

## **Archival Principles and Practice**

### **Course Description:**

This course is an introduction to the fundamental principles and practice of archival studies. Basic problems and solutions related to archival functions such as acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, description, preservation, and public services will be discussed. An exploration of both past and present societal organizational structures and records keeping systems will be undertaken from the archival perspective.

### **Goals and objectives:**

The course introduces students to the principles of archival science and the activities of professional archivists. The objectives are to make students familiar with the history and societal context for archives, archival reference tools, basic professional skills of archivists and the management of archives.

### **Content:**

The course will cover the following areas; professional values and principles, institutional records keeping practices, historical methodology and archival research, history and functions of archives, legal frameworks for Archives, and the archival functions of preservation management, reference services and out reach, arrangement, description, acquisition, as well as appraisal theory and practice.

### **Topics:**

#### **1. Defining Archives**

- Definition of Archives
- American, British and Canadian perspectives

#### **2. History of Archives**

- Ancient world
- Archives pre-1789
- Modern Archives

### 3. Archival Profession

- Custodial Age
- Information Age

### 4. Records Keeping Practices and Systems

- Classification systems
- Retention schedules
- Electronic records

### 5. Historical Methodology

- Traditional approach
- Focus on records keeping
- Diplomatics

### 6. Arrangement

- Principle of arrangement
- Problems of physical arrangement
- Reclassification procedures

### 7. Description

- Conceptual levels from general to specific
- Scope and content notes
- Various types of finding aids
- Descriptive standards in Canada and beyond

### 8. Acquisition

- Acquisition process
- Acquisition policies and cooperation
- Total archives

### 9. Appraisal

- Theories on appraisal
- Evaluation of the future use for records
- Defining the values of records: administrative, legal, financial, and historical
- Selection process

## 10. Preservation Management

- Preservation planning
- General measures of protection
- Disaster planning
- Restoration techniques

## 11. Public Service

- Archives as a tool for researchers
- Public access
- Diffusion programme including the use of web sites
- Reference issues

## 12. Archives and the Law

- Copyright
- Access issues
- Ethical questions

### **Learning Outcomes:**

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with archival literature from the course book required readings. For additional background material please consult the suggested readings. The lectures will explore the major themes and some particular issues relevant to archives management and practice, particularly in the Canadian context. Workshops will illustrate the practical aspects of some topics and issues. Each student will be expected to write a major research paper using a variety of sources. By the completion of this course students are expected to be able to identify core issues in archival theory and practice and be ready to present a synthesis of one of these issues from an archival perspective based on the relevant literature.

### **Evaluation:**

Term Paper: (50%): Each student is expected to work on a term paper project involving an issue in archival studies.

Examinations (50%): 2 examinations. A one hour in class exam will be held in October (20%) and a take home final exam due in December (30%). The exams will reflect the

material covered in class as well as relevant readings from the course pack and any additional readings added to the myCourses Learning Management System. In order to develop an appropriate understanding of the course content the course pack readings should be started as early as possible.

Office Hours: Bronfman Building Room 210 on Thursday 5:00-5:30 or by appointment.  
Contact me by e-mail [gordie.burr@gmail.com](mailto:gordie.burr@gmail.com).

Please note:

1. “McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).(approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

"L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/))."

2. “In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.” (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)

"Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)."

## **SUGGESTED BACKGROUND READINGS:**

Bureau of Canadian Archivists. Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards. Rules for Archival Description. 1990. [Canadian Council of Archives - RAD](#) . Free e-version

Canadian Council of Archives. Canadian Archives in 1992. Caya, Marcel, General Editor, 1992.

Couture, Carol and Jean Yves Rousseau. The Life of a Document. 1987.

Cox, Richard J. Closing an era: Historical perspectives on modern archives and records management. 2000.

Bemington, Jackie et al (ed). Keeping Archives (3rd ed.). 2008.

Jenkinson, Hilary. A Manual of Archive Administration (rev. ed.). 1966.

Nesmith, T., ed. Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance. 1993.

Schellenberg, T.J. The Management of Archives. 1965.

**DISCLAIMER: This syllabus is provided for informational use only. Content and assignments may change before the start of the course and may differ between course sections. Students of this course should not use this document but instead retrieve the official version from the McGill course management site.**

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