The Broadest Possible Range of Users: Learning About Users of Archival Aggregations

CHELA SCOTT WEBER

For the past 18 months, OCLC Research has been conducting original research as a part of Building a National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN), a two-year, IMLS-funded research and demonstration project that seeks to lay the foundation for a national finding aid network that serves as the central point of search for archival finding aids across all collections (LG-246349-OLS-20). This presentation will focus on semi-structured individual interviews with end users of archival aggregation websites. Guided by a key NAFAN project goal to "Increase usable access to unique resources for the broadest possible range of users" we sought to identify the varied users of archival aggregation websites performing research for work, leisure, creative, and academic activities. Interviews were conducted with 25 archival users across five user types - Professional, Personal Interest, Family History, Student, and Faculty - identified through their responses to a pop-up survey placed on regional archival aggregation websites. Interview protocol questions focused on why users are searching for archival material and where those materials fit into their research process; how users search for archival material and the challenges, enablers, and benefits of their process; how archival aggregators fit into their research process and what an ideal archival aggregator would look like for users. The presentation will highlight our research questions, data collection and analysis methods, efforts to align our methods with project values and principles, and initial findings.

About the author:

Chela Scott Weber is a Senior Program Officer for the OCLC Research Library Partnership, where she focuses on work supporting archives, special, and distinctive collections. Prior to OCLC, she helped to create and led the Archival Collections Management department at NYU Libraries, where she also served as the Acting Head and Associate Head of the Tamiment Library & Wagner Labor Archive. She has previously been the Director of Library and Collections at the California Historical Society and Director of Library and Archives at the Brooklyn Historical Society, and held positions at the Microsoft Archives, New York Transit Museum, and Benson Ford Research Center at The Henry Ford. She holds an MLIS and certificate of archival administration from Wayne State University, and a BFA from Cornish College of the Arts.