

CASE #25

“We Could Be the Way Forward”: Creating an Asynchronous Primary Source Activity

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES ENGAGED FROM [GUIDELINES FOR PRIMARY SOURCE LITERACY](#) BY THIS CASE STUDY

- 3A. Examine a primary source, which may require the ability to read a particular script, font, or language, to understand or operate a particular technology, or to comprehend vocabulary, syntax, and communication norms of the time period and location where the source was created.
- 3B. Identify and communicate information found in primary sources, including summarizing the content of the source and identifying and reporting key components such as how it was created, by whom, when, and what it is.
- 4B. Critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source.
- 4C. Situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection.

CASE STUDY LOCATION Florida Gulf Coast University
10501 FGCU Boulevard South
Fort Myers, FL 33965
<https://library.fgcu.edu/uasc>

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Introduction and Institutional Context

Established in 1991, Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) is a public institution that sits on 760 acres in the city of Fort Myers, Florida, with half of the campus's acreage devoted to environmental conservation and preservation. FGCU has an enrollment of about 16,000 students with 87 percent of the population being undergraduates and 37 percent of the students being first-generation college students.¹ The University Archives and Special Collections (UASC), which is part of the Wilson G. Bradshaw Library, first opened its doors in 2012 and has seen tremendous growth in the first decade. The University Archives is the official repository of records for Florida Gulf Coast University and serves as its institutional memory. The Special Collections curates a collection of rare and unique materials documenting the cultural and environmental history of Southwest Florida. The UASC team consists of four full-time employees, up to six part-time student workers, and four interns each semester. All members of the team work to expand and preserve collections, develop scholarly resources, and provide global access to the collections through [DigitalFGCU](#), the digital repository. Collections in the vault span up to 720 linear feet of materials with about 300 linear feet devoted to the environmental history of Southwest Florida.

Narrative

From its early development, a key mission and strategic goal of Florida Gulf Coast University has been to focus on Florida's unique environmental challenges and develop programs on water resources and environmental sustainability education.² To achieve its key mission, FGCU created a unique requirement for all students to take the University Colloquium course.

The mission of Colloquium is to empower students to act for social, environmental, and economic sustainability in a changing world.³ It introduces students to the complexities of developing sustainable societal patterns that they may face as they launch their careers. Faculty members from every college, as well as members of the community, join students for discussion in the classroom and experiential learning in the community. In the course, students are taken on field trips to different areas in Fort Myers that are contributing to sustainability. The instructors and community members who assisted in the creation of FGCU wanted to ensure that there was an opportunity for students to engage with their community and learn to apply sustainable thinking in their daily lives.

The course goals for students enrolled in Colloquium are as follows:

1. Identify ecological relationships using Southwest Florida and students' own communities as a living laboratory.
2. Analyze sustainability concepts and interactions from ecological, economic, and social perspectives.

¹ "Fast Facts," Florida Gulf Coast University, accessed January 23, 2023, <https://www.fgcu.edu/about/fastfacts>.

² Kevin Erwin and Roy McTarnaghan, "Our Creation Story," in *Making the Sustainable University: Trials and Tribulations*, eds. Katie Leone, Simeon Komisar, and Edwin M. Everham III (Singapore: Springer, 2021), 11–24, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4477-8_2.

³ "A Sustainable Future: University Colloquium," Florida Gulf Coast University, accessed January 23, 2023, <https://www.fgcu.edu/colloquium/#FGCUFaculty>.

3. Connect principles of sustainability to students' academic major, profession, and lifestyle choices.
4. Reflect on students' sense of place within the context of local, national, and global issues.

During the first decade of UASC's existence, classes would visit the archives for exhibition tours or instruction sessions, but these visits focused more on collection development, digitization, and fostering partnerships in the Southwest Florida community. During the Library's strategic planning for 2020–2025, UASC saw an opportunity to expand its reach and create instruction sessions that could be used in classes. The following activity, "We Could Be the Way Forward," was developed during the authors' participation in the Integrating Sustainability Across the Curriculum (ISAC) Academy.⁴ The academy is offered to FGCU faculty and staff to further integrate sustainability education into curricular and cocurricular activities throughout the campus community. Widely supported on campus, ISAC was crucial to the development of this primary source activity.

