Interviewer

Would you mind explaining briefly and describe your experience in teaching undergraduates to us.

Respondent

Right. I teach courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and I use primary source material directly in those. That includes manuscript material. It includes images, be they drawings, engravings, photographs. Sometimes we use sound recordings, as well. And also, we use I guess digital media but also media that's been repackaged so TV and radio broadcasts from the past.

Interviewer

That's quite a vast amount of primary sources in different...

Respondent

Yes, I guess I'm probably more unusual among historians in that I have had a career as a professional archivist. And during that career, I will have worked with material from before the First Crusade right the way up to the present. The truth is most archival material is 19th and 20th century, and indeed 21st century. So, one has to move to cover the whole range. Yeah.

Interviewer

That's great. And have you received any training on how to use primary sources in teaching or how have you learned?

Respondent

I would say that there was some discussion when I trained as an archivist more years ago then I care to remember. But just working in that sort of job where I am explaining to people how documentation works from the base, most basic level of “What does it say?” through to thinking about how its constructed and what one needs to know or think about in analysing a document, so that you see not only text, the words on the page if you like, but the whole context of the material. That's just a part and parcel of the job and one would do it on a daily basis, and it's not a great step from talking to people in a reading room about how something works, to then teaching students about it. Obviously one has selected what it is that you're going to give to the students and you will have in your mind a series of points that you want them to take away from it, whereas if you're explaining something to somebody in a reading room, the process is probably a little more random but you will have these things in the back of your mind.

Interviewer

That's a great explanation. Thank you. And when you, when you actually talk about primary sources, all the sources that you've mentioned, do you use any ideas, any methodology, anything else from somewhere else? Or you use only your own ideas?

Respondent

Well I think there's two ways of approaching that. One is, you obviously have a body of...well one acquires a body of knowledge about documentation of all sorts and how it works because that's the way your mind works. So my approach to this is - I will have a piece of paper in front of me and I will not necessarily think "What does it say?" but I will say "How does it work?" And if I look at my notes in front of you, I have got the date in the top left hand corner, I've got your names there, I've got the main points of discussion so that there's a structure to it. And there is a structure with most sorts of documentation. There is a body of theoretical work -it's not so much directed at teaching, but it's directed at the ways in which one goes about the analysis, and there is a branch of archival study that's called diplomatic. And that is really about the forms of words one uses to affect particular things. I guess you, you can develop patterns of analysis from that, so we're looking at form we're looking at structure, we're looking at physical makeup of things. And if for example I have in front of me a TV broadcast, I'm mindful of the way that that will have been put together. We may see it as a continuous piece of work, but I will say to the students, "what elements of this have been brought together to produce what we're seeing?" So we may be looking at a soundtrack that's been recorded in different ways. We may be looking at images that have been filmed in different sequences not necessarily contained temporanously, yet we're presented with something as if it were in real time. So I guess there is a theoretical side to media studies that goes with this but I don't go that way terribly often! Most of my…I feel like my research work is mediaeval, although I do have an interest in the history of communications and types of documentation that go with it. So, it's a mixture of the two.

Interviewer

So you've been talking about using materials that other people have created in terms of media, and all these additional resources. Is there anything that you produce as a part of the teaching that then you share with others, not only with the students, but with others in terms of re-using, I don't know I'm thinking, could be PowerPoint or it could be a lecture that's being recorded, anything.

Respondent

Because it's so much of our daily work. I don't conceive it as a separate activity. Because the form of analysis is something I would do all the time, and other colleagues who are specialists in this would know that anyway. There may be some things that are, I guess more unusual, but they tend to be quite particular, rather than generic. And we do a session for dissertation students in the third year in history on archives and how they work. And that aims just to get them thinking about what they what they're doing and the structure of our administration in this country, where you go to find out things, why you go to find out things in particular ways. And some of that just gets us into. If you like as a group of technical disciplines that underpin reading documents, diplomatic is one, palaeography is another (the handwriting's) if we're working with books. And there's a study of codicology, which is a bit like diplomatic but it's how books are structured and why they're structured in this way and what we can learn from it and how that. And then there are other stranger things like the study of seals and whatever. But we just introduce people to those as and when they need them rather than ... because most people won't need them, but I guess they're much more awful with technical media, many of them will have done Media Studies at some point in their school careers, so they will be thinking about these things at least as far as modern communications are concerned. We need to roll that backwards so that they can think critically about what's in front of them.

