions” and then on “Rare Books Division.” While browsing in Rare Books, they considered “English Books” and “Americana.” After looking for *The Great Gatsby* in Americana, the participant decided to use the search bar. They searched for “F Scott Fitzgerald autograph Great Gatsby” and clicked *The Great Gatsby* under “Books and results.” This led the participant to a facsimile of the autograph manuscript. From there, they were clicked to request the materials which led them to a list of boxes, but none of the contents of the boxes. Ultimately, they ran out of time and were unable to locate the correct box.
Task 4: Virginia Tech

Figure 9: Virginia Tech Special Collections Library Home Page

In the question for this special collections library, participants were asked to locate the finding aid for the Robert Taylor Preston Papers to find one of the two regiments he served in during the Civil War. The task required the participants to have knowledge of the dates of the Civil War. This library was selected because it does not have a centralized search bar but has directions for how to search for special collection
holdings on the main page. It also had several different searching methods that could be used to locate the finding aid. The finding aid was chosen because it was easy for the researchers to find using the library catalog search and the searching method mentioned on the library’s home page. For this task, four out of eleven participants answered the question correctly, five found the finding aid but found an incorrect regiment, and two ran out of time.

**Figure 10: Robert Taylor Preston Papers Finding Aid**

The majority of the participants commented that this website was hard to work with and that they were frustrated by their inability to easily locate the search bar. Despite this, almost all of the participants located the finding aid for the collection. Once they located the “Addison Library Search” button, they were able to search through Virginia Tech’s holdings to find the finding aid. This allowed them to look through the
finding aid and find the answer to the question. The majority of participants who found the finding aid used “Control-F” to search for the word “regiment.” There were three regiments listed in the finding aid: two from the Civil War and one from 1830. The researcher accepted either of Civil War regiments as the correct answer. The most common error made by participants was listing Robert Taylor Preston’s 1830 regiment. Three of the participants were unable to locate the search bar and clicked on “Special Collections Online.” The Robert Taylor Preston Papers are digitized and the participants were able to search through individual letters. One participant was able to find his regiment in the title of one of the letters. The other two participants attempted to read some of the letters but struggled with the handwriting and were unable to find the correct answer in the limited time frame. Almost all of the participants agreed that this task would have been easier if the website was better designed and had an easy to locate search bar.
Discussion

While completing the interviews and stimulated recall sessions with the participants, the researcher began noticing patterns and common themes amongst the participants’ responses. The eleven screen captures were synced up with the audio recording and the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for their content. From these transcripts, the researcher was able to code the earlier observations into categories. The main topic of discussion during the interviews was the searching methods used by the participants as well as the searching capabilities of the libraries. Other observations include the experience of the participants in comparison to their success finding information and their lack of familiarity with archival language.

Searching Methods

When designing this study, the researcher ensured that the information asked for in each of the tasks was findable in each library’s search bar. Fifteen different library websites were tested before the four for the test were selected. Three of the four sites had a noticeable search bar located on the library’s home page. On those websites, almost all of the searches were conducted using the search bar. In some cases, the participants felt that they could attempt to find the materials by browsing on the library’s website. In their interviews, they assumed that Task #3 would be done without the search bar. However, they eventually realized that it was easier to use the search bar at the top of the page.
One of the biggest criticisms the participants had while completing the tasks was the lack of a central search bar on the Virginia Tech special collections website. Ten out of eleven expressed their discontent with the website as they felt it looked dated. This site was specifically selected to challenge the students’ searching abilities. Despite these complaints, the lack of a search bar on the main page did not have much of an impact on the participants’ capabilities. Seven out of eleven participants located the library’s search bar and nine out of eleven were able to locate the Robert Taylor Preston Papers’ finding aid. The two participants who were unable to locate find the finding aid ended up searching the “Special Collections Online” page and ran out of time.

When conducting searches, the participants used the keywords found in the questions. The researcher worded the questions with terminology used in her own searching exercises. In cases where there where several keywords, they selected the ones that were either the least common or they thought would generate the most accurate response. For example, the question in Task #2 asked the participants to locate the collection where they would find an “1863 letter from Braxton Bragg to Jefferson Davis.” Most recognized that Jefferson Davis was one of the most notable figures from the Confederacy. Very few of them recognized the name Braxton Bragg. Therefore they felt that searching for Braxton Bragg would help them eliminate extraneous collections that only referred to Jefferson Davis. In other cases, they changed terms used in the question and it caused them to struggle with finding the answer. In the case of Task #3, the question asked them to find which box held an “Autograph Manuscript of The Great Gatsby.” A number of the participants attempted to figure out what was meant by
autograph manuscript. They searched for “The Great Gatsby signed” or “The Great Gatsby handwritten” and as a result, were unsuccessful at finding the correct answer.