The academy allowed the authors to collaborate, create partnerships with members of the campus community, and generate interest in archival instruction sessions. It was during these discussions that Jones and Rodgers realized they had a concept that would support the colloquium course goals by including primary source instruction in University Colloquium. During ISAC, the authors had conversations with faculty members about their preferred method of delivery for an activity offered by the archives. Because Colloquium already takes students on four to six field trips throughout the semester, the faculty shared that they would be more likely to incorporate an asynchronous activity than a visit to the archives. Through these informal conversations, the consensus was that an asynchronous activity would be the preferred method.

In addition to faculty feedback, the authors were also interested in creating this asynchronous instruction online to align with a growing need on campus. Like many institutions, FGCU is offering an increasing number of courses via distance education. During the 2021–2022 academic year, 36 percent of full-time equivalent (FTE) students were enrolled in distance learning.⁵ This represents an increase of about 16 percent from the four years prior to COVID-19.⁶ According to the Association of College and Research Libraries' 2021 Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey, about 56 percent of library presentations were offered either entirely or mostly online during the 2020–2021 academic year.⁷ In the same survey, about 79 percent of respondents shared that they planned to continue offering presentations and instruction through a "mix of online, in person and hybrid" formats.⁸ Prior to COVID-19, online instruction only represented 20 percent of library

⁴ The activity's title is both a quote that FGCU's founding president used to describe FGCU and the future of sustainability education and a quote from a song by Taylor Swift. The authors specifically selected this reference to the founding president's description to emphasize the importance of virtual and asynchronous education to the future of instruction.

⁵ Florida Gulf Coast University, *Accountability Plan* (Fort Myers, FL, 2022). Per section 1009.24(17) of the Florida Statutes, distance learning is any course in which 80 percent or more of instruction is delivered via technology and while students and instructors are separated in time and/or space. FTE or full-time equivalent is a measure of instructional activity that is based on the number of credit hours during an academic year.

⁶ The 2020–2021 academic year was not included in this calculation as the need for increased distance education due to the pandemic created an outlier.

⁷ Laura Taylor, "2021 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey: Highlights and Key Academic Library Instruction and Group Presentation Findings," *College & Research Libraries News* 84, no. 4 (2023), accessed May 17, 2023, <https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/25850/33784>.

⁸ Taylor, "2021 ACRL Academic Library Trends."

offerings.⁹ Furthermore, when students learn remotely, they are at the center of their education, allowing them, in the case of archival instruction, the ability to connect resources to their own research interests. While “We Could Be the Way Forward” is heavily curated, the activity gives students the autonomy to examine primary sources, identify information about those primary sources, evaluate their creators’ perspectives, and work to situate the sources in their cultural and historical contexts (Objectives 3A, 3B, 4B, 4C).¹⁰

With the assistance of Colloquium instructors at the ISAC academy, Jones and Rodgers identified four lesson objectives that aligned with both the Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy and three of the four goals for University Colloquium.¹¹ The lesson objectives are as stated:

1. Students will learn how to access the archives to request primary resources and how to access DigitalFGCU.
2. Students will be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources (components of Objectives 3A and 3B).
3. Students will use primary resources to understand the basic principles of sustainability (components of Objectives 3A, 3B, and 4C).
4. Students will learn to think critically about current sustainability practices in their community (components of Objective 4B).

After creating the lesson objectives, the first challenge that the authors needed to address was selecting the collections. Jones and Rodgers agreed that the collections they chose should represent both University Archives and Special Collections, be well-processed and described, include a variety of material types, and align with the University Colloquium course goals. After careful consideration, the authors chose the Kevin Erwin Environmental Ecology Collection and the University Site Selection Collection. Each collection contains materials related to the site selection and early development of Florida Gulf Coast University. The Kevin Erwin Collection consists of field notes and documents from a local ecologist’s perspective.¹² The University Site Selection Collection includes materials regarding the institution’s development from the perspective of its leaders and the State of Florida. Both collections strongly related to Colloquium’s course goals to “identify ecological relationships using Southwest Florida and your own community as a living laboratory” and “to reflect on your sense of place within the context of local, national, and global issues” as outlined in the syllabus.¹³

⁹ Taylor, “2021 ACRL Academic Library Trends.”