Interviewer

That's a good way to approach it.

And you shared with us, the example. So you mentioned that you teach primary sources to undergraduate and also, Master. For the purpose of this study we're focusing on the undergraduate side of it, and you shared two syllabus.

Respondent

That is the undergraduate one - that's postgraduate.

Interviewer

Oh this is a postgraduate one. Okay, let's see.

Respondent

I misunderstood the issue.

Interviewer

Yeah, so this is the undergraduate. Would you like to just talk us through the module?

Respondent

Yes. Well this module main focus is on the period from the late 18th century to the present day. I teach it with two other colleagues, with two colleagues who are specialists in 20th century American history, and also in terms of, I guess, security and communications. And they teach very much at the modern end of this. I do everything before that, if you like. So we started out by getting people to think about how people communicate, what is necessary in terms of structures. We started out with a series of models, face to face communication as we are here but it might be one person talking to a group or it might be one person recording information putting it in a repository for others to come to. We looked at cases with largely non literate societies, as well so I have some nice examples from the first nation peoples of Northwest Canada. How you would communicate using totem poles or talking sticks and those sort of symbols and things that go to go with it. And then we looked at societies where I guess literacy is quite important in this because it changes the potential for communications, so we looked at, in this case, mediaeval England and we looked at the case of Magna Carta and how that was communicated. And you have at this time, a small scrible elite. You have an official (pause), you have a royal Chancery (a writing office) which has in the reign of King John perhaps half a dozen people who can write, and they communicate with the sheriffs in the Counties sending out royal instructions and there are people there who can read them. So we get to the Magna Carta, it's addressed as a letter to everybody and it lists everybody by rank. And what happens is that the small group of people in the Chancery then have to copy it out so there's a copy that goes to each county court where it is read out. And it takes them about seven weeks to make copies to send out round the country. So that's one way of doing it and then we look at the arrival of literacy. King John can't read, so you've got an elite that can't necessarily read they’re dependent on this bureaucracy and the ability to have, I guess, systems of authority that rely on written communication. They're very effective in this country. At time together. A nation, really. It's a system that you can project forward really quite a long way. The invention of printing in the 1450s doesn't actually change much because there are questions with literacy to start off with. You've got to be able to read these texts in the first place. And it's not until the end of the 19th century in the United Kingdom that we get close to 100% literacy. If we were looking at, I guess, 1830, we're probably only looking at 50% literacy. So there are there are step changes in this and that changes what goes on but these systems of almost manual transmission of material. So, if you are a commander of an army in the field, you will have an Adjutant General whose job it is to give out orders. Each regiment will have an adjutant who will go to the Adjutant General's office in the morning, the orders will be read out to him, he'll write them down, he will go back to the regiment, and then he will parade the troops, and the orders will be read to you. You don't necessarily have printing presses so you've got a very laborious system of doing that, and that is mirrored in the documentation, and it's not really until we get into the period of mass printing which comes with all sorts of changes in terms of production, through the 1830s. You can suddenly get long runs of things being printed, changes in terms of production of paper. Once you get paper produced on roles. We already have systems of printing using roles because we print cotton in the 1780s onwards, and you can switch to newspapers that can print 10s of thousands of copies an hour, and you've suddenly...and it all coincides with new mechanisms of distribution. We have railways as opposed to just roads, and all of a sudden everything changes, and you have the potential for everybody across the country or everybody who can read to know about what's going on, ideas of news. And so what we're doing is we're going through this, particularly when we get to the 18th century and onwards, we have a number of different types of change. We have, I guess, technical innovation, so that there are new things coming in. The really big thing in terms of communications is not printing but copying - that's where the investment is because that's what people find laborious, but labour is cheap. So we start off with sessions that explain the technologies that are developed and invented for going with this from the 1780s onwards. Inventions of things like carbon paper or making press copies. And then we have structural changes. The most important of which in the United Kingdom is the change in terms of postal reform that comes the end of the 1830s. And that, over a period of a decade and more, changes the volume of communication completely. So, 1839, the year before Penny postage, we have high 70 millions of letters going through the post. A decade later, we have five times as much going through the post, so within that space of 10 years, everything changes. Now, we