Engaging with Silences:
Clayton State Master of Archival Studies Program's Approach to Teaching

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the theoretical framework and approach to educating archivists in the Clayton State Master of Archival Studies (MAS) program. The MAS program is an entirely online program based in the state of Georgia in the U.S. Across the curriculum of the MAS, we approached developing our curriculum to ensure that students engage with social justice issues through wrestling with archival silences. Through creating a theoretical framework, class discussion activities, and assignments, our hope is for our students to be prepared to engage with issues of representation in archival collections once the students are in the field. This paper explains the basis for our approach and provides example assignments which other institutions can use as inspiration for their archival education curriculum.

For many, archival education emphasizes fundamentals. Archival educators and professionals seem most concerned with educating new archivists on topics such as how to preserve materials, how to provide access, and how to acquire materials. These activities are the work of archivists, but emphasis on the technical disguises the complexities of cultural, economic, and social issues that surround archival work. Technical archival work often silences the voices of many groups found within our collections through emphasizing standardization and mechanics of archival work. Student archivists need exposure to discussions that go beyond the technical. The MAS program does this by encouraging students to engage with the silences that occur during our work.

Keywords: archival education; social justice

Introduction

C	urriculum shifts are a common occurrence in higher education worldwide. Opportunities to review and revise curricula are an effective way to identify gaps in student learning, so that those gaps can be filled with relevant knowledge to meet the goal of an effective, holistic education. Part of the process of identifying those knowledge gaps is in acknowledging where faculty overlook perspectives, or do not incorporate a diversity of ideas and knowledge coming from a variety of socio-cultural heritages, over time. This case study describes how a curricular review of the Master of Archival Studies (MAS) program offered at the Clayton State University in the state of Georgia in the U.S. provided opportunities for faculty and administrators to go beyond a traditional perspective for curriculum overview. The faculty identified models of archival silences and social justice, and these models served as conceptual guides to frame the

program design that included a diversity of knowledge and intellectual heritages for the purpose of offering meaningful, well-rounded archival education. These intellectual frameworks helped faculty consider community information needs and heritages and were incorporated as part of the Clayton MAS program's vision.

To rightly adjust the Clayton MAS curriculum, knowledge gaps within the discipline of archival studies itself needed to be recognized and challenged. For example, many archivists have long recognized that archives in and of themselves are not neutral; that ways in which artifacts and collections have been appropriated throughout the world affirm institutional hegemony, privilege, and power, thus perpetuating the obscurity (whether intentionally or unintentionally) of authentic voices of various cultural groups' intentions, perspectives, values, and knowledge (Greene, 2009; Greene, 2013; Jimerson, 2009; Pell, 2015; Collins, 2018). To reconcile this kind of egregious inequity requires a rigorously reflective form of intervention to begin to resolve the problem. To that end, there are additional layers of knowledge-based problems at play in the archives field that must also be addressed in order to develop an honest approach to renewing a curriculum that is based on the ideals and motivations of social justice.

Archivists have been wrestling with the issue of representation in their institutions (Schwartz & Cook, 2002; Cook, 2013; Taylor, 2017). Mitigating traditionally western notions of what archives are, what they do, and who they are for, inclusion and representation of the people of the archives of a community or cultural group require archivists to think about how their own identity constructs impact the decisions that they make for materials accession, installation, preservation, and access. Taylor (2017) explains that "when our worldviews have been formed within the dominant culture, the dominant culture is what we tend to project through our work" (p. 21). This cultural projection, often unrealized, marginalizes the presence of cultural groups, whose narratives and inheritances are appropriated and on display without knowledge or permission, thus, becoming "invisible" in the archive because the dominant culture obscures their stories and separates their humanity from their artifacts—thus nulling their existence.

Past and current presidents of the Society of American Archives (SAA) regularly implore archives and archivists to embrace a "*behavior* of inclusion" (Messiner, 2017, para. 5). The proposed solutions to increase inclusion in archival practice can be understood as an act of social justice where information-related actions help to empower communities, ensure equity, and avoid adding trauma to the stories and experiences of disenfranchised groups (Mehra, 2015; Mehra & Rioux, 2016). For social justice to be realized in the archives, archivists must acknowledge and understand their own perspectives and identities.

