Assigning Archival Research Projects: Resources for Instructors

Why assign an archival research project?
Using archival resources—such as personal correspondence, memoranda, and unpublished drafts of research papers—is rewarding for students, giving them a chance to learn and develop new research skills, and to “dig into history” by looking at unpublished documents. It can also be enjoyable simply because it is a new experience. And of course, it helps students learn a lot about the history of psychology.

What should students know about archival research?
Because archival research is entirely new to many students, they need some basic knowledge to prepare them for archival work. You and your students should know that:

1. **Archival materials do not circulate.** The Center is not a library; thus no material is available for loan. All research with archival materials is conducted in the CHP reading room.

2. **Archival research is by appointment only.** Students should schedule appointments two weeks in advance. The CHP reading room is open to researchers Monday through Friday from 10am-4pm and research can be done any during those hours.

3. **Archival research is often time and labor intensive.** Students should be prepared to devote several hours to conduct research at CHP based on their projects. They should also do some basic background reading on their subject before arriving at the Archives.

What can I do to prepare my students for their research trip to the CHP?
In order to ensure that students get the most out of their time at the Archives, instructors should do some pre-visit preparation. An instructor should consider:

1. **Teaching students about historical research methods.** Students should have a basic understanding of the difference between primary and secondary resources. They should understand the definition of “personal papers” and the material that is included in a manuscript collection. You may want to devote some class time to a short lecture on historical research methods can greatly improve student success at CHP.

2. **Scheduling a workshop at the Archives.** Better yet, let us do the work by visiting the archives with your class and attending a short presentation about historical research by CHP staff. If you are unable to visit
CHP, maybe CHP can visit you! If you are interested in scheduling a workshop at the CHP or having CHP staff visit your class for a lecture on archival research and historical research methods please contact us (ahap@uakron.edu).

3. **Using available resources.** At the end of this guide, we have provided a list of resources and readings that may help you introduce your students to archival research in the history of psychology.

**What kinds of project should I assign?**

The variety of projects that could be assigned is really limitless at the CHP. In the past, instructors have typically instructed their students to write a term paper on a historical topic, usually a biography, incorporating materials from the CHP’s Archives. If you have an idea for a project, let us know. We know our collections well and can help you design your projects and make sure they are successful.

**How do I choose a research topic?**

Whether you assign research topics or students choose a topic themselves, it is important to consider what is available at the CHP. For example, a student who chooses or is assigned “Freud” as a topic will not find a lot of materials at the CHP for this assignment because we do not house the papers of Sigmund Freud. Instructors should assign or help students choose topics that are represented in the CHP collections. The collection can be browsed online at [http://tinyurl.com/CHPcollections](http://tinyurl.com/CHPcollections). We encourage you to contact our reference archivist (ahap@uakron.edu), who will gladly work with instructors and students to choose topics that are interesting and well-represented.

**Do you have any suggestions for paper topics?**

Here are just a few ideas for papers or projects in the history of psychology.

1. **Examining the history of an instrument or apparatus.** CHP houses a large instruments and apparatus collection. Students may track the history of a given apparatus or examine how the use of instruments changed over time. This can include locating primary source materials within the CHP manuscript and book collections that document how and when specific instruments were used. For example, the CHP is home to a pair of night vision goggles developed to assist fliers during World War II. The manuscript collection contains archival documents relevant to this apparatus as well.

2. **Examining the history of psychological tests.** CHP has an extensive collection of psychological tests – both three dimensional tests and paper-and-pencil tests. Students can research the history of a specific test and how it evolved over time – the Army Alpha and Beta tests for example. Students can also
examine a number of tests that examine the same attribute (e.g., intelligence), and compare and contrast these tests.

3. **Examining introductory textbooks.** The CHP has a large book collection which includes rare titles in addition to a collection of psychology textbooks. Students could review a series of introductory psychology textbooks throughout history in order to see how the teaching of psychology has changed.

4. **Writing a biography.** The CHP holds the papers of many prominent psychologists. Students could choose an individual and write a biography of him or her. Students would have ample material to work with if they chose any individual whose papers are housed at the CHP.

5. **Other Topics.** The following topics are well-represented in the CHP collections: comparative and animal psychology, child development, vocational guidance, the rise of applied and clinical psychology, industrial/organizational psychology, counseling psychology, IQ testing and the psychology of under-represented groups in the field such as women and African Americans.

**Resources**

**Your Best Resource: The CHP!**

Contact us to coordinate your project, schedule a free workshop, book a tour, or chat casually about your ideas and needs.

**Telephone:** 330-972-7285  
**Email:** Lizette Royer, Reference Archivist at ahap@uakron.edu

**Location:** Center for the History of Psychology  
The University of Akron  
73 College Street  
Akron, OH 44325-4302

**Resources for Learning about Archival and Historical Research**


http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.cfm?id=2242.

Resources on Teaching and Practicing the History of Psychology

The Society for the Teaching of Psychology
http://teachpsych.org/

Cheiron: The international society for the history of behavioral & social sciences
https://www.uakron.edu/cheiron/

Society for the History of Psychology (APA Division 26)
http://historyofpsych.org/

Have an idea? Need some help planning a project? We’d love to help!