¹⁰ Amanda Boczar and Sydney Jordan, “Continuity during COVID: Critical Digital Pedagogy and Special Collections Virtual Instruction,” *IFLA Journal* 48, no. 1 (2021): 99–111, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03400352211023795>.

¹¹ The authors acknowledge that some of the lesson objectives and elements of the activity align with more than the four stated primary source literacy guidelines. However, the authors found that objectives 3A, 3B, 4B, and 4C were the ones that were completely addressed, not just in part, and assessed for in the activity.

¹² Kevin Erwin is a world-renowned ecologist. He was not directly involved in the establishment of Florida Gulf Coast University. He served as an environmental consultant who opposed the selected location of the new university due to the potential negative environmental impacts.

¹³ Robert Lucius, “IDS3920–University Colloquium: A Sustainable Future” (Fort Myers, FL: Florida Gulf Coast University, Spring 2022), syllabus.

After selecting the collections, the authors focused on determining the materials to be included in the assignment. They used a combination of their experience giving in-person primary source instruction sessions and conversations with University Colloquium faculty to further narrow their selection. In addition, the authors were cognizant that students would be completing this activity outside of the classroom, with no prior archival experience. Therefore, the selected items needed to be materials that students were familiar with.

The final material types chosen included maps, letters, photographs, legal documents, reports, and oral histories. Maps are rarely brought out for in-person instruction due to their large size, but since this lesson was online it was easier to scan the maps and make them available digitally. In addition to maps, letters were also available in both collections. Incorporating letters and maps allowed for the chance to ask questions related to critical thinking skills and address primary source literacy objectives 3A, 3B, and 4B (see Figure 1). Furthermore, students analyzing letters and especially maps would coincide with Colloquium course goals, such as establishing a student's "sense of place."¹⁴ The other resources that were selected (legal documents, reports, and oral histories) were all materials students were less likely to have worked with before but were still easy to use in a primary source activity and aligned with primary source literacy objectives. All the materials selected would tell the story of the FCGU's creation without adding secondary contextual information, instead asking students to use their knowledge to address sources in context (Objective 4C). After material selection, the authors began to draft questions for the activity.

Jones and Rodgers sought to write activity questions that would be easy to grade, prioritizing multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer questions over longer essay responses. Question development included taking into consideration both the primary source literacy guidelines and the Colloquium course goals. Each collection's activity includes questions pertaining to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (see Figure 2).¹⁵ The goals are a large part of the Colloquium curriculum, and ISAC Academy instructors encouraged participants to incorporate the goals in their activities. Jones and Rodgers also ensured that the questions for each of the activities were a similar level of difficulty and mirrored each other so that the responses could be easily compared between the two collections (see Appendix A).

¹⁴ The colloquium learning objectives addressed include "analyze sustainability concepts and interactions from ecological, economic, and social perspectives" and "reflect on your sense of place within the context of local, national, and global issues."

¹⁵ For more information, see the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>.

"We Could Be the Way Forward": Using Primary Sources to Examine the Creation of a Sustainable University (University Site Selection Collection)

Letter of Support

The screenshot displays a digital document viewer interface. On the left, a sidebar contains a 'Menu' and three questions: 'Who wrote the letter?' (required), 'Who was the intended audience?' (required), and 'Identify one point in favor of the creation of FGCU from the letter.' (required). The main area shows a scanned handwritten letter dated June 1, 1992, addressed to the Lee County Division of Planning, Attention: Local Planning Agency, P.O. Box 398, Ft. Myers, FL 33902. The letter includes a 'RECEIVED JUN 5 1992' stamp and the text: 'To whom it may concern: We are writing to you as the future graduating class of 2002 asking that you keep your schedule for completing a university in Southwest'.