Clayton MAS embraced this reflective approach by centering, what is known in archival studies as "archival silence," as a social justice-based approach to restructuring the program's curriculum. During the process of unpacking the curriculum, MAS faculty reflectively sought knowledge gaps (i.e., the silences) that were evident conceptual witnesses to the program's structure. This archival silence perspective required faculty to understand how archival theoretical and methodological approaches can act to isolate the techniques of archival practice, thus needing to incorporate knowledge from other disciplines and worldviews (Kaplan, 2009; Lee, 2019).

A vital aspect of identifying the silences of the curriculum was the need for the Clayton MAS faculty to acknowledge their own socio-cultural privilege and how their identities and constructs may impact the curriculum in limiting ways. Examining archival silences gave the MAS program a

framework for explaining why social justice solutions existed to combat the lack of diverse voices within the content of the program (e.g., textual readings for classes, hiring and/or involvement of faculty members from diverse backgrounds, and interdisciplinary relationship building across campus). By wrestling with various issues, ideas, and approaches inside the classroom, throughout the campus, and in communities, future archivists may be better prepared to combat silences in archival settings in which they would work during their careers.

The Clayton MAS program took up this challenge to wrestle with archival silences, why they existed, and how they are mitigated. This introspective process required not only acknowledging the work of archivists, but also included interdisciplinary approaches to understanding archives and integrating social justice perspectives and actions in the curriculum-(re)building process. During the curriculum review, the MAS faculty found that courses were not engaging with social justice issues and thus, by extension, were perpetuating archival silences.

The curriculum review began in 2015, led by the MAS faculty in consultation with the Dean of College of Information and Mathematical Sciences at Clayton State University. The first task was to align the MAS curriculum with other archival studies and library science programs around the country (U.S.) in terms of credit hours, required and elective courses, desired student learning outcomes and program objectives, and impact beyond the profession. This initial review process led to the realization that there were many silences in the Clayton MAS curriculum, particularly around social justice topics. This curriculum review allowed the MAS faculty to think about archival silences as a social justice issue for improving course topics and pedagogical procedures across the entire structure of the program. The MAS program's case study is illustrative that review processes are an opportunity to effect meaningful changes to archival education and, more importantly, an opportunity to include social justice reflections throughout the curriculum.

Clayton MAS Program: The Context

The MAS program started in 2009 as a collaboration between The Georgia Archives, Clayton State University, and the National Archives and Records Administration-Southeast Region to create a master's level program on archival administration in the southeastern U.S. Writing about the MAS program's formation, Cherie Long (2011), a member of the planning committee, noted:

> From its inception, the advisory committee insisted that the proposed program goes beyond the traditional archival education supplied by history or LIS programs to incorporate a broad range of technological skills and approaches to digital preservation of information, as well as incorporate service-based learning throughout the curriculum. (p. 113)

Early on, the curriculum centered around a rigid sequence of 45 credit hours, with courses focused on the core archival domains established by the Academy of Certified Archivists (ACA), courses in database design, introduction to archival technology, and digital preservation. These core areas became a hallmark of the Clayton MAS program. Before curriculum updates, the Clayton MAS faculty consistently emphasized, pedagogically, how important it was to think about the archival enterprise holistically, with a focus on two critical questions: "What does archivists' work represent?" and "Why is it societally important?" (CSU, 2021). These considerations became central to the program's overall approach to teaching archives.

In Fall 2015, a new program director was appointed to the Clayton MAS program. One of the campus administration's first mandates to the new program director was to update the curriculum to improve graduation rates. In response to this charge, the Clayton MAS faculty reflected on the student body makeup of the program, its online status, and current archival education trends. The first decision was to streamline the program's 45 credit hours to 36 credit hours. With this reduction, the MAS program had to then consider the following:

- What was missing from our curriculum?
- Would there be enough time in a semester to add to an already full curriculum that was now missing several courses?

These questions are examples of the "silences" that the faculty was determined to explore and understand. They reviewed the current archival research literature to confirm what the MAS program was in alignment with, and explored the contemporary ideas within archival education discourse that would be needed in their revived program. One important result of the literature review was learning that social justice was becoming a central core of the archival field, in response to evolving social and cultural shifts happening in U.S. life. The Clayton MAS curriculum was missing that essential aspect of archival discourse.

Part of this realization involved conversations about the crucial aspects of archival education and the role the Clayton MAS program plays in that educational process. Faculty believed that it was important to teach students how to not just see or read the archival record but, just as importantly, to listen to the archival record. Listening to archives can be understood as looking for the stories, narratives, and facts that a collection or repository tells (Namazi, 2021). This listening activity is not just related to data that is most obvious in a collection but, more so, becoming aware of nuances beyond the surface of an artifact that might be barely a whisper or even unheard–a means of actively searching for and locating the collective memory of a text or object in the personification of the archive. Active listening also requires engaging with the speaker, text, or object as an active engagement with the embodiment of that text or object (Nemec et al., 2017).