Once the participants located the search results or finding aid they thought had the correct answer, a number of them used Control-F to search quickly through the finding aids to find the specific piece of information. This step usually helped them save time when answering the question. For example, when searching for the letter from Braxton Bragg to Jefferson Davis, several participants did a Control-F search for “Braxton Bragg.” Since he was determined to be the less common name, it helped the participants determine if they had found the correct collection. The Control-F method was also used on Task #4 for the term “regiment” while searching for the regiments that Robert Taylor Preston served in during the Civil War. However, this often led participants to misidentify Robert Taylor Preston’s regiment because they would select the first instance of regiment which was from 1830. While it did not always yield the correct results, the Control-F search was the quickest way for the participants to find information.

One of the goals for this study was to determine if students with experience using special collections searched for information differently than those without that experience. One of the ways the more experienced users reduced the results of their searches was by limiting their searches to a specific collection or material. The experienced users who used this method recognized that searching for finding aids meant that they were looking for archival materials. When searching for Task #2, one of the participants was able to reduce their results from fourteen to three. This allowed them to quickly read the collection’s summary and determine that the correct answer was the “Jefferson Davis Papers” in the “Harry L. and Mary K. Dalton Collection.” Another way
that the experienced users were able to limit their searches was using Library of Congress subject headings. When designing these tasks, the researcher found the “Alfred and Elizabeth Brand Collection” using a subject heading search for Jefferson Davis. Two experienced users who were unable to find the search bar for Task #4 used the subject heading for Robert Taylor Preston to narrow down the results for their search in the “Special Collections Online” page. While this did limit the results, the digital collection did not appear to link back to the collection’s finding aid. Despite using the subject heading to reduce the number of results, both these experienced participants ran out of time before finding the correct answer.

*Experience versus Success*

While some of the experienced users used more advanced searching techniques to search for the information requested in the tasks, they were not necessarily more successful than their inexperienced counterparts. In fact, only one of the experienced participants was able to successfully answer all four questions. In Task #1, all of the inexperienced participants were able to find the correct answer; 80% of the experienced participants provided the correct answer. All three of the participants who had archival instruction answered this question correctly. With Task #2, 50% of the inexperienced participants were able to find a correct answer; 40% of the experienced participants were able to provide a correct answer. One of the three participants who had archival instruction found a correct answer. With Task #3, 33% of the inexperienced participants found the correct answer; all of the experienced participants including those who received
archival instruction located the correct box number. With Task #4, only 33% of the inexperienced participants provided the correct answer but 83% of them located the finding aid; 40% of the experienced participants found the correct regiments and 60% found the finding aid. One of the three participants with archival instruction correctly answered this question. Two of the three participants with archival instruction were able to locate the finding aid. The third participant with archival instruction ended up searching through the digitized materials and attempted to read some of the documents.

With the exception of Task #3, the experienced participants had less success finding the correct answers than their inexperienced peers. Despite having experience using special collections, why did they have less success? One of the biggest issues for the experienced users was the time limit. The researcher instituted a time limit to reduce the time needed to conduct the study. However, two of the experienced participants had at least one question where they ran out of time before finding an answer. When the footage of their searches was played back to them, they were either close to finding the answer or about to rethink their searching strategy. Had they had no time restriction, they likely would have provided an answer for the question.

The experienced users also tended to explore the websites more than the inexperienced participants. This was especially the case with Task #4 where there was no search bar on the home page. However, their exploration of the site led them to the digitized collections where they attempted to find the answer in the digitized letters. Both of the participants who ran out of time searching through the digitized letters stated that they were hoping that the answer in one of the digitized letters. One of the participants stated that they thought that because there was no search bar on the main
page, the question was not as straightforward as it seemed. They both struggled with the handwriting and ultimately ran out of time for that question.

In this study, the researcher used Task #2 to explore whether the more experienced participants could locate a collection where the creators of the collection were not mentioned in the question. The question asked about an 1863 letter from Braxton Bragg to Jefferson Davis which is located in the “Alfred and Elizabeth Brand Collection.” While the answer the researcher wanted came up in all of their searches, none of them explored the “Alfred and Elizabeth Brand Collection.” Several expressed that they thought that the information they needed would be in the summary or content description in the catalog. One of the participants felt that the description seemed like nothing more than a big wall of text. None thought creatively about the information provided and as a result, only two of them found a correct answer for Task #2 and it was not the answer that the researcher initially wanted.

