

# Assessing Instruction Sessions: Post-Visit Surveys For In-Person and Virtual Classes

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## INTRODUCTION

### About This Project

From 2019 to 2021, the Bentley Historical Library's Academic Programs distributed post-visit surveys to 19 classes that had a formal instruction session at the library. Some questions were included in all survey questionnaires, while others were selected based on the learning objectives for the specific session in which they were distributed. This poster summarizes what Academic Programs staff learned from the surveys and what questions remain.

Reference archivist Sarah McLusky designed the project described here, and compiled, coded, and summarized the results.

### About the Bentley

The Bentley holds the University of Michigan's institutional archives and a variety of collections related to the state of Michigan. It is located on UM-Ann Arbor's North Campus and is separate from the main library system.

### About Academic Programs

The Bentley has had a full-time Archivist for Academic Programs since 2015. For most of that time, one additional Reference team member has had some instruction responsibilities.

The Bentley's instruction program focuses on providing instruction for UM classes and students. In a typical pre-pandemic semester, the Bentley saw 25-30 in-person instruction sessions, and few if any remote or virtual sessions.

## OBJECTIVES

Academic Programs staff have long tried to fit some formative assessment into their classes (for example, by asking students about their knowledge of archives at the start of an instruction session). Prior to 2019, however, formal, summative assessment of instruction efforts was not something the library had attempted.

By 2018 and 2019, the Bentley was renewing efforts to collect data about its collections, its researchers, and interactions between the two. Academic Programs had also established closer ongoing relationships with many professors. The survey project described in this poster was conceived to gather more uniform and easily comparable data about Academic Programs' success or failure at achieving learning objectives for an instruction session.

Two main standards were referenced when defining learning objectives: The then recently-adopted *SAA-RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*, and the learning outcomes listed in Peter Carini's 2016 article "Information Literacy for Archives and Special Collections: Defining Outcomes."

The below chart maps Academic Programs' most common types of class session to the corresponding objectives from each standard:

Class focus	Carini Outcome	SAA/RBMS Outcome
All classes	Know	
Analyzing primary sources	Interpret	Interpret, Analyze, and Evaluate
	Evaluate (provenance)	Read, Understand, and Summarize
Doing archival research	Access (find collections, understand finding aids)	Find and Access
	Use (concept of a collection/R.G., original order, flexible process)	Use and Incorporate (examine/synthesize to construct argument)
Creating original work based on archival research	Use (access restrictions, copyright, citation)	Use and Incorporate (respect privacy, copyright, cultural context; cite)
	Follow Ethical Principles	

## IMPLEMENTATION

### Likert Scale Questions:

Based on the class focus(es) that Academic Programs staff identified after talking with the professor, students were given a selection of the following questions. They were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree."

Class focus	After this class, I understand...
All classes	...what kind of sources I can find at the Bentley.
Analyzing primary sources	...why a source's context (for example, its author, audience, or date) is important.
	...why the Bentley might not have some of the sources I want.
Doing archival research	...how archival collections are organized.
	...what strategies I can use to find helpful sources within a collection.
Creating original work based on archival research	...how to cite sources from the Bentley.
	...why the Bentley restricts access to some material.

### Free-Response Questions:

All classes were asked the following two free-response questions:

- What was the most important thing you learned in class today and why?
- What is still unclear or confusing after today's class?

Classes where learning to do archival research was a focus of the instruction session were also asked a third question:

- Please list the online tools you would use to search for material from our collections.

### Distribution

The earliest questionnaires, in 2019, were printed on paper and distributed at the end of instruction sessions held at the Bentley. Students were informed that the questionnaires were optional and anonymous, but that any feedback they gave would be helpful to Bentley staff in planning for future class visits.

The questionnaire was not distributed to all classes, often because of time constraints (particularly if a 50-minute class had already started late because many students had to travel from previous classes). Academic Programs staff tried to ensure that multiple classes, and classes with various focuses (analyzing sources, doing archival research, creating original work) were represented. The majority of classes focused on analyzing primary sources while a sizable number focused on doing archival research; only a few upper-level, project-based courses had a significant focus on creating original work (for example, a public website presenting their research).

### Shift to Online Classes

Because this project was started in 2019, it was created with in-person instruction sessions in mind. The pandemic forced a switch to both online instruction and online distribution of survey questionnaires. Data collection was suspended for the Spring 2020 semester, and then resumed online during the Fall 2020 semester, at which point the questionnaire was distributed using Qualtrics.

The questionnaire was emailed to all professors, with a request that they share it with their students, at the end of the semester, rather than the end of their instruction session. A question asking students to identify in which class they worked with the Bentley was added to the beginning, and Qualtrics's skip logic applied from there to ensure students only saw questions related to their class's focus.