need to relate this back to the primary sources. And what happens is that they change as well, because all of a sudden.... First of all, you need that much more paper. If you're going to switch from 70 million letters to 400 million, this has got to appear from somewhere. So there are questions of manufacture. They're very obvious if you look at them. There are questions of different types of communication being used by different social groups. Postal reform is seen as THE big liberal reform, playing on the development of, I guess, education, particularly Elementary Education and the ambition is that the working classes, the artists and classes, can now all communicate with each other. And it's an economic question as well because the Treasury has made a lot of money out of the post office, and the government has to be convinced, parliament has to be convinced that as much money can be made afterwards. One of the things that goes wrong in this projection, because instead of there being five or six times as much post going through, what happens is that it only doubles in the short term, from one year to the next. And that's because it's not the working classes who write it's the middle classes who write. And we can see this from the documentation we have - we have a few statistical returns to the post office. My students love looking at statistical returns and parliamentary papers, but there are things that you can get from them that you can't get from anywhere else and they show me that instead of this…we can see the numbers of letters per capita sent or received/delivered in the 1850s and 1860s, and in Oldham the numbers double from three per person to six per person. But in somewhere like Cheltenham or Malvern we're looking at 40 or 50 times as much material going through the post so there is an impact at one end, but it's a much greater impact among the middle classes. And it's not until we get other media appearing... 1870s onwards the invention of postcards, we're thinking about different types of sources that people can see and particularly picture postcards which come in after 1900, that people who have benefited from elementary education really start writing and using these things so the miscalculation that Roland Hill makes in 1839 is that he assumes that education means that people can write, they will communicate. But actually the education teaches people to copy, not compose. And it's only after 1870 that the elementary education curriculum changes to include prose composition. So from that point onwards people are thinking about writing in a very different way. I don't know whether you have ever worked with somebody who is functionally illiterate, just to see how...and observed how they work. And literally, they will work by copying letter forms. Rather than admitting to illiteracy they will look at the side of the yoghurt pot or whatever it is they've got to replenish the supermarket shelves with and try and make the letter forms and then match them up. We get past that stage with so many people in the 19th century so it's effectively 100% literacy at the end of that and that changes everything. So, so these are some of the things that we encompass on this. We've got other technical things like the invention of the telegraph, the electric telegraph, there are manual telegraphs before. We have in the collections here for example, telegraph dictionaries from manual telegraph systems. When we get to the 1830s 1840s electric telegraph supersede that and then with things like transatlantic cables, you have got theoretically instanteity of connection but actually it doesn't quite work like that. What happens is that it changes the pattern of how people communicate. So let's take an example. Because we can focus it on primary sources, if I look at the way Queen Victoria does business in the 1840s with her government. Now, what happens is the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs will write a letter to the Queen and the Queen will read it, she will read all the papers in the box, and she will write her replies by hand. We fast forward, 30-40 years, the electric telegraph has been installed in the Foreign Office it's been installed in Osborne house it's been installed at Windsor Castle. So when the Foreign Secretary wants to send the Queen something, no longer does he write it out by hand or get a clerk to copy it out and put it in the red box. He talks to his private secretary who goes downstairs and the telegraph operator sends a telegraph to Windsor or Osborne. And at the other end the Queen's private secretary will get this and take it to the queen, and her opinion will be taken. And he will then have a telegraph going back to the Foreign Secretary. So we have got very different types of communication that go this way. And I guess just as with the arrival of the telephone, people stop writing down as much or they writing, or they write different things down. They use a different type of medium, and it's very interesting to see what is recorded. I don't know when you have telephone conversations whether you rely on the transcription that comes out of this, or whether you make your own notes of the conversation and put those in the file for you to see, or whether you are reliant then on putting it into an information system and retrieving it. And then who has access to that? And we're interested in the BIG questions as well, l guess, big questions in terms of communication. This is one of the things that defines modern society: the VOLUME of communication, the NUMBER of contacts that people have and the SPEED of communication as well.

Interviewer

Would you be, would you say that those are the learning objectives of the course for the students?