Lastly, a few of the experienced users struggled with the archival language. While they all had used archival collections before, one of the participants was unfamiliar with the term finding aid. They said that if the questions had not had the term in the question, they would not have found some of the correct answers. This participant had used special collections before but did not attend an instruction session with a librarian. This vocabulary term is something the instruction librarians attempt to teach students when they attend a special collections library instruction session.

Archival Language
There were several vocabulary terms that some of the participants struggled with while completing the tasks. The first was the word box. For Task #3, the participants were asked locate the box where they would find the autograph manuscript of *The Great Gatsby*. The Society of American Archivists defines box as “A rigid container, usually with square or rectangular sides, typically used to store nonliquid materials.”

Four of the participants were confused by the term and two of those four were experienced users of special collections. One of the participants thought it referred to a search term and not a literal box. Another did not realize that the box would have a number. A third thought that the box would be part of the description and that they would not have to search through the finding aid to find the number. The last participant confused by the term did not understand what was meant by a box. Despite not completely understanding the term, the two experienced users were able to locate the box number for this task. For the two inexperienced users, the term box tripped them up and as a result they failed to record a box number.

Another term that three of the participants including one experienced user did not understand was finding aid. The participants were not provided with the definition of finding aid before the study but the term appeared in all of the questions. The Society of American Archivists defines finding aid as “1. A tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records. – 2. A description of records that gives the repository physical and intellectual control over the materials and that assists users to

---

gain access to and understand the materials.”²⁹ The experienced user stated that they had seen the term finding aid before but did not know what it meant. Two other participants said that they were unfamiliar with the term when asked by the researcher if they struggled with any of the vocabulary. During archival instruction sessions, students are shown an archival finding aid and its function is explained to them. None of the participants who struggled with this term, including the experienced user, had attended an instruction session with a special collections librarian.

Some of the participants struggled with the different terminology used by the different archival repositories. They noted that the terms collection and papers were used interchangeably by different libraries and they had no idea if these terms meant the same thing or something different. The Society of American Archivists defines collection as “1. A group of materials with some unifying characteristic. – 2. Materials assembled by a person, organization, or repository from a variety of sources; an artificial collection.”³⁰ Papers are defined as “1. A collection. – 2. A collection of personal or family documents; personal papers.”³¹ These two terms have almost the exact same definition and the word collection is used to define papers. These terms mean the same thing and are used interchangeably but still confused some of the inexperienced students. While there is no way to standardize the usage of the term amongst repositories, it is worthwhile to note that these words do confuse inexperienced users.

Comparison With Earlier Finding Aid Studies

The participants in this study had similar struggles with the archival vocabulary when compared with the participants in the earlier studies done by Daniels and Yakel, Schier, and Prom. Schier’s novice participants struggled with some of the terminology such as “finding aid” and “creator” but it did not necessarily impede their ability to answer the questions. Citing an article by Dennis Meissner, she concluded that “while [archival vocabulary] may be acceptable when archivists are on hand at a repository to guide researchers through a finding aid, such coded language needs to be carefully reconsidered for online finding aids.”\(^\text{32}\) Therefore, archivists should eliminate certain terms without losing specificity. Prom found that both experienced and inexperienced participants in his study struggled with the terminology and that archivists should avoid using it in general.\(^\text{33}\) It is impossible to determine what vocabulary terms should be eliminated as people process language differently. However, archivists should consider more standardization of terminology across repositories to eliminate confusion amongst users.

Another similarity between this study and Prom’s study was the amount of success amongst experienced users. During interviews with his participants, Prom discovered that many of the student participants who stated they were experienced struggled with searching through the finding aids on their own. Several graduate students said that they typically asked librarians for assistance when attempting to find

\(^{32}\) Schier, 72.
\(^{33}\) Prom, 262.
information at a special collections library. Most had received no instruction and found information either from citations or “because of the kindness of the archivist.”

Undergraduate students who participated in Prom’s study stated that they expected immediate search results for any library resources including archival materials. This held true for many of the undergraduate participants in this study. Many stated that they expected the answer to be in the summary of the collection found in the catalog. Many did not realize that some of these questions were asking for more minute details found in the finding aids. Like the participants in Schier’s study, this study’s participants did not want to have to read through large blocks of text to find the answer. In the world of Google and high recall searches, the undergraduate expects instant results.

