

Alison Clemens & Lisa Conathan  
L-60: Introduction to Archives for Special Collections Librarians, Booksellers & Collectors  
1–6 June, 2025, New Haven, Connecticut

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Are there any readings that you would like to see added or removed in future years?*

1. They were very helpful. I was relieved and happy to see that the pre-readings were not extremely long and were manageable. I appreciated the thoughtfulness of our time and understanding of our jobs and life.
2. The reading assignments were a useful introduction to the terminology used in the class. As an attendee professionally unfamiliar with the topic at hand, it gave me an idea of what I could look into deeper before class. With a busy work schedule, it was also useful to have more overview readings that were entry level into the field and not white papers or entire chapters needing to be read ahead of class. It helped to have them as links on a site where I could access them as I had the time to ingest them. The links were also useful to more easily share with colleagues as we begin our discussions around this topic.
3. The pre-course reading assignments were all useful and selected with thought and care. I especially appreciated the short videos that gave explanations on DACS.
4. Yes, they were useful to gain a baseline understanding of archival work regardless of background—and this is a diverse class with a range of backgrounds, so that was helpful.
5. Yes, the pre-course reading assignments were useful. I found myself frequently returning to the materials throughout the week, in tandem with the course's hands-on exercises (which were also deeply useful and well designed).
6. Yes.
7. {no response}
8. Yes! The perfect amount and content.
9. The pre-course readings were somewhat useful. A lot of other things would have been a lot more useful to me. I get the concepts and {illegible} at play in archival management; navigating jargon and databases, not at ALL. I would have felt a lot better about all of this if I had been better equipped in re:lingo.
10. Pre-course readings and videos were helpful, and not too many. I was surprised to get a reading assignment of Sunday night, but it was a manageable length.
11. Yes, they were helpful.
12. Yes, useful. Not too much: perfect for cramming the week before. More info: a glossary for ArchivesSpace would have been helpful.
13. Pre-course reading assignments helpful.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. All of the content was extremely useful! I will definitely be going back to the PowerPoints provided during class a lot—especially during my next few courses at

UW Madison. I think the class was well paced. I wish there was more material or information on ArchivesSpace; it felt like we were thrown into the software without background information or any context.

2. The presentations and resource list along with the notes I took in this class will become our standards Bible! We are not a Google campus, so I copied all the presentations into a different format, combining them with my class notes and the other resources. I can't wait to share this with my colleagues so they can see the level of detail and thought our projects require. I foresee us referring to the bulk of this material in concrete ways starting as soon as I'm back in the office and for years to come.
  3. LC and AC did a fantastic job putting together the course workbook. Readings and assignments were organized and clearly noted in the Google Drive folders. Notes regarding what was optional vs. what was required were readily apparent. Slides and worksheets were accessible and used appropriately in tandem with in-class exercises. I will be downloading PDF copies of some of the resources for my continued learning and references. Kudos to these instructors for doing a really excellent job tailoring materials to create a thoughtful introduction to archives and special collections libraries.
  4. The teaching materials were extremely useful, and the content highly useful and appropriate. It will absolutely be useful to me after the course. In particular, I am a huge fan of LC and AC's practice of gathering anonymous (handwritten) takeaways and questions at the end of each day to answer on their own time and then discuss the next day. It would be amazing if that were a more common feature of instruction in our field, or any!
  5. It would be wonderful to have the course materials—in a selected overview—available as a PDF to follow alongside the syllabus's stated structure, but the existing structure also functions well.
  6. Yes. Yes.
  7. A list of resources was continually being updated as need was identified. This list will be critical in the future.
  8. Very much so. I'm sure I'll be returning to the resource document constantly. The answers to our reflections were also incredibly rich, applicable, and all around useful.
  9. Slides: good to have, will absolutely download for future reference.
  10. The Google Drive worked great. Separating the folders by day made it incredibly easy to navigate the additions of daily reflections and the resources discussed list is sure to come in handy.
  11. LC and AC prepared several very comprehensive slide shows that will be helpful for future reference.
  12. Very well organized. I will copy + use the resources after this class.
  13. The course workbook/teaching materials helped me tailor my own reference guidebook, which I will treasure and use as a professional aid.
- 3) *Which aspects of the course were most intriguing and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*
1. My favorite parts were the Beinecke Library, for obvious reasons, but I found that going to 344 Winchester Ave for Preservation and Conservation was also very

insightful for me. Seeing different archivists and projects they're working on, as well as their backgrounds and how they got into this role. I wasn't sure what a day-to-day workday would look like for an archivist, so I loved seeing what they were doing (especially the processing archivists!).