Figure 1. Site selection criteria document from the Kevin Erwin Collection and associated questions (Objectives 3A, 3B, and 4C).

"We Could Be the Way Forward": Using Primary Sources to Examine the Creation of a Sustainable University (Kevin Erwin Collection)

Site Selection Criteria

The screenshot displays a digital document viewer interface. On the left, a sidebar contains two questions: 'Which one of the criteria considers the "presence of archaeological artifacts/Indian burial"?' (required) and 'Which one of the criteria considers "health care services"?' (required). Below the questions are 'Back' and 'Next' buttons, and a page indicator 'Subpage: 2 of 3'. The main area shows a typed document titled 'NEW SOUTHWEST FLORIDA UNIVERSITY SITE SELECTION CRITERIA FOR SITE SELECTION COMMITTEE' with the text 'RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED' and the signature of Robert M. Friedman, AIA, Associate Vice Chancellor.

Figure 2. Letter from the University Site Selection Collection and associated questions (Objectives 3A, 3B, and 4B).

After creating the activity questions, the next challenge the authors faced was determining what system would host the asynchronous activity. There were three options available to the authors: Google Forms, Microsoft Sway, and LibWizard Tutorials. Jones and Rodgers had a vision of how they wanted the lesson to be designed, so they put together criteria of what the system needed to be successful. The first two criteria they set were cost and availability. The system needed to be free, and it needed to be readily available for them to use. A third criterion was that the selected system needed to be supported by the institution. Having the support of FGCU's systems administrators was necessary for the asynchronous lesson to be used across campus. Finally, the system needed to

have an easy-to-use interface for faculty and students and support different file types (see Appendix B).

Ultimately, Jones and Rodgers decided to use LibWizard Tutorials, which met all four criteria.¹⁶ The Wilson G. Bradshaw Library already had a subscription to LibWizard Tutorials, so there were no additional costs, it was immediately available, and it was institutionally supported. The system also supports various file types, which allowed for the authors to easily organize the activity sections for a user-friendly interface. In addition, LibWizard Tutorials produces a report of student responses that can be exported and easily graded by faculty. Jones and Rodgers originally pictured both collections being separate sections within one activity that would allow students to pick what collection they could work with. In the end, a separate tutorial was created for each collection. The first half of each tutorial is the same and provides an explanation of what archives are, the importance of archives, and the difference between primary and secondary sources. The second half of each tutorial includes questions related to the specific collection, and asks students to examine sources, identify information in sources, evaluate source creators' perspectives, and situate sources in context (Objectives 3A, 3B, 4B, and 4C).

Results

The authors measured the effectiveness of the instructional activity by tracking the number of faculty participants, the number of student participants, and the grades from the tutorial. Jones and Rodgers made the decision to add the activity to Canvas Commons in response to faculty members requesting that the authors create an activity that could be easily incorporated into their existing course structure. The activity has also been incorporated into the course template for all University Colloquium courses in Canvas.

Since launching the activity, 145 students have submitted their responses with an average overall score of 75 percent. Students have the option to reselect an answer if it is incorrect or to move on. There is also no limit on the number of times a student can complete the activity. With a 75 percent pass rate, the authors can infer that most students understand the material at an acceptable level and are meeting the learning objectives. Taking a closer look at participant responses, students most excelled in accomplishing objectives 3A, 3B, and 4C. The questions related to these objectives consistently had the most correct answers. Participants were able to navigate the letters provided, which in some cases included reading cursive and understanding outdated or specific language, to correctly answer questions about the creators, audience, and main points (See Figure 2). Jones and Rodgers think that the students performed best on objectives 3A, 3B, and 4C for three reasons. First, the questions related to these objectives drew on reading comprehension skills that were familiar to students. Second, the selected materials were an appropriate skill level for the participants. Third, the familiarity of the topic—campus history—made it easier for students to navigate the material and focus on primary source literacy skills rather than content.

¹⁶ LibWizard Tutorials is a Springshare product that allows users to create digital learning objects. There are four different elements: quizzes, surveys, forms, and tutorials/assessments. Tutorials and Assessments allows users to incorporate images, videos, and other interactive content into a quiz-like system. Detailed tutorials for creating and designing LibWizard Tutorials are available on Springshare's website at <https://springshare.com/libwizard> and YouTube.

