

# A diplomatics-informed archival pedagogy: Fostering student-centered learning environments for novice archival researchers

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## Abstract

**Purpose** - This paper begins to construct a theoretical foundation for using a diplomatics-informed pedagogy that specifically addresses common concerns in archival instruction in a higher education environment. The authors utilize Self-Determination Theory to define student-centeredness and provide empirical guidance for creating a learning environment supporting student motivation, persistence, and academic achievement. The proposed framework provides both structure and theoretical grounding for the archivist while also cultivating a learning environment which effectively motivates novice researchers.

**Design/methodology/approach** - The authors draw on diplomatics and archival instructional literature to propose an instructional framework utilizing Self-Determination Theory.

**Research limitations/implications** - This is a conceptual paper and based on subjective analysis of existing literature and theory. The proposed framework has not been tested in a practical application but it is based in the pedagogical foundations of diplomatics and Self-Determination Theory's focus on student perceptions and motivations.

**Findings** - A diplomatic-informed pedagogy is a new, theoretically viable approach to archival instruction for novice researchers intending to replace common archival orientation and competency-based instruction. This pedagogical approach also provides a reproducible structure to the instructional archivist, helping to organize classroom learning outcomes, assessments, and activities in alignment with evidence-based research and well-established archival theory.

**Originality** - Diplomatics, the foundation of archival science and legal theory, can be applied pedagogically to provide concrete guidance to teach students to use archives in more intentional, creative, and disciplinary authentic ways. Diplomatics gives the instructional archivist a pedagogical foundation, structure, and guiding methodology to approaching novice researchers in the archives while Self-Determination Theory presents how to implement such an approach.

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## Introduction

As the archival literature continues to praise the pedagogical importance of archives in the academic classroom, the list of instructional challenges of teaching with primary sources also grows. While archivists are expected to employ active learning techniques and flipped classrooms, so too are they often expected to introduce aspects of the theoretical and administrative history of archives--often within truncated classroom sessions. At once, archival instruction efforts are often expected to meet the archives' outreach goals, introduce students - or novice researchers - to the concept and importance of the archive, and teach primary source research methods. This presents a dilemma. Should archival instruction focus on teaching about archives or teaching archival research?

Given the realities of archival instruction we propose archivists spend class time demonstrating to students how to be researchers, not how to be archivists. Diplomatics, the foundation of modern American historiography and paleography, can be applied *pedagogically* alongside Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a prominent theory of human motivation, to provide concrete guidance to teach students to use archives as an experienced researcher would--in a way conducive to creating a motivating and student-centered learning environment. Such learning environments account for students' basic psychological needs, empowering students to take greater ownership over their learning (Jang, *et al.*, 2010).

Created in 1681 by French monk Dom Jean Mabillon, diplomatics was used to establish the authenticity of medieval charters and has become an auxiliary science of history and a foundation of the education and research of many European archivists. While the necessity of establishing the authenticity of papal and medieval charters is no longer a pressing operational need, diplomatic concepts and methods of determining authenticity and reliability of documents have transitioned well into the realm of digital records preservation and access (MacNeil, 2000), and determining the legal status of records (Storch, 1998). Yet diplomatics can be more than a

descriptive methodology. We present three themes of a diplomatics-informed pedagogy and argue it can provide a structured yet flexible framework for creating student-centered archival instruction when integrated with SDT a diplomatics-informed pedagogy answers the question of “*what* should I do in the classroom?” and SDT answers “*how* should I do it?”.

Archivists are often constrained in what they can accomplish pedagogically. An archival instruction session in an academic library can encompass everything from standard outreach talking points, to archival history and theory, to historical research methods. Instruction is further constrained by time. Yet the goal of archival research is not to help students become novice archivists but to become novice archival researchers and to use archives like citizens, historians, sociologists, and various other disciplines use them. Archivists encounter the tension between spending precious time on teaching what archives are and how they function versus spending that time helping students understand what archival research can accomplish and how students can employ it within their disciplinary context. While archivists - and librarians - can assist and support researchers through reference interviews—it is ultimately the researcher who is the driver of the inquiry. One goal of archival instruction should be to motivate students to pursue their own avenues of inquiry and to do so independently.

