Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection: An Experiment in Engaging Students in Archival Research and Editorial Practice

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This article reflects upon the pilot phase of an ongoing project at the University of North Florida (UNF) in which students, alongside library and academic faculty, are using TEI–XML to construct an electronic archive of rare materials related to the life of Eartha M.M. White (1876–1974), a key figure in the African American history of Jacksonville. These documents, drawn from White's personal papers and correspondence, are held in the Special Collections and Archives of the Thomas G. Carpenter Library at UNF. The present study first locates this project within emerging conversations about archival research and digital editing as tools for teaching, Digital Humanities collaborations between academic faculty and libraries, and archival work as a means of institutional outreach and community engagement. I then outline the pedagogical framework in which "Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection" began, examine the editorial processes we designed, review our successes and challenges, and consider potential modifications to the project going forward.

Emerging conversations[1]

A growing body of recent scholarship addresses the use of the Digital Humanities in teaching. The contributors to the volume *Digital Humanities Pedagogy,* edited by Brett D. Hirsch (2012), examine the place of Digital Humanities in the classroom and the academy. Ann R. Hawkins (2014) edited a special edition of *CEA Critic* dedicated to the topic of Digital Humanities in the English curriculum, with articles by E. L. Bonds (2014), Sarah H. Ficke (2014), Amanda Gailey (2014), Luke A. Iantorno (2014), Maura Ives (2014), Wesley Raabe (2014), Peter Shillingsburg (2014), and Lindsay Thomas and Dana Solomon (2014). Meredith J. C. Warren (2016) addresses this topic in her article "Teaching with Technology: Using Digital Humanities to Engage Student Learning," and Claire Battershill and Shawna Ross (2017) offer a "practical introduction" for educators in their book *Using Digital Humanities in the Classroom.*

Recent studies have also looked more specifically at the role of digital textual editing as a strategy for teaching. In a chapter of *Digital Humanities Pedagogy,* Malte Rehbein and Christiane Fritze (2012) examine a one-week summer course on digital editing, and Simon Mahony and Elena Pierazzo (2012) include thoughts about electronic editing in the chapter "Teaching Skills or Teaching Methodology?" in that same volume. Kate Singer (2013) published on her use of TEI for teaching poetic vocabularies, and Amanda Gailey's (2014) contribution to the aforementioned volume of *The CEA Critic* addresses digital editing as a tool for teaching reading and writing. M. Brooks (2017) published the article "Teaching TEI to Undergraduates: a Case Study in a Digital Humanities Curriculum" in *College and Undergraduate Libraries.*[2]

Scholars have also considered archival research as a pedagogical approach in recent years. Sarah Berry (2011) reflects upon an experience working with student in archives, and Peter J. Wosh, Cathy Moran Hajo and Esther Katz (2012) study the teaching of digital skills within

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[1] I seek to establish here the general outlines of several scholarly conversations for which I believe the current study bears relevance. This review of literature is not intended as comprehensive.

[2] As far back as the late 1990s, Miranda Beaven Remnek (1999) published "TEI Analytical Encoding and Its Application in the College Classroom—The Role of the Library," but few similar studies appeared until recently.

archival and public history programs. Morgan Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel (2013) consider the impact of engagement with archives on student learning outcomes. Silvia Vong (2016) describes an approach to introducing students to special collections and archives, and Natalia Fernández (2016) writes about using archival work to help students connect to multicultural history.[3]

Another body of recent scholarship looks at models for collaboration between academic faculty and libraries. Elías Tzoc (2016) considers specifically such partnerships with respect to Digital Humanities endeavors. José O. Díaz and Meris A. Mandernach (2017) examine case studies of library–faculty collaborations in a more general sense, as Nayana D. Wijayasundara (2008) had done previously, and Karen M. Øvern (2014) examines pedagogical approaches to such collective efforts.[4]

Scholars have also addressed the role of digital media in libraries. One group of studies looks fairly narrowly at matters of digitization and digital curation within an archival setting, such as Alison Cullingford's 2016 work *The Special Collections Handbook* (113–26). Related scholarship looks more broadly at the role of libraries in curating the products of Digital Humanities endeavors, as is the case with Arjun Sabharwal's 2015 volume *Digital Curation in the Digital Humanities* and Alex Poole's 2017 article in the *Journal of the Association for Information Science & Technology*. Others studies examine the ways libraries can contribute to the interdisciplinary creation of knowledge through digital collaborations. Examples include the study *Digital Humanities in the Library* by Arianne Hartsell-Gundy et al. (2015), and the article "Librarians Doing DH" by Lydia Bello et al. (2017). Miriam Posner (2013) considered ways to surmount administrative obstacles to Digital Humanities collaborations in a library setting.