Respondent

I think, for the students to see some of the big questions and how what they're dealing with almost on a day to day basis are critical in that, so we need to think about questions of privacy, development of official secrecy, the transition of a society from one where images were almost, I wouldn't say totally unknown, but are really unusual, to one where they become a sort of regular part of society. So it's hard to imagine. In 1800, well in 1790 Lord Palmerston goes on holiday to Paris. He and his family arrive at Calais and the first thing they have to do is to go to the Marie, the town hall, to have their picture taken. And what that means is a clerk in the town hall writes a verbal description of the people who are in front of them. It doesn't mean they have a photograph taken or they have a sketch taken, they have a verbal description taken, and it's still embedded in passports of some countries. If you fast forward to say, 1850, you have a position where anybody can have their photo taken, because the technology has appeared really very rapidly between the late 1830s, and the 1850s, and people are just not used to seeing themselves. They may have mirrors and things but it's not an image that you can freeze. We find people going to have pictures taken five or six times a day just to see how they look like. "What do I look like in my new dress?" or whatever it is. So, it's things like that that I'm trying to get people to imagine - the scale of change, different ways of thinking and questions that are really about how society manages these and if you like polices things, and the different media that we have in terms of primary sources allows me to ask questions so that they can look at a letter and I can get them to say, get them to think about "What are the messages that come with the matter/the letter?" so we will have the text, we will have questions of handwriting, we may have questions to do with the type and quality of stationery - is it nicely embossed?, is it perfumed? or... how do you receive this? Is it a letter from one person or from many people to another group of people, or is it individual communication one-to-one? And that links into questions of literacy. So, this is one of those courses that can really show very significant transitions in terms of the way people communicate by focusing on those changes in primary source and getting people to think about the really big changes, and how I guess others intervene. What is the role of government in this? We worry about interception of communications and all the rest of it, but they worried about it in the 1840s as an Italian nationalist called Mazzini and we do a case study on his correspondence which is intercepted by post office and turned into a big public hooray, but it's done on the basis of authority. We know from the statistics that it's a TINY amount of correspondence compared to the totality of communication but rep because it can only be done on the authority of a warrant from the Secretary of State. Now, we have systems of communication today that are effectively open, unless you manage to encrypt your telephones, or all the rest of it, which most of us don't do most of the time. We have systems of, I guess, digital mining of text, and audio that are unimaginable. And those don't only sit in the hands of the state, they also sit in the hands of private companies, and potentially foreign powers as well, so there are a very wide consensus(?) of things.

Interviewer

So do you find yourself, reviewing the course regularly to make sure that you take into account all this new and modern way and modern primary sources. So how do you...

Respondent

It is a brand new course and this is the first year.

Interviewer

Ok, so it's the first year.

Respondent

Yes. The first semester that we're going through.

Interviewer

So you well you don't know about it. You haven't done it yet but, is there a plan to review it at the end?

Respondent

I'm sure we will, I mean, I think we need to review it in, in different ways. One is how the students react to it and what they think they have got from it, which is always very useful to us and knowing how we put over the things we want to put over. And we can look at the written work they do as a result, we know how our seminars have gone. What enthuses students what doesn't enthuse students. Things that they have not thought about before that are actually quite interesting to them so they can see, for example, that if I write a letter by hand to somebody there are many other messages would come with it, as opposed to what's come on my WhatsApp message. It's, you know, I can put so much more with it. But there are also big intellectual changes that go with it. And there is so much more that comes with things that are physical than comes with things that are digital. And I think that's really interesting to unpick. So, if I send a Valentines card myself in the 19th century and these are big business in the 19th century - there's a whole industry of women making these things and they're very nice and interesting. There is a view of the world that sees the human body post-enlightenment as closed and that if I touch this table I can feel it's smooth I can feel it's hard, I can feel it's relatively warm. But there is also a pretty(?) enlightened view of the human body that sort of persists in some ways that says something of me, enhanced(?) and something I create or touch. And this is the logic behind the homemade cakes market because something of me goes into the baking, as well. There is so much more in this present if I write it myself. It's something I have created. And that's just completely lost in terms of our notions of electronic communication - you may put an emoji at the end but it's naff, you know, it's not sort of thing one does to impress because that's what underlies this, and I think it's, it's using primary sources to, to understand the totality of communication. I think it's really important.

Interviewer

How do you embed all these different type of resources in the course design?