The lesson objective that students had the most difficulty answering was 4B, to “critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source.”¹⁷ The analysis of the oral history interview made this particularly evident. Students struggled to display an understanding of the speaker’s perspective and how their biases may impact their retelling of events. For example, student responses to the prompt asking them to develop an oral history question for the ecologist Kevin Erwin included questions like, “What inspired you to create FGCU?,” “Where did you get the idea of making the school?,” and “What was the most exciting part of the development?” These responses indicate a clear misunderstanding of who Kevin Erwin is and his role in the creation of Florida Gulf Coast University.¹⁸ There is a slide in the activity that gives context for the Kevin Erwin Environmental Ecology Collection, but there is no information on who Kevin Erwin is as related to FGCU. In the future, there will be a slide before Erwin’s oral history that will provide context on his role in the creation of FGCU.

Moving forward, Jones and Rodgers also would like to include a feedback survey for faculty and students. In order to align this activity with UASC’s broader instruction efforts, the authors would seek to use the same survey form that is used for in-person instruction. Each of these surveys is short and assesses the accomplishment of learning objectives and enjoyment of the instruction. In addition to being used for feedback and improvement, these surveys would also be beneficial in marketing the lesson to future courses.

Lessons Learned

Incorporating University Archives and Special Collections into the University Colloquium course allowed the authors to introduce archives and primary source instruction to students who may not have otherwise had an opportunity to interact with UASC. Jones and Rodgers hope that this activity can serve as an opportunity for a wide body of students to begin to understand the use and value of primary source research and further develop critical thinking skills. In addition, the authors have learned that they can leverage this activity as a form of outreach. By embedding the asynchronous instruction into University Colloquium, the authors hope that more students and faculty will be encouraged to engage with UASC for research and instruction in a variety of ways.

Jones and Rodgers have also learned that this activity has the potential to reach beyond the initial, intended scope. While the authors created this activity to be used for University Colloquium, a faculty member teaching nineteenth and twentieth-century American history has used this activity to introduce primary sources to students. Introducing a new concept like primary sources, within the context of something familiar, like Florida Gulf Coast University, has made it easier for students to understand. As a result, the authors hope to create a similar activity for other general education classes such as English composition and introduction to humanities.

Finally, Jones and Rodgers learned how vital it was to clearly connect the activity goals to the goals of the course. Making this decision early on made it easier for the authors to gain buy-in from

¹⁷ ACRL RBMS-SAA Joint Task Force on the Development of Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy, “Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy,” approved June 2018, <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/GuidelinesForPrimarySourceLiteracy-June2018.pdf>.

¹⁸ See Appendix A for examples of the questions used in the activity.

faculty and departments outside of the social sciences and humanities. Moving forward, this is a practice that Jones and Rodgers will incorporate into further instruction development for both virtual and in-person activities.

Appendix A: Examples of Activity Content

Click on the links below to view live examples from the asynchronous activity.

- Kevin Erwin Environmental Ecology Collection:
https://fgcu.libwizard.com/f/primary_source_cs_u_erwin_TWPSCase
- University Site Selection Collection:
https://fgcu.libwizard.com/f/primary_source_cs_u_TWPSCase

Appendix B: Pros and Cons of Activity Platforms

When determining whether to use Google Forms, Microsoft Sway, or LibWizard Tutorials for this activity, the authors created a pros and cons list for each system. While Google Forms and Microsoft Sway did not work for the authors, they are still viable choices for other institutions to use in creating asynchronous instructional activities.

	Pros	Cons
Google Forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to use and create questions • Free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not supported by institutional software • Did not support the different media types used in the lesson • Did not report results in an organized fashion
Microsoft Sway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported by the institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor user interface • Unable to link responses to media and reporting
LibWizard Tutorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LibWizard recently acquired by institution • Reported the results in an organized fashion • Can send professors a copy of the completed activity. • Supported needed media use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not allow for the choose-your-own activity feature • Expensive for the institution