In recent years, scholars have also considered archival research as a means for community engagement. Alexandrina Buchanan and Michelle Bastian (2015) explore the role that archives can play in the work of local activists. Lydia Ferguson (2017) examines this topic within the context of liberal arts education, and Douglas Whitney (2017) does the same, with a broader focus. Nancy L. Godoy-Powell and Elizabeth G. Dunham (2017) look at the Chicano/a Research Collection at Arizona State University as a mechanism for building ties to the local Mexican American community.[5]

The current article connects with all of these conversations. The project under consideration here sends students into the archive to conduct research with primary sources, and then tasks them with encoding the materials they find for digital publication. It represents a collaborative model that combines the archival expertise of library faculty with the digital editing skills of Humanities faculty. This project has the potential to play a role in the preservation and accessibility of the materials, and because the subject matter addresses an important yet understudied aspect of local history, may also have implications for the institution's outreach to the community.

Pedagogical framework

The pilot phase of the "Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection" project occurred in the context of an experimental, workshop–style course titled "Introduction to Electronic Textual Editing." I designed this course with support from the UNF Digital Humanities Initiative (DHI), an association of faculty, staff and students from across campus. My intention was to create a classroom experience that was inherently hands–on and interdisciplinary, based in part on work that I had previously undertaken with students in my own research (McCarl, 2015b,

2016a, 2016b).[6] I envisioned "Introduction to Electronic Textual Editing" as an opportunity to explore archival and editorial processes within the context of a specific set of materials.[7]

In the summer of 2016, I first taught this course in a five-week summer semester, in partnership with Dr. Aisha Johnson-Jones, who was at that time head of Special Collections and Archives at UNF.[8] The course focused on the correspondence and personal papers of Eartha M.M. White, a businesswoman, philanthropist and community leader. These materials form the foundational collection of the Library's Special Collections and Archives, and represent a valuable but understudied resource (Thomas G. Carpenter Library, n.d., Johnson-Jones, personal communication, May 24, 2017).

At the beginning of the semester, Dr. Johnson-Jones introduced students to the Eartha M.M. White Collection, discussing the history and organization of the archive, as well as White's life and work. She also explained processes involved in creating and maintaining collections of rare materials, and addressed the proper handling of the documents. In consultation with Dr. Johnson-Jones, the students then began to identify materials of interest. Working in the Special Collections Reading Room, they requested folders and examined documents (Fig. 1). Dr. Johnson-Jones helped the students to understand the nature and historical context of the items they were viewing, and assisted them in requesting reproductions of those they desired to edit.

Introducing the students to the editorial and technical aspects of the course, I discussed the function and structure of XML, and the use of TEI–XML as a standard for the encoding of electronic texts. With a basic understanding of these topics, the students then undertook a simple markup task that I had designed, working with a sample document image, the template XML file that I had created for our project, and the oXygen XML editor. This session was followed, throughout the semester, by more detailed discussions of the evolution of documentary and digital editing as fields of scholarly practice, based on readings by authors including Lou Burnard et al. (2006), David Greetham (2013), Mary-o Kline and Susan Holbrook Perdue (2013), Jerome McGann (2013), Julianne Nyhan (2012), Elena Pierazzo (2015) and Melissa Terras (2013).

The main emphasis of the course was on the students' own work with the archival materials, and Dr. Johnson-Jones and I therefore conceptualized the experience as a partial internship. Our in-person class schedule was reduced, with many of the remaining class periods designated as workshop sessions, in which the students could labor independently or in groups, and consult with Dr. Johnson–Jones and myself on matters specific to their work. In order to regulate the time invested by students beyond these sessions, they were required to complete a total number of out-of-class hours, which they tracked on a standard electronic timesheet that we provided.[9]

We believed this approach would provide students with freedom to engage with the archival materials in the ways that best suited them. We were aware that requiring students to complete a given number of documents would not be a productive—or even workable—guideline,

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[3] Sammie Morris et al. (2014) have considered faculty expectations regarding students' archival literacy.
[4] Rebekah J. Lee (2017) has considered on–campus collaborations more broadly, looking at the role of makerspaces.
[5] Kevin Fleming and Morna Gerrard (2014) Gerrard look more generally at the state of public outreach of special collections and archives.

[6] A separate article addressing my work with coloniaLab is currently in development.
[7] The course description (University of North Florida, 2016), as it first appeared in the UNF *2016–2017 Undergraduate Catalog*, under course code DIG3152, is as follows: "This workshop–style course introduces students to methods of Digital Humanities research through hands–on work in the transcription/digitization, regularization, and encoding of manuscript or rare print texts. Students may also annotate and/or compose introductions to the texts in question, a process which may involve historical and/or bibliographical research. Specific requirements will vary by term, according to the particular material under consideration. Students' work may eventually form part of online publications carried out in collaboration with the Thomas G. Carpenter Library or other institutions. Students will be graded on their participation in course sessions, on the quality of their editorial work, and on oral presentations and reflective writing assignments in which they will synthesize their learning."
[8] Dr. Johnson is now supervisory archivist at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum in Atlanta.
[9] In order to facilitate this flexibility, the course was listed as hybrid in the schedule.