2. Unsure if any were NOT intriguing or relevant... I was not sure at signup that a week's worth of material would inform my job any differently. This proved to be a naive thought. I'm now armed with a wealth of ideas, practices, and inspiration that will reshape my work activities and priorities for the foreseeable future.
3. I appreciated the modules that focused upon archival processing, collections management, use of ArchivesSpace, and most importantly, hands-on experience looking at an unprocessed collection and determining a processing plan. As a librarian who works at an archive, I have often wondered how diverse primary source materials were described, arranged, and organized in relationship to other collections. I'm often charged with locating and making these materials accessible. I had prior experience with curation and knew how collections were acquired but I didn't know what happened in between securing and moving collections to the library and seeing them made available online. This course has been key to my evolved understanding of how archives and special collections libraries function, and will help me be more intentional as I continue to work with diverse researchers to help them access and use primary source materials.
4. I derive a lot of value both from the hands-on practice arranging and describing archival collections (print and digital) AND the higher-level discussions of ethical, practical, and realistic challenges and opportunities in this kind of work. I am taking away more insights, ideas, and plans than I could count, but generally I can say I feel much more informed and empowered to have intelligent conversations with archival colleagues. In particular, I learned the value of minimal description at the time of accessioning, the differences and parallels between archival and bibliographical description (and the continuum that they exist on), the terminology and principles of archival work, the challenges that are part and parcel of digitization or born-digital content, the importance of digital hygiene, that donating materials is surprisingly emotional and time-consuming work, and that gathering the right types of information from donors at a vulnerable time in their lives.
5. I deeply appreciated multiple aspects of the course—the hands-on experience creating {illegible} aids and other resources helped make abstract systems and categorizations tangible, and the inclusion of a final project presentation pushed me to articulate far more fully my nascent ideas for ongoing collaboration. (Thank you!)
6. Hands-on experience with ArchivesSpace. Yes
7. Any time an applicable concept was discussed. I recorded it so I could return to my projects with new info.
8. Our accessioning and processing days (days two and three) and especially day two were extremely valuable. They demystified much of the labor involved in transforming an acquisition into an accessible, usable resource. It installed in me a deep appreciation for the work of archivists and a recognition of best practices more broadly for stewarding a special collection.
9. I guess, rather grimly, what I come away with is only a greater sense of the extreme limitations I face in my archival future. There really isn't much I have in my notes that I wouldn't have thought of anyhow. I am glad to have had the

opportunity to hear folks bat ideas around, but I can't say "I learned X" or "I learned Y." It's more that I re-learned a lesson I learned when I was 30 or so: I will never be a librarian or archivist.

10. All the sessions were interesting and most of them were extremely relevant for me in my current role. I have quite a list of ideas that I'm eager to share with my department
  11. I very much appreciated the opportunity to do some hands-on work processing a collection. It gave me a better understanding of which aspects of archival work I most enjoy.
  12. The exercises and opportunities for conversation, Q&A were helpful. What I learned will help me in my job for sure. I have a lot to think about.
  13. There was a balance of technical instruction and theoretical conversation.
- 4) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*
1. Yes! The instructors were great at giving ample time for questions, which I think also opened up a lot of room for connecting and learning from the other students. I liked the time that LC and AC took to make sure we all gained what we wanted from this experience. They also provided a lot of great resources to help further our development, and included all of it in one succinct document; super helpful for looking back if needed.
  2. Yes, and some.
  3. LC and AC were patient instructors who were very intentional about how they shared their knowledge. They also brought together great guest speakers who could provide other perspectives beyond the readings and course lectures, and such firsthand experience is invaluable and rarely duplicated by a recording (for example). I learned much more than I hoped and am so glad I was able to attend this course.
  4. Yes, I learned everything I hoped to learn, benefited hugely from the generosity and wealth of LC and AC's experience, and I got to know some really friendly and diverse classmates.
  5. Yes, and I also appreciated the opportunity to reflect on my own work's relation to the related yet distinct culture of libraries and archives more generally. (Thank you!)
  6. Yes. Yes.
  7. A valiant attempt was made to address individual needs across the group.
  8. Yes! I hoped to better understand the ways in which different units of a special collection work together. In their lectures, exercises, and course structuring, LC and AC taught me just that and so much more.
  9. Possibly a remedial Introduction to Archives class would have been useful to me in advance of this class?
  10. I learned what I had hoped to and SO MUCH MORE.
  11. Yes!
  12. Yes and no.
  13. Yes. Yes—above and beyond.

5) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. I have a year left at UW Madison for an MLIS, and then I have a summer practicum. Having this knowledge going into my next round of classes, and feeling more prepared for hands-on experience during my practicum has given me more confidence in my abilities and knowledge about handling rare materials.
2. I will be meeting with staff immediately and developing plans to really talk about our archives in an “archival” way. We will be writing a processing plan, assigning roles for arrangement and description, and discussing software or other documentation methods. We have a collection that needs immediate processing so that will be our priority, but the information on accessioning will be so useful in future endeavors.
3. Understanding how primary source collections are arranged and processed, and being privy to conversations that more broadly address what principles are used to guide their arrangement, has been revelatory. I can better grasp why collections appear as they do at my repository, and I can more readily appreciate the intellectual labor it takes to make these collections useful and accessible. Recognizing the possibilities for arrangement, and seeing how principles of archival processing are defined, helps me deliver more tailored research support for our patrons and in turn provide better service!
4. I will be much better able to make informed decisions about what type of description approach on the bibliographical-to-archival continuum to use in a given situation. I know what information to try to capture at the time of accessioning. I will be better able to understand and manage what my archival and records management colleagues do. I will be better able to maintain digital hygiene in my personal files, my work files, and those of my colleagues. I will be able to more sensitively handle the transfer of records and archives when a colleague is getting ready to retire.
5. I will use the skills and knowledge obtained through this course to enhance my existing courses, develop possibilities to collaborate, and continue to serve as a point of contact between multiple departments and one library system.
6. I plan to process a collection as an archival collection.
7. I will tackle a major project with better understanding.
8. I work in a special collection, so I now have a deeper understanding of how my work intersects with that of my colleagues across multiple units. I feel more empowered now to pitch collaborative projects and contribute to larger institutional goals, especially around questions of access and use.
9. I'm going to go organize 200 years' worth of stuff.
10. There are several tasks/policies/projects that I will implement with my department starting this summer.
11. I will be grateful to have this as background knowledge when going further into studying library science.
12. I will use what I learned to support staff projects, and student projects. To work on enriching the archival holdings, and for fundraising and exhibitions.
13. I am now confident to expand my business as a bookseller into brokering literary property and archives to institutions/special collections.