A final question, "Was there anything about the virtual delivery of the class session and documents that you found especially helpful or difficult? If so, why?" was also added.

## RESULTS

### Scope of Surveys:

In total, 19 classes from 4 different semesters were surveyed, though not all classes were asked every question.

Data was collected during the following academic years:

- Collected Fall 2019 / Not collected Spring 2020
- Collected Fall 2020 / Collected Spring 2021
- Not collected Fall 2021 / Collected Spring 2022

### Likert Scale Results:

Class focus	After this class, I understand...	Avg. Response	No. of Responses
All classes	...what kind of sources I can find at the Bentley.	4.5	142
Analyzing primary sources	...why a source's context (for example, its author, audience, or date) is important.	4.6	74
	...why the Bentley might not have some of the sources I want.	4.3	57
Doing archival research	...how archival collections are organized.	4.2	48
	...what strategies I can use to find helpful sources within a collection.	4.3	38
Creating original work based on archival research	...how to cite sources from the Bentley.	3.8	24
	...why the Bentley restricts access to some material.	3.3	6

### Free-Response Results

When coding the free-response questions, themes were identified with two priorities in mind: What the students *thought* they understood, and what they *demonstrated* they understood, through mention of specific tools or articulation of concepts. Bowles-Terry and Kvenild's *Classroom Assessment Techniques for Librarians* helpfully articulated the difference between the two, and the importance of considering both.

116 students responded to the question, "What was the most important thing you learned in class today and why?" They mentioned:

- Existence of the Bentley or scope of its collections: 42
- Accessing Bentley resources: 10
- Searching for Bentley material: 12
- Citing Bentley material: 1
- Handling rare material: 7
- Analyzing primary sources (inc. understanding a genre/form): 13
- Content specific to their class: 23
- The nature of archives (collecting practices, context, original order): 8
- Importance of primary sources/archives: 13

97 students responded to the question, "What is still unclear or confusing after today's class?" They mentioned:

- Scope of Bentley collections: 7
- Accessing Bentley resources: 9
- Searching for Bentley material: 4
- Citing Bentley material: 2
- Analyzing primary sources (inc. understanding a genre/form): 9
- Content specific to their class: 8
- The nature of archives (collecting practices, context, original order): 4
- Relevance of visit to their class or future work: 7
- That the question was N/A or nothing remained unclear: 51

19 students responded to the question, "Was there anything about the virtual delivery of the class session and documents that you found especially helpful or difficult? If so, why?" The smaller number of responses make it more difficult to code and compare replies. Two themes that multiple students mentioned were the ability to follow along with searching exercises on their own computers (a positive) and feeling as if they could not focus on digital sources as easily.

## CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

### Instructional Changes

Some of the responses that indicated uncertainty about accessing Bentley resources mentioned not understanding the campus bus system or the Bentley's hours. Academic Programs has long asked professors to remind students that it might take a 15-20 minute bus ride to reach the library. However, we now try to provide that and other "orientation" type information in a brief Google doc professors can share with students, rather than expecting them to pass it on verbally.

The Bentley also hopes to create new video tutorials or research guides that students can refer to after instruction sessions, so they have a written/filmed reminder of how to search catalogs and databases. This goal was formulated in part due to responses to the question about virtual delivery of class sessions, in which students indicated that they liked being able to follow along with search exercises on their own computers. Hopefully, it will also make research easier for students whose free-response answers indicated that they understood search concepts but couldn't remember vocabulary (for example, understanding the type of information included in a finding aid, but referring to it as a "finding guide").

Finally, many responses to the question about what remained unclear or confusing actually indicated that students achieved the intended learning objectives. Their questions showed they were thinking ahead to the next concept that Academic Programs or their professor wanted them to consider. (For example, students in a session whose main objective was to find and access sources stating they remained confused about privacy and ethical use of material - something Academic Programs had not mentioned due to time constraints but which they recognized was important on their own.) Academic Programs is considering ways to invite students to ask more of these questions in class and reassure them that they are not failing to understand; they're actually on the right track.

### Future Survey Plans

Some of the Likert scale questions asked in this questionnaire were consistently high, meaning Academic Programs' current strategies are working well. Future surveys will likely eliminate questions that ask students to rate, for example, how well they understand what kind of sources they can find at the Bentley, to make space for other questions that remain unanswered. Under consideration are more questions about the affective experience of doing research: Do students feel welcome in the Bentley? Are they comfortable asking questions of staff?

## REFERENCES

SAA-RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy.

Peter Carini, "Information Literacy for Archives and Special Collections: Defining Outcomes," *Libraries and the Academy* 16, no. 1 (2016): 191-206, doi:10.1353/pla.2016.0006.

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