The program faculty asked what active listening might look like for an archives curriculum. They realized active listening requires teaching students that engagement is not just with the records, but also with the record creators and the communities who utilize those records. Active listening further requires archivists to acknowledge past pain and trauma that might be demonstrated in silent ways within archival records and artifacts. This form of critical engagement is strongly connected to a social justice approach. One of the MAS program's goals in reviving the curriculum was to teach students how to actively listen to collections when identifying whispering or absent voices.

Theoretical Intersections: Social Justice and Archives

Social justice in library and information science (LIS) requires valuing the voicedness of everyone in society, not just the dominant culture, in respecting and empathizing with the human condition with a sensitivity that redeems, rather than perpetuates trauma (Jaeger et al., 2015; Tansey, 2020). The Clayton MAS program realized that it could readily teach the skills and techniques of archival professional practice, but the faculty were concerned: has the program identified a conceptual framework for understanding the socio-cultural nuances of the archives

field? Are the faculty prepared within their own identities to teach their students the societal, emotional, or cultural perspectives that could impact archival practice? This reflective inquiry required exploring beyond any traditional approach and determining where theory and practice converged with heritage-based archival perspectives. For the MAS program, this inquiry involved going beyond archival literature and examining how to make the curriculum more theoretically and pragmatically inclusive. For faculty, this required that they, too, engaged in a reflective examination of their own theoretical stances and professional practices alongside an active discussion about power, archival silences, social justice, and critical pedagogy. This multifaceted review included seeing how these theoretical approaches might intersect with archival work and add value to practical archival education.

From a philosophical point of view, the Clayton MAS faculty considered philosophers like Michel Foucault (via Monod, 2019) and Jacques Derrida (1996) who forced archivists to deal with our role in society, specifically looking at how the ways we archive can further the notion of silences. Following a Foucaultian view, Lynne Huffer (2016) believed that "when we look at the details of those primary sources, we can see immediately that the archival 'text itself' is not the voice of 'madness itself' but, conversely the voice of its captors" (p. 31). Foucault saw archives as created by oppressors, a process that would lead to limitation or at least control of the voices in the archives (Millar, 2017; Monod, 2019). The silences framework provided a method for explaining where Foucault and Derrida's ideas intersected with archival theory and practice. Case in point, Rodney Carter (2006) states:

> Silence can be actively entered into or, as occurs where the power is exerted over an individual or group, it is enacted upon that individual or group. In the archives, silences can occur as marginal groups are actively denied entry. (p. 216)

Carter (2006) engaged with both Derrida and Foucault to understand archival silences and how this methodology reflects what can be understood about archives creation. Building upon these concepts, Thomas et al. (2017) remark in *The Silence of the Archives,* that:

> [m]uch of the impetus for this way of thinking came from colonial historians, who came to see that what survived in the archive was a function of power relationships in the past and future societies; the voice of subordinate groups is excluded from the archive. (p. 174)

Here archivists are wrestling with how both Derrida and Foucault impact our way of thinking about archives. Carter (2006) and Thomas, et. al (2017) provide readers with an understanding of how power relationships within colonized societies invariably result in archival silences.

So, how are archival silences transmuted through a social justice lens? Mehra and Hernandez (2016) found that social justice provides a set of actionable items that can activate all library and archival settings to positively impact the communities they serve. Further, the authors state that "it is important for LIS professionals to question who is 'left out' and considered on the margins of society and what can we do to improve their life circumstances and experiences" (p. 176). This approach demonstrates the efficacy of social justice as a tool to empower silenced and "left out" stories in communities where embedded power structures like libraries and archives represent dominant cultural forces. Therefore, creating a framework around silences to affect social justice principles required the Clayton MAS program to go beyond the archival field to learn how understanding power and justice might intersect with archival work.

Revived Pedagogy: Integrating Social Justice into the Curriculum

With social justice principles and theoretical frameworks from other disciplinary origins to help guide them, the MAS faculty led students through a process of exploring both social justice and silences. Derrida, Foucault, Harris (2015) and others provided the initial inspiration, but some of these scholars proved challenging for students. In turn, the faculty selected a diverse group of authors of multiple disciplines, from all over the world, to help students understand social justice issues surrounding silences and how archival approaches intersected with other forms of scholarly thought. This scholarly collection became part of many of the Clayton MAS course readings and class materials. Casting a wide net into different disciplines proved helpful in the MAS program's attempt to understand and integrate a more global and interdisciplinary perspective. These perspectives came especially from historians and their critiques of colonialism and capitalism.