6) *Who might benefit the most from taking this RBS course?*

1. People who are in an MLIS program or a program focused on archives would absolutely benefit from this course. Even though I am a year into my MLIS program there were so many things I learned during this course that I can take with me.
  2. Anyone working with archives in any capacity...this course helped inform an overall scope in such an informative way that I could see different departments benefiting so much from everything presented here.
  3. Special collections staff, including librarians and others not formally trained in archival processing. Graduate students in the humanities. Early career archivists and records' management professionals. Booksellers eager to learn more about curation, archival processing, and administration of libraries.
  4. I am from a bibliographical cataloging background and came here to learn more about description options that are possible above the item level. I don't plan to become an archivist, but this course gave me a stronger toolset for describing and managing a wide range of materials beyond monographs or serials. I think anyone who wants to understand archival principles and best practices and get hands-on experience to cement the instruction—whether or not they actually plan to become an archivist—I highly recommend this course!
  5. All of the audiences listed in the current course title!
  6. Administrators, students, and librarians who want an overview or an introduction to archives.
  7. I believe many fellow students had a particular project in mind. People coming to RBS with a project/goal would benefit from learning and applying this info.
  8. Early career librarians; folks who manage special collections.
  9. {no response}
  10. Seems to me like everyone in this class was engaged and benefitted. I will be recommending it to my colleagues.
  11. Anyone who needs to have at least a broad understanding of archival work would benefit: managers with archivists under them, booksellers with archivist clients, and students interested in being archivists, to name a few.
  12. Student with little to no archives experience or those in need of a refresher on basic terms and concepts.
  13. Librarians, collectors, booksellers, enthusiasts, publishers, authors, scholars, journalists, &c.
- 7) *If applicable, what were the most original, powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any “aha!” moments you'd like to share?*
1. Using ArchivesSpace and entering a digital object was a very “aha” moment for me. It took time to just mess with the software for a while until I got the hang of it, but once I did, it felt a lot easier and more manageable than before.
  2. So many! One that in the appraisal process, “no” is powerful. Another that digitization does not necessarily equal preservation. The power of a processing plan (and the flexibility of processing occurring at various points.) The ability to not keep everything, just because it is there. Also the scope of what a large archive looks like—this gives a great idea of working towards a larger standard, even though we are much smaller in scale. Archival work shouldn't be done on an island; a collaborative community is best. Also loved the hands-on exercises of

handling an unprocessed archive. It was impactful to hold folders, papers, and to collaborate with other students as we talked through ideas.

3. One “aha!” moment was when the instructors explained the possibility of describing a collection either archivally or bibliographically. While I am not trained as a cataloger, I could see how either approach could be used and could grasp the implications for using one approach over the other.
4. Archival work takes practice. Everything that Lisa said about the comparisons with bibliographical description really helped elucidate the instruction for me, since that is my background. The contrasts between AC’s and LC’s respective workplaces were also really illuminating to me, and I think helped all of us think about approaches that might work for us, borrowing almost certainly from both of them as I will be. The exercises that they had us do were all so valuable, especially the one in which we each created a digital collection and interviewed a classmate in order to arrange and describe their digital collection. I now understand archival work to be an approach, not a format, and that I have latitude to adapt it to a wide range of contexts and materials
5. Though many moments were powerful, several that stand out came in the instructive following up each day’s question with a detailed recap the next day. (Two salient insights: the reciprocal nature of bibliographical and archival description and the existence of systems and resources and which my own {illegible} context might contribute.
6. {no response}
7. Learning about the massive scale at which Yale operates was eye-opening. Some discussions were very philosophical, others practical.
8. Access; is a form of conservation; getting walked through the accessioning process and being able to physically process a collection myself.
9. {no response}
10. There were so many “aha” moments. A major one is that archival description will take time to learn, but it will get easier the more times I do it—and enter the info in the appropriate ArchivesSpace field.
11. I really enjoyed hearing from Elise Riley, an accessionist at Yale. Her talk really drove home the mental and physical challenges of accession work.
12. Learning about {illegible} digital forensics. Understanding how to leverage archival concepts and description and the ILS to accession and locate collections.
13. “Access is preservation.”

8) *Are there any other ways in which the course could have been improved?*

1. N/A.
2. {no response}
3. None that I can think of. I’m especially grateful to RBS staff member RB for her friendly support and gracious hosting.
4. Really the only thing is that the additional readings specifically for Monday were a bit buried in emails.
5. I look forward to reviewing my class notes to this end—honestly. The whole was hugely helpful.
6. {no response}

7. We discussed DACS as it's used in archival description. Maybe other standards could be introduced in case we find ourselves at a job that uses other standards, descriptive or structure.
  8. On day one, I would've loved to hear the instructors' comments and critiques on the varied collection development policies included in our pre-readings. The selection was so interesting and distinct, so I just wanted to hear more about the documents and where they sit in relation to other places in the field.
  9. {no response}
  10. I recognize the amount of work that went into planning this class and think the instructors have got it just right.
  11. {no response}
  12. Better ArchivesSpace demo to help us have greater success and understanding. Figure out how to share archival collection valuation in a generic way.
  13. {no response}
- 9) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? How likely are you to recommend this course to others? On a 1-10 scale, 1 would indicate that you disagree that you got your money's worth, 5 would indicate a neutral response, and 10 would indicate that you agree that you got your money's worth.*