Respondent

We, for example, have a second week. We took them in their seminar groups to the archives here to look at a selection of materials so that they could understand some of the differences, so they could see the physicality of correspondence so that they could understand the difference in terms of transition between letterpress printing at the end of the 18th century and illustrated London news. Middle of the 19th century commemorative issue for Wellington's funeral in November 1852, the print run is 2 million, as opposed to something 50 years earlier where you would probably not have printed in most cases a couple of hundred copies. And I think also to realise that a lot of communication is quite ephemeral, and that people will PRINT certain types of communication as well- they will set in type. Yet other things it's much more important to write. And this is when you send out your wedding invitations it's why you still use these fancy scripts on the... because the actual getting something personal is really much more important, and much rather than the bald facts (if one spots that). So that gives them a variety and then each week we have a particular primary source that we would talk about. So this morning, I have been talking about Orson Welles broadcast of the War of the Worlds in October 1838, which is the remake of HG Wells play. So instead of it being about the destruction of Woking it's about the destruction of New York, and just getting people to think about how this works and how communications media have changed. And we have there a nice image of a radio set, which was sat in the corner of the room from any point from 1929 on, and it's how these things become part of domestic life, if you like, and what you expect from this type of communication, and the registers that it implies. Now we've got different registers different degrees of formality and all of this, which you can see quite clearly in written communication that are also there other types of media as well. So we're getting them to develop a critical sense in approaching this - so WHY was this broadcast? Why did it look... why was it reputed to create mass panic. And one can see if you didn't tune in at the start of it, which said "this is a drama". You have things that are projected in a register that indicate, they're like an official announcement. And how do you then test that? And people ring their friends they ring the radio stations they've got other ways of... So this in a way is not, if you like, a model of communication that is one point to the masses, the masses are not without agency in being able to test us and interrogate it. I mean today they all have their phones on and they can, they can search Wikipedia to see whether what I'm saying has any degree of veracity, on the spot. But, much harder in other societies at other times. So we choose sources that do this. So we are going to look at US presidential debates. We're going to look at film of the moon landings, 1969, so they're all sorts of possibilities. So they will have seen a huge range of things, right from the anthropological examples of talking sticks through to this.

Interviewer

So you talked about a variety of sources from video or audio, manuscripts and letters. What are the challenges that you're facing when introducing those primary sources into the course? If there are any!

Respondent

There are many challenges, and I think the hardest one is getting people to understand context. And if I show somebody a 19th century letter there's a fairly good chance that they won't be able to read it. In fact, if I show somebody a 21st century letter that I've written by hand there's a fairly good chance that they won't be able to read it because students today don't write. They type virtually the whole time so there is a, a disjuncture between one type of communication and another. So that's one challenge - what does it say? Then we need to think about registers of communication ...different degrees of formality. Because they may well send me emails that say, "Hi *NAME*", or you go into a shop and somebody will address you as a buddy! They won't really have got the message that there are degrees of formality and social occasions, because it's not necessarily within their experience. So we've got to introduce them to different ideas about formative(?) communication and register and what that has in terms of consequence. We need them to think about the investment that goes into media. Do they have the latest smart iPhone? WHY do they have the latest smart iPhone? What does that say, as opposed to different types of qualities of stationary or, you see the point that I'm getting at? And I think they need to understand how these things circulate and how people handle them. It's very easy today to send messages that are picked up by millions of people and we have news media that do it. And we've had broadcast media - have effectively allowed a few individuals to broadcast to the world really from the 20s onwards. And understanding the power that goes with that, and the relationships. However, we're moving to a position where almost anyone can broadcast at any time and that has all sorts of consequences. We have legal issues starting way back and 19th century copyright, but also notions of what one can communicate: slander, blasphemy, libel, different jurisdictions. There is law that has to be invented to underpin some types of communications, for example, if you lay a transatlantic cable, who has sovereign rights and which bit of it? And are there rights to protect communications? What actually happens to these rights in the case of conflict and that sort of thing? So there's a whole lot of ideas that can go with it, and mentions of privacy and secrecy and personality - they're all there. I've watched the week before last a piece on facial recognition in Beijing, with people doing their shopping in the baker's shop. Going in they're recognised they pick up their purchases. They walk past the scanner on the way out, and the money is automatically debited from their bank account. So …

Interviewer

a different way of communicating.

