

Seeing Oneself to See Others: The Personal Archive Assignment

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How do archivists introduce students to the power and potential of archives when all classes are conducted online and there is limited access to physical archival materials? How do archivists foster virtual community so that students can engage meaningfully with archival concepts?

An archivist and faculty partner discuss an archives assignment (the Personal Archives Assignment; PAA) that introduced first-year undergraduates to archival concepts by figuring their own lives as sites of exploration. The assignment was intentionally designed to ensure that every element could be successfully introduced and completed within the digital environment.

The PAA asked students to assemble a personal archive that documented their experience/s during 2020 and beyond: the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter protests, and more. The assignment had several goals:

- To help students explore what an archive is, understand how archives are political, and that archives are often the product of heteronormative, patriarchal, white supremacist institutions
- To introduce the concept of symbolic annihilation and then imagine how creating a personal archive can counter systemic forces that silence, erase, deny, and minimize
- To help students develop an understanding of intersectional analysis, utilizing it as a lens to interrogate mass movement, other, and self
- To build radical empathy, both in and out of the classroom

The assignment and associated resources were created so that instructors and archivists could use, adapt, and implement them in their own spaces of teaching and learning. The presentation will explore possibilities for remixing the assignment within higher education institutions around the country.

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