

Focus Groups in Archival Institutions

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Abstract: This initiative grew out of a larger project for which I am the Graduate Student Research Assistant, the Archival Metrics Project. The presentation will discuss current work around developing a focus group toolkit for use in archival institutions. Project team members investigated the use of focus groups in the archival and related literatures, and produced a guide for archivists seeking guidance on conducting focus groups as well as supplementary materials to aid in administration including demographic questionnaires and sample session outlines and ideas. The sample session seeks to explore the place of archival institutions in the social media landscape. The project seeks to prove that archival institutions can benefit from including focus groups among methods for conducting user studies, and that their reputation as tools of marketing studies is limiting. In comparison to other methods of user studies, focus groups are unique in that they encourage conversations between users, rather than only between the user and institution.

About the author:

Adam Kriesberg is a first year doctoral student at the School of Information (SI) at the University of Michigan. His primary areas of interest include digital preservation and archival practice, digital humanities, access to digital materials, and cyber-infrastructure for the humanities. Currently, he works as a research assistant on the Archival Metrics Project with his advisor, Beth Yakel.

Kriesberg studied History and Classics as an undergraduate; after earning a BA he worked in the corporate world as a project manager at a technology consulting firm. In his job, Kriesberg worked with clients to understand and address information challenges related to business; he returned to graduate school to study similar challenges confronting archivists and humanities scholars. Initially, he was drawn to archives as a result of conducting research in multiple humanities disciplines and using archival resources in multiple ways when asking different questions. An archival perspective is valuable for addressing the future challenges of balancing preservation and use for digital materials. The unique lens of archival studies in the iSchool environment is a great method for studying the challenges of the digital age.