---

34 Ibid, 245.
36 Schier, 75.
Conclusion

The most interesting thing about this study is that the experienced users tested had less success finding the correct answers to the task than the inexperienced participants. Also, the experienced users who attended a special collections library instruction session were not any more successful at searching for and finding information. However, the experienced users were more creative with their searches, limiting the parameters of their searches and using subject headings in an attempt to find the answers. Overall, all of the users were capable of using the library search bar when they had the specific details necessary to answer the questions. Still they struggled with vague searches which are mainly used when searching for archival materials. Most participants did not feel comfortable with searches that put them out of their comfort zone such as Task #2 or websites that did not conform to their idea of a good website such as the Virginia Tech Special Collections home page in Task #4.

Another area where the participants struggled was with some of the archival terminology. There are many studies where the users have expressed their confusion due to some of the vocabulary used in archives and finding aids. The finding aids seem to be designed by archivists for archivists and are not particularly user friendly. So how do archivists improve their vocabulary so there is less confusion amongst users? Archivists might eliminate redundancies within description. In this study, a participant expressed confusion about the difference between collection and papers. When researching the definition, the researcher found that there is not much difference between the two words.
While users cannot expect all archives to be exactly the same, there should be some standardization between them. Archival repositories should also take input from their users regarding the design of their finding aids. By conducting more user studies, they can better understand what works and what does not and attempt to improve the finding aids for the user.

This study was an attempt to understand the searching behaviors of experienced and inexperienced undergraduate students with special collections websites and archival finding aids. While this study did give insight into those behaviors, most of the tasks are not representative of real world searches. When conducting archival research, users typically do not have the exact facts or information they are looking for, nor do they necessarily know the name of the collections or the repositories they wish to use. Task #2 attempted to create a more real world searching environment for the participants. Even so, they had all of the information needed to find the collection requested. Users often conduct a lot of research before searching for archival collections, evaluating the collections they want to use, or arriving at the archives. While the tasks for this study do not replicate real world conditions for archival research, the searching methods used by the student participants and how they interacted with the catalogs and finding aids do represent how they actually search for information.

User studies are a fairly recent research method used by archives to better understand their user population. Most of these user studies are conducted with professional researchers such as historians and archivists or with adult novice researchers. There is a lack of studies examining how younger users such as undergraduate students interact with archival finding aids. Special collections libraries are increasingly
collaborating with undergraduate classes in an attempt to have more students to use archival materials and rare books in their research projects. User studies about how these students interact with the finding aids to locate materials for their research could be invaluable for instruction session. This study is an attempt to try and obtain a better understanding of what students know about special collections and how they go about searching for materials.

While this study attempts to better understand the searching methods of undergraduate students, it was conducted on a small scale to fit the time constraints of graduate student research. This study used just four finding aids and the participants only examined minute details of those finding aids. With some of the questions, the information asked for did not reflect how researchers would typically interact with finding aids. Further studies should use more finding aids and more participants. They should also explore how students search for archival materials without being given all of the details for how to find the information.

While this study does have limitations, learning about how undergraduate students search for information on library websites and interact with archival finding aids gives insight into a little studied group of researchers. Undergraduate students are the future researchers, professors and historians, and archivists should strive to better understand them and how they might use archival resources. Undergraduate students also have strong computer and internet skills and as a result are capable of conducting basic searches for archival materials. What the study indicates is that while students are not always successful at searching for information and locating archival finding aids, finding aids are not a barrier for them to do research with primary sources.
Bibliography


Appendix #1: Email Recruitment Message to Professors

Message to Professors

Dear [Insert Name Here],

My name is Elizabeth Shulman and I am a graduate student in the School of Information and Library Science at UNC. I am also a Research Assistant in the Research and Instruction Services Department at Wilson Library. I am seeking undergraduate student volunteers for a research study I am conducting for my master’s paper. I am trying to understand whether students with experience using special collections libraries and archival finding aids search through finding aids differently than students with limited or no experience. My reason for contacting you have brought your students to Wilson Library for an instruction session. Could you please send the follow recruitment message to your current and former students through your class list or Sakai list-serv? Thank you for your assistance.

Recruitment Message:

Would you like to participate in a research study and earn $20? My name is Elizabeth Shulman and I am a student at the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at UNC. I am looking for 20 volunteers to participate in a research study to understand if undergraduate students who have used special collections before search archival finding aids differently than students with limited or no experience. Selected volunteers will be asked to complete a series of tasks using finding aids in an on-campus computer lab and then answer some questions about their search process. Participants’ actions will be recorded using a screen capture and interview responses will be recorded using an audio recorder. Any undergraduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill is eligible to participate in this study regardless of archival experience, however I am looking for an equal number of participants with and without special collections experience. If you are interested, please contact me at eshulman@live.unc.edu. Please indicate whether you have used special collections before. This study should last no more than an hour and participants will receive $20 upon successful completion of the study. Thank you for your participation. The research study has been approved by the UNC Institutional Review Board (Study #16-0142).