Respondent

a different way of communicating. And then this is a society that has big display boards at railway stations with images of individuals who have not paid for their cinema tickets or whatever it may be. So the power of the state is an interesting question and the power of big companies, and the ability to access and manipulate data.

Interviewer

Thank you. You have mentioned that you are teaching also another course. Are you incorporating in the same way primary sources to the other module that you're teaching?

Respondent

It's quite common in history for us to incorporate primary sources into our discussions and in fact it's one of the key things about history at university level is we expect students to engage with those and to understand what is going on and to see the context, and to understand some of the technicality, and what communication in a particular register might mean. And, yeah good historical practice.

Interviewer

And you also mentioned that there are two other colleagues that are teaching on the module. Can I just ask if they co-designed this module or are they just the teaching part of it?

Respondent

Well I'm the convener but we actually put it together ourselves sitting down two or three meetings over the last year, and talking about what we were going to do. And we parcelled it up largely chronologically. So that we have an expert on digital security and modern America, right at the front end if you like. The next person that's got a longer spread of history from the 19th century through to the end of the 20th and the present day, but has got a particular interest in communications as well. Yeah.

Interviewer

And so you mentioned…

Respondent

There's no textbook!

Interviewer

Well, I can see there are lots of resources listed here! So, we're just moving a little bit, and talking about, not the course design, but mainly about discovery and finding of primary sources. And how do you think...how do you find primary sources that you've used here? Some of it is clearly coming from your engagement with archives. But there is much more in here.

Respondent

Well I guess what we do is we have... we've set up particular areas where we will do a lecture and a link seminar. And what I need in this case, is to make sure that the lecture will touch on some of the big themes. It will examine some of the primary sources - students will have images of them. There will then be a seminar that is linked really to a particular incident or development in communications, and there will be a primary source that we've worked that around. Now, that's something we normally know from our research. And I guess like all things, one has to do some new research anyway to put together a course, so that you have something that's consistent, but we would do that anyway as part of our ordinary resource discovery, if you want to call it.

Interviewer

How do you discover the additional resources? Would it have been via Google or through databases, or...?!

Respondent

We try to do it systematically! Yeah.

So I know that there is an archival network in this country that works in a particular way and organises archives in a particular way. And I will know the types of material that I want to find. I will know equally that there is a system of producing official material and print that works in particular ways that produces different types of material is going to have an impact, so I've got those. There are vast swathes of private documentation. And then what I'm really looking for is the way academics have worked with this and some of the ideas that they have. So I need to think about this in quite a cross disciplinary way. Some of this is sociological, some of it is political, a great deal of it is historical. There are abstracting databases for periodicals but typically what I will do is, I will find one, a journal that works on a particular theme in a particular area. So you will see there are things on 19th century visual culture or whatever it is, and I will just look through the last 20 years worth of articles online, just to see what people are writing about so the students have also got a spread of things that are there as well. We will know about the main books from our ordinary research work, but one does trawl through reviews as well, and I've probably been collecting information for a couple of years - just a few ordinary files at home that I take bits out of newspapers and drop them in, so that when I can come to this I've got a book review of this night(?) and now's the time to follow it up. There's been a...there was a piece in the Saturday Guardian a few weeks back about showing teenagers technology of the 20th century. Could they recognise a telephone with a dial?! What was a postcard?! So that sort of thing sits in my file as it were.

Interviewer

So you do have your own private file.

Respondent

Oh yes! Because it's got my thoughts in it as well!

Interviewer

What challenges do you feel you're facing when finding the appropriate resource to use. So we're thinking about, you know, the core resources but also digital...

Respondent

What we need are things that demonstrate the case studies that we discuss in a particularly apposite way. So it's honing in on those so that we can come to them. So I mentioned official secrecy and the opening of letters. So that's one elements that goes in. I've also done things on parliamentary publication and, if you like, one of the BIG changes in the 19th century is the state starts collecting material and in fact that word 'statistics' comes from the word 'states' and it's information that the state puts together. But in the 19th century almost everything that the state collects is open or produced in a way that it could be made open, and it's used to encourage people to reform. They don't have the technical statistical means of manipulating it until quite a bit later. So it's not really until the 20th century that the census, for example, is manipulated in particular ways. I think perhaps in the 1890s in the States. People can do statistical work with it. So that's all a part of this but it's changing aspects of the modern world. And there is a limit to what one can introduce in these things.