Addressing these important concerns, this paper theorizes a pedagogical approach using diplomatics with SDT to foster a learning environment conducive to student motivation, persistence, and academic achievement for novice researchers in an academic archives. We highlight three main themes from diplomatics as guiding this pedagogy: 1. Progressing from the specific to the general; 2. Treating context as a coequal focus on inquiry with content; and 3. Emphasizing relationships found within archival records. The proposed framework provides structure and theoretical grounding for archivists engaged in instruction while also cultivating a learning environment which effectively motivates and inspires students or novice researchers. While this paper will specifically address the proposed framework in the context of academic archivists introducing students to archival research, we believe the framework could also be

applied by special collections librarians, historians, or others introducing novice researchers to primary source research. We use the terms students and novice researchers interchangeably to reflect the educational mission of academic archivists and archives and include students from all walks of life including non-traditional students, members of the public, the academy, and first-time archival researchers. As such, this framework could be applied outside of academic archives or institutions of higher education in places such as community archives, historical societies or virtual learning environments. However, for the purposes of this paper, we chose to introduce this framework in the specific context of the academic archival classroom.

## Literature Review

### Archival instruction

Archival instruction literature has detailed the pedagogical possibilities and benefits to bringing archives into the classroom and bringing the classroom into the archives. Structured experiences in the archives can inspire excitement and confidence in research abilities and encourage return visits to the archives (Daniels and Yakel, 2013; Marino, 2018). Archivists and archival instruction play a pivotal role in teaching critical thinking skills which allow students to engage directly with text and historical context and contribute to the support the growth of independent learners who are able to interpret new and diverse modes of information (Buehl, *et al.*, 2012; Robyns, 2001). The growing acknowledgment of the importance of student engagement with primary sources and archives has mirrored the idea that archivists also serve an important educational role beyond merely facilitating access. Archival reference literature often advocates for archivists to embrace their “public responsibility” to researchers and engage in historical methods instruction within the reading room (Saffady, 1974). With research method instruction decoupled from the formal instruction setting (the classroom), archivists embraced the “archives as laboratory” metaphor. Schmiesing and Hollins (2002) discuss the archives as a laboratory accompanying undergraduate humanities courses where students can practice

archival research skills and Grimm and Vostral (2019) apply the laboratory model in a humanities class comprised of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) students. In STEM disciplines, the lab is a structured learning space where students learn skills in an authentic disciplinary setting with a mentor-instructor nearby (Grimm and Vostral, 2019). One of the most valuable aspects of the laboratory setting, which has not been widely discussed in the archival literature, is that it provides a safe and structured environment for students to experiment, falter, and ultimately learn from their mistaken assumptions, processes, or beliefs.

The benefits of student experience with archives and primary sources are clear but so too are the struggles. For many student researchers, the archives is an unfamiliar territory, even for those who have a firm grasp of other types of information retrieval skills (Buehl, *et al.*, 2012). The rules related to using archival materials, delayed gratification, and unfamiliar search tools and technique may each contribute to a degree of “archival anxiety” for students which can persist even with efforts to create welcoming and friendly research environments (Johnson, 2006). Often, archivists’ efforts to orient students to the unique nature of archives can be both overwhelming and fail to address the real needs of those new to archival research. While studies have reported that archival orientation sessions can improve student confidence in archival reading rooms (Duff and Cherry, 2008), orientation sessions typically only provide broad overviews of archival research methods and briefly introduce related materials or treasures from the collections (Roussain, 2020). In some instances, orientation sessions were either too detailed for students to fully process or misdirected student’s focus to important but not critical issues. Hensley *et al.*’s (2014) research suggests that addressing concepts of Yakel and Torres’ (2003) Archival Intelligence such as archival organization through an archivist-centered orientation session was not an adequate instruction method. A separate post-session survey of students at the Bentley Historical Library indicated that students struggled to see the value or the purpose of the orientation session because they either did not have a research topic in mind, were already familiar with many of the concepts presented, or were focused on

the specific rules of the archives (Zhou, 2008). The archival orientation approach focuses too much on how to navigate the current repository in order to complete the current project at the expense of teaching students how to conduct research in a variety of settings (Yakel, 2004). The extant literature highlights numerous issues with an orientation approach to archival instruction.

## Competency-based Archival Instruction

Archivists have seemingly competing goals when working with student researchers. First, there is the effort to demystify and democratize the archives, to present a welcoming and friendly environment while also introducing and enforcing a set of rules and security protocols that at first introduction seem alarming. Secondly, archivists seek to spark curiosity and interest while also teaching students how to do research. In order to achieve these goals the discipline has, at various points, articulated what it means to be a competent archival researcher.