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth Shulman
2016 MSLS Candidate
eshulman@live.unc.edu
Appendix #2: Email Recruitment to Academic Departments

Message to Professors

Dear [Insert Name Here],

My name is Elizabeth Shulman and I am a graduate student in the School of Information and Library Science at UNC. I am seeking undergraduate student volunteers for a research study I am conducting for my master’s paper. I am trying to understand whether students with experience using special collections libraries and archival finding aids search through finding aids differently than students with limited or no experience. Could you please send the following recruitment message to the undergraduate [Insert Department Name Here] Department list-serv? Thank you for your assistance.

Recruitment Message:

Would you like to participate in a research study and earn $20? My name is Elizabeth Shulman and I am a student at the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at UNC. I am looking for 20 volunteers to participate in a research study to understand if undergraduate students who have used special collections before search archival finding aids differently than students with limited or no experience. Selected volunteers will be asked to complete a series of tasks using finding aids in an on-campus computer lab and then answer some questions about their search process. Participants’ actions will be recorded using a screen capture and interview responses will be recorded using an audio recorder. Any undergraduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill is eligible to participate in this study regardless of archival experience, however I am looking for an equal number of participants with and without special collections experience. If you are interested, please contact me at eshulman@live.unc.edu. Please indicate whether you have used special collections before. This study should last no more than an hour and participants will receive $20 upon successful completion of the study. Thank you for your participation. The research study has been approved by the UNC Institutional Review Board (Study #16-0142).

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth Shulman
2016 MSLS Candidate
eshulman@live.unc.edu
Appendix #3: Task Sheet with Answers

Thank you for taking part in this study.

On the following pages you will find four tasks to complete. Each task involves searching on a library’s page to find a specific finding aid. Once you reach the finding aid, you will find a specific piece of information found in that finding aid. You will record your answer to the task in this document. You can access the library’s homepage by command-clicking (ctrl-click if using a PC instead of a Mac) on the link provided. Please spend no more than five minutes on each task. This will ensure that you will be able to complete the study within an hour. If you cannot find the answer in the allotted time, please skip to the next question. You can use the timer provided or your own clock or watch.

Please be aware that your actions during this study are being recorded using a screen capture and that your answers to interview questions will be recorded using a recording devise.

If you have any issues accessing the pages or experience technical issues during the course of this study, please notify the researcher and she will be happy to assist you. Please let the researcher know when you complete the task sheet.

[Answers not provided during actual test]
1. Please go to the homepage for the Montana State University Special Collections & Archives: https://www.lib.montana.edu/archives/ 
Please locate the finding aid for the Alexander Leggat Collection and record his date of birth and location of birth.

[December 22, 1876 in Owasso, Michigan]
2. Please go to the homepage for the Duke University Rubenstein Library: http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/
Please locate and record which collection you would find an 1863 letter from General Braxton Bragg to Jefferson Davis?

[Alfred and Elizabeth Brand Collection of Civil War and Lee Family Papers]
3. Please go to the homepage for the Princeton University Department of Rare Books and Special Collections: https://rbsc.princeton.edu/

Please locate the finding aid for F. Scott Fitzgerald Papers and record which box you would find an autograph manuscript of *The Great Gatsby.*

[Box 5a]
4. Please go to the homepage for Virginia Tech Special Collections: https://spec.lib.vt.edu/
Please locate the finding aid for the Robert Taylor Preston Papers and record one of the regiments he served with during the Civil War.

[28th Virginia Infantry or 4th Virginia Reserves]
Appendix #4: Stimulated Recall Script

Questions to Ask Before Completing Tasks

Please show me your UNC One Card to prove you are a current UNC student. None of the information such as name or PID will be recorded.

How old are you? You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study.

What year are you at UNC?

What is your major at UNC?

Have you ever been to a special collections library to do research?

Have you had an instruction session with a librarian at a special collections library?

Questions to Ask After Completing Tasks

For the final part of this study, I will play back the screen capture of your task completion session. Please discuss with me the steps you went through while completing each task and explain to me your though process.

Please describe any challenges you faced while completing the task.

Did any unfamiliar vocabulary slow you down or get in the way of you being able to complete the task?

Did you have any issues navigating the library website?

If you decided to use searching methods other than those found on the library website, why did you chose those methods?

Did anything regarding the tasks confuse you?

If you found something easy, explain why you found it to be simple.