

Evaluating How Archival Websites Allow Researchers to Prepare for An In-Person Visit

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Abstract:

The serious researcher visiting an archival website has specific needs they hope the website may meet. The Archival Research Preparation Online (ARPO) Index provides a content analysis framework for measuring the degree to which those needs are met. The index directs the focus toward preparing the researcher online for an in-person research visit.

This presentation introduces the ARPO Index and its components. Each of the index's components represents a webpage feature that, when viewed more broadly, is currently common on existing websites but may or may not be common on archival webpages. The components include the ability to ask questions, browse holdings information, search holdings information, view search results information, accumulate selected search results, save selected search results, review information about planning a research visit, schedule a research appointment, and request materials directly.

The use of real-world examples of the components provides concrete illustrations of the methodology employed to evaluate archival webpages. The discussion features the online ARPO Index Assessment Tool (arpoindex.org) that any archivists working at a repository open to the public may use to review their webpages and calculate the resulting score. The tool assists archivists in determining where their webpages need improvement, how archival websites they admire score, and how each iteration of a website redesign improves their score. Using the ARPO Index to guide a redesign will better allow the online researcher to become more self-sufficient in their research preparation. This self-preparation frees the reference archivists from preliminary, mundane tasks and provides an opportunity to assist the researcher at a more in-depth level.

The ARPO Index is the basis for two research papers. The first discusses using the content analysis approach and delves deeper into the ARPO Index foundations and components. The second applies the index to more than 460 academic archives.

About the Author:

Scott P. Pitol, Assistant Professor and University Archivist at the University of Illinois at Chicago, researches the use of technology by archivists and librarians to address issues that have arisen from the digitization of information and explores ways that technology facilitates the transfer of knowledge. Scott is the Reception Subcommittee Chair of the 2018 Midwest Archives Conference Spring Local Arrangements Committee. He holds an MLIS from Dominican University and is a Certified Archivist with the Academy of Certified Archivists.

Previously, Scott was the corporate archivist at The Pampered Chef, Ltd., a member of the Berkshire Hathaway Family of Companies. He served as Chair/Vice Chair/Immediate Past

Chair of the SAA Business Archives Section and on the Chicago Area Archivists Steering Committee for eight years including service as the inaugural Vice Chair for three years.