1. 10
2. 10
3. 9
4. 10
5. 10
6. 9
7. 8, cost and time commitment are high. Having experts to learn from is a major benefit.
8. 10—this course modelled why professional development funding is necessary and ultimately beneficial to both the employee and—in the short and long term—the institution they serve.
9. {no response}
10. 10
11. 10
12. Money's worth: yes. Recommendation to others: 7.
13. 10

10) *If your course made any (virtual) field trips outside of the classroom or had guest speakers, do you feel that they enhanced the course experience?*

1. I loved having guest speakers in this class! All of the guest speakers came from different areas in archives, which made the experience even more valuable. They discussed their backgrounds and what they do, which really helped me as someone who isn't in the field yet figure out what kinds of things I might want to do. Our field trips were very helpful. It's also nice to get out of the library for a little while and explore other parts of the campus together.
2. Absolutely. The field trips were eye opening, and fun. It helped to bring new voices in that supported the overall concepts being taught (not one was contradictory!).

3. The guest speakers (all of whom were staff from one of Yale's libraries) were all excellent speakers and seasoned professionals whose insights were especially relevant to our course content. Their expertise and real-life examples further illuminated what was shared by LC and AC.
4. Yes, I think all the guest speakers and the field trip were very well chosen and they enhanced the course experience. We heard from four of Alison's colleagues here at the Beinecke, who were generous with insights and answering our many questions. Our field trip was to the Beinecke's offsite technical services offices, which has state-of-the-art equipment, and it was elucidating to see the guest speakers and other colleagues in situ.
5. The day spent at Yale's Technical Services environment was extraordinarily helpful in showing the practical implications of key course topics and concerns. (The guest speaker were also {illegible}—Yale seems the perfect environment for the {illegible}.)
6. Yes.
7. Yes, visiting technical services was informative and made me realize what kind of institution we were earning about—a wealthy one with many resources
8. Our 344 day was very fun. Pacing-wise, it was great to mix up the final few days.
9. It was cool to hear curators/working archivists speak about their jobs.
10. Yes! It was nice to switch up the scenery and get a tour and hear what other staff do.
11. Yes! All of our guest speakers brought with them more specialized perspectives which I enjoyed hearing about.
12. Guest speakers were good and appropriate—they definitely enhanced the course.
13. Yes.

11) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. {no response}
2. I would advise that it is okay to come in with little to no knowledge. This course quickly caught everyone up to speed in an engaging and equitable way.
3. None at present.
4. Do it! But try to stay either in the dorms or right in downtown New Haven. Public transit is a challenge here.
5. {checkmark}
6. {no response}
7. Come with examples and projects in mind. Every effort was made to address each individual goal.
8. Take it! This class gave both an introduction to the field and a deep dive into the components that make archives so compelling to work with.
9. {private response}
10. I really appreciated the review of the schedule for the day and was even more appreciative of the time taken for answering daily reflections. The last session was very helpful for covering every outstanding question.
11. {no response}
12. Spend time practicing and watching videos about ArchivesSpace before class to get the most out of in-class exercises using this software.

13. Highly recommend.

*12) If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or haiku, what would you say?*

1. This was an invaluable experience for me, and I will take the education I gained from it with me throughout my entire professional career!
2. It depends. (The archival class joke of the answer to every question asked an archivist!)
3. RBS is a great bridge for those seeking professional development in a supportive learning environment alongside fellow practitioners and scholars.
4. I have so much respect now for the work of archivists, compared to before this class when I didn't understand it very well.
5. So much depends...{private response}
6. {no response}
7. Exhaustive.
8. Enlightening, empowering, and rigorous all at once.
9. It depends.
10. LC and AC have done a phenomenal job of organizing a class that covers a wide range of archival topics, but also allows time to get in the weeds every once in a while. Kudos and thank you!
11. An engaging experimental endeavor.
12. Not too intense/well balanced/worth the trip/and effort.
13. "Archives are all unique!"