Interviewer

Do you specify which sources the students must use or do you expect them to go out and find?

Respondent

They have a very vast amount here that I can follow up, but there's absolutely no reason why they can't follow their own persuasions to look at particular things, and I know that the best of them will do so.

Interviewer

So, in the one where you directed students to them...so some of them are more traditional books, some of them are links to images. Do you find, do you face any challenges in terms of students accessing this material?

Respondent

We try not to, in the sense that we will only put in there things that are accessible to them. And when we prepare the course we know if there are particular things that are not in the library or only in the library or only one or two copies and we will get them digitised or we will get it changed to be multiple access to things simultaneously. As we have 40 plus students on this course. So, if there is a key text they've all got to be able to get at it. But that's just planning. There may be costs down the line but one can use different options of costs if significant.

Interviewer

See you really...well we just move into working with primary sources. And you kind of already addressed some of the questions, because we talked about the teaching students what a primary source is, which is clearly covered.

Respondent

Yes.

Interviewer

And, and the extent on how the students developed the information literacy, because you kind of take them through these things.

Respondent

Yes.

Interviewer

And so what are the formats that the students... in which ways are the students engaging? So apart from, what are they doing after they're accessing those resources after they went to Archives?

Respondent

Well, they have to do pieces of work for us. One thing that they have to do for this course is to submit a learning journal. And if we asked them each week to write 500 words on what they have learned that week. And they will submit five of those entries for assessment at the end of course. So that's a two and a half thousand word piece. They will also write a 3000 word essay, again for the end of the course. Perhaps very traditional but we need that based around two case studies, and they can choose what those case studies are, and I suspect in many cases, the work each week with a learning journal will have got them into a case study. So we're trying to encourage them to think about those things. They will come to the seminars each week and we will discuss what's been going on and try and bring out the connections.

Interviewer

That is good. And you also already talked about using not only primary sources but also radio, audio, digitally born media. How do you think all those formats or different formats of primary resources are fundamental in terms of the pedagogy, to the students? So how relevant they are?

Respondent

Well I think they're all relevant because they can all be used as examples of how we communicate. And they each have different connections and consequences. So they can get something out of looking at their smartphone right in front of them and I can ask them about "Who you paying to provide your service?" and "Has that got a Google Drive with it?" so who's looking at... So these issues are all there embedded in our daily lives. They find it really quite interesting and immediate.

Interviewer

Good, and can I just ask, How do you reference non-traditional, sorry, non-traditional books? I know that you are conscious of time so this is pretty much the last question. So traditional books, you have the traditional way of referencing. What about everything else?

Respondent

Right, history uses the modern Humanities Research Association style guide. I appreciate not everything in there is done consistently in that one, but one works with what one has.

Interviewer

And do you have any advice that you would like to give to colleagues that might be actually new in working with primary sources?

Respondent

I would say that it changes the student experience extraordinarily, and the feedback that one gets from sessions where you work directly with primary sources is, in our experience, overwhelmingly positive, and it just sets them thinking about things that are very much more immediate because they're tangible, rather than just listening to me in a lecture.

Interviewer

I do have the last question...

Respondent

Yeah

Interviewer

Before letting you go, and it's about the future.

Respondent

Yeah.

Interviewer

What do you think will be the challenges or opportunities for everyone who's teaching with primary sources?

Respondent

I think one of the biggest challenges of working with archival sources is simply their scale and understanding what something means. The last government for which you could read everything that it wrote administratively, came to an end in 1830. After that point the volume is just too great. Now, the real problem then is selection, making sure not that I've just got the things that Google throws up for me as a historian. I need to look across the totality of the record, and select what it is I need to answer my questions from that. That is going to be hard. I also think that preservation is a very serious issue, because whereas paper materials on the whole survived by benign neglect, digital materials don't. And we know, just from what we can see coming out of government, things like the arms for Iraq inquiry produced material that was put in the public domain... I suspect we will never find the rest of it because if you're going to preserve that sort of material you've got to decide, almost from the word go, to preserve an entire administrative system, and then move it forward onto new technology. And it's expensive it's not benign neglect, and there will be big gaps of serious material.

Interviewer

Thank you so much.

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