Archivists often turn to historians to gain an understanding of complexities in the historical record. During the curriculum review, readings cited from historians focused directly on ways in which silences tell the story of social shifts and power relationships over time. For example, historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015) revealed "that silencing also is due to the uneven power in the production of sources, archives, and narratives" (p. 27). Trouillot (2015) explains why silences exist. Thomas et. al (2017) explained the reasoning for the uneven relationship. Thomas et al. (2017) also found that governments were complicit in creating silences. In Simon Fowler's chapter "Enforced Silences", from Thomas et al. (2017), he found that archives could have numerous silences from informal, intentional, governmental secrets and collecting the wrong topics (Fowler, p. 6). These authors provided students with insights into information creation and archival silences.

To incorporate the ideas of the new curriculum's bibliography, the Clayton MAS faculty asked their students to critically think about how archives are created and how society views information in them. While engaging with Trouillot, Thomas et al. (2017), among others, class learning objectives typically included:

- Students will justify their decision related to collection development to ensure that they are inclusive.
- Students will analyze situations that may lead to the underrepresentation of diverse cultural heritages and communities in archival collections in each scenario.
- Students will discuss how and why silences occur in archives.

Faculty intended these objectives to teach students where silences come from and give them insight into social justice perspectives, such as community engagement.

The program faculty found further inspiration in discussions around how capitalism and colonialism have impacted communities abroad and in the U.S. One topic that was a compelling conversation for students involved the concept of "extractive capitalism." For example, in the text, *The Extractive Zone*, Gómez-Barris's (2017) definitions proved useful for explaining imbalanced economic relationships. Gómez-Barris (2017) gives the example of South America whose economic system "engages in thefts, borrowings, and forced removals, violently reorganizing social life as well as the land by thieving resources from Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories" (p. xvii). Stated differently, extractive capitalism is a form of colonial capitalistic enterprise which seeks only to take and not give back to communities.

Akin to Gómez-Barris's point, archives, too, extract prestige from the records they collect. If archives are not extracting prestige, they may be unfairly extracting cultural property or intellectual property rights. Students needed to think about what an archive gives and takes from their communities. These conversations were brought up in the appraisal, law and ethics, and some special topics courses within the Clayton MAS curriculum. Readings that addressed these issues helped students think through ways in which archives extract knowledge, identity, and power from the communities they purportedly represent. Learning objectives that discussed the extractive nature of capitalism included the following:

- Students will design policies and procedures that ensure various property rights are not infringed.
- Students will investigate collecting practices for unfairness based on how an organization requests copyright or acknowledges cultural property rights.

Plainly stated, faculty should engage students to critically inquire who really should own archival records physically, intellectually, and culturally. This line of thinking can prompt students to think of archiving as a collaborative process.

Another work that has inspired the MAS program is Patel and Moore's (2017) *History of the World in Seven Cheap Things.* While Patel and Moore's (2017) explanation of cheap things relied on capitalism and colonialism to discuss the cheapening process, MAS program faculty were more interested in the monetary thought process illustrated by their book. The authors stated that "[c]heapening marks the transition from uncounted relations of life making to the lowest possible dollar value. It's always a short-term strategy" (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 22).

The Clayton MAS faculty identified the cheapening process occurring in archives in two critical ways. One, when society cheapens lives, as was suggested by Patel and Moore (2017), people's stories are obscured. Patel and Moore (2017) asserted that individuals, namely marginalized people, are only valuable because of their labor. Therefore, their documents are undervalued unless related to their work. Secondly, archives often reversed the cheapening process by overvaluing certain types of records over others, essentially cheapening (and therefore silencing and marginalizing) documented stories of cultural groups on the fringe of the dominant culture. Patel and Moore (2017) further remarked, in their discussion of colonialism and commodification of work, that "cheapening is a set of strategies to control a wider web of life" (p. 2). For archives, this means that archivists can control the narrative by overvaluing the records of the wealthy (in terms of access) and powerful (i.e., governments). From Patel and Moore (2017), the MAS program faculty understood and could discuss processes that cheapen/marginalize people, their stories, and their communities at-large.

Further, the Clayton MAS faculty took what they learned about capitalism and connected it to archival literature. For example, Ramirez (2015) posits, "Recognizing the link between educational and economic disparities, and the whiteness of the profession is also to acknowledge how committing to diversity as a core organizational goal necessitates the examination of structural inequalities and one's role in perpetuating them" (p. 350). By triangulating the hubris of scholars such as Ramirez (2015) and Patel and Moore (2017), the MAS faculty learned how to synthesize different disciplines to frame discussions around marginalization, economics, and how an activist approach may help to guide students along a social justice-oriented stance for the archives profession. These authors helped the MAS program faculty think through the archivist's

role, in capitalist and other oppressive systems, in creating silences. The following learning objectives of the program's course on archival principles and practices were useful for assisting first semester students in exploring this idea:

- Students will discuss why economic disparities may lead to underrepresentation in archives.
- Students will identify communities that have traditionally been excluded from archives due to socio-economic status.

This integration of social justice and silences into the MAS Program was an iterative process of creating new objectives inspired through an interdisciplinary approach to see how differing theories and methods can come together to produce a better way of fusing theory and practice into an inclusive identity construction for the professional archivist. Showing students how differing viewpoints concern the archives helped them see how our work matters, and more importantly, how our work could lead to equity and inclusion. These ideas helped the MAS program faculty frame experiences and develop our curriculum for archival studies students.

Conclusion: Social Justice as a Methodology in Class Activities

Inspired by interdisciplinary readings and a broad framework of silences, the MAS program needed to construct assignments, discussion prompts, and other activities to help students engage with these concepts. The faculty wished for a shared set of experiences for each student to have as they moved through the MAS program. Faculty asked: What shared experiences, such as readings or assignments, did all students have in their courses? When did they have them? What did the experiences represent for these students? Did students engage with difficult topics surrounding silences? The faculty decided on two initial goals for student experiences:

- Students should engage with archival silences at multiple points across the curriculum.
- Students should engage with case studies, discussion posts, and assignments that ask them to learn more about underrepresented groups in archives.

These goals were rudimentary but gave faculty a place to create activities that would honor and center silences. The hope was to complement existing shared experiences around technology and core archival concepts with new ones that emphasized social justice.

As another means of honoring silences as a social justice approach to archival education, case studies formed a core experience in many of the reformed Clayton MAS courses. Students engaged with case studies by intersecting current events with archival literature. For example, during 2020, the year of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, case studies included content discussing the U.S. elections of that year and social justice events such as the destruction of U.S. confederate monuments and the momentum of the Black Lives Matter protests which spread throughout the world. Case study experiences, explored with a social justice lens, provided an opportunity for students to ask themselves hard questions about their own biases and (mis)understandings of archives. Faculty constructed these experiences within the social justice framework of archival silences. With these experiences, the faculty wanted to allow students to understand how their decisions impact archival silences and how understanding social justice issues could help dissipate those silences.

The archival field is more expansive than just technological prowess and professional practices. Skills are most meaningfully applied when archivists understand the heritage and values of the people in the communities they serve and how their role, as archivists, may create or perpetuate silences. The Clayton MAS program's case demonstrates that a reflective, collaborative curriculum review be an opportunity to think about how students can gain a more inclusive understanding of the social, cultural, and political forces that archival studies may create and participate in with communities; specifically, how various theoretical approaches that go beyond professional practice intersect, interact, and impact ways in which archive are situated as community-based institutions. The Clayton MAS program embraced a social justice lens to enact a curriculum where students could begin to explore more topics and issues which can better prepare them to empower new voices in archival collections through these experiences. Other archival educators may find some inspiration in the MAS approach. This article presented examples of how MAS faculty integrated a social justice framework to integrate a means of honoring archival silences into the curriculum. This work is just beginning.

The next step for the MAS program includes new courses on diversity and inclusion in archives where students will engage with various communities to collect, access, and describe. Additionally, Clayton MAS faculty members are in the process of creating a diversity statement for the program that will explain the program's inclusive educational philosophy and approach to understanding archives. The faculty plan on incorporating this statement into the program's assessment practices. There is hope that the MAS program's process may help others think through how archival education can benefit from social justice frameworks. Finally, any form of program review can be an opportunity to create lasting change in education and is a perfect time to incorporate social justice ideals in the curriculum. It was an active decision by the MAS faculty to embrace our chance during a program review and make the curriculum more inclusive.

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