Yakel and Torres (2003) sought to define what it means to be a competent archival researcher in order to inform a model for archival user education. They identified three forms of knowledge required for use of archival materials: domain knowledge, artifactual literacy, and archival intelligence. For the purposes of this study we will focus on archival intelligence. Archival intelligence refers to understanding of archival theory, practices, and procedures; the ability to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity; and the understanding of the relationship between primary sources and their descriptive surrogates, such as finding aids. Building on this, Carini (2009) proposed moving away from library-based literacy instruction and presented a set of concepts as a guide to archivists creating archival lesson plans. Carini's concepts also stress the importance of critically engaging with primary sources and having a basic understanding of archival processes. Through a series of interviews with history faculty, archivists, and librarians, Weiner *et al.* (2015) developed a list of archival literacy competencies for undergraduate history students. The 51 competencies are arranged by topic and include the ability to define and locate

primary sources, formulate research questions and construct arguments using primary sources, and demonstrate acculturation to the archives.

While the competencies developed by Weiner *et al.* (2015) specifically list *diplomats* as a concept to introduce into archival education, even then it was listed as an “advanced skill” and not required for undergraduate history majors. Diplomats has largely been left out of archival instruction literature, although one could argue that the theory makes appearances through instructional goals such as understanding the form or syntax of a variety of documents, evaluating authenticity of records, or historical contextualization.<sup>1</sup> Diplomats as a learning tool is introduced in Roussain’s (2020) case study in the context of a primary source analysis exercise. There is an opportunity to investigate diplomats from a pedagogical lens in the quest to help novice researchers successfully perform actual archival research.

## Defining Student-Centeredness with Self-Determination Theory

SDT, a psychological theory of motivation supported by decades of research, posits that students who feel connected to others (relatedness), competent in what they have been tasked to do (competence), and volitional in what they are doing (autonomy), will feel more intrinsically motivated (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2017). We define student-centeredness as supportive of students’ basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Richards and Levesque-Bristol, 2014). This is antithetical to a teacher-centered approach which would prioritize the instructional archivists’ perspective over students (De George-Walker and Keefe, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Carini (2009) presents concept 10 as “An understanding of the nature and syntax of a variety of document types and sources including written, printed, visual, and financial.” and Weiner *et al.* (2015) describes competency 18 “Interpret and analyze both print and digital primary sources. Include: description of the features and vulnerabilities of the physical or digital object, means for evaluating authenticity including provenance, methods for historical contextualization, indications of the purpose and intended audience, and observations that may be used to identify bias.”

SDT has been found to be applicable to various domains including “parenting, education,...sustainability, health care, and psychotherapy” focusing on developing certain types of motivation more so than just the amount of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Motivation is viewed on a scale ranging from amotivation to intrinsic motivation for SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Practically speaking, students are unlikely to be completely amotivated (otherwise they would not show up for class) or intrinsically motivated as most students have an extrinsic motivation like earning a degree. SDT posits that certain types of motivation are more self-determined, and hence like intrinsic motivation, than other types of non self-determined motivation. Providing opportunities in classroom instruction to meet students’ basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness yields motivation that is more self-determined, cultivating more positive behaviors and outcomes than less self-determined types of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Students motivated to complete a classroom activity mostly because they are afraid of earning a failing grade yields a lower-quality kind of motivation because it most likely does not satisfy students’ basic psychological needs. Alternatively, an activity providing students structured choice about how to analyze an archival object and to reflect on the value of doing so (utilizing Diplomatic principles followed by a reflective prompt) likely provides more opportunities for students to perceive their psychological needs of autonomy and competence being met yielding more self-determined forms of motivation. Diplomatics is particularly useful in scenarios like this as it provides specific topics and methods to investigate archival materials but is not overly prescriptive such that it encumbers student perceptions of autonomy. How instructional activities are structured and executed will yield either more or less self-determined forms of motivation.

Deci and Ryan (2008) reviewed how SDT research has provided strong evidence over time for a host of benefits to learning environments where students’ basic psychological needs



are met. This includes greater persistence, effort, and achievement in the form of GPA, course grades, and teacher-rated performance (Bailey and Phillips, 2015; Black and Deci 2000; Taylor *et al.* 2014; Vansteenkiste *et al.* 2004). While these needs are interrelated, SDT scholarship has indicated that student perceptions of autonomy are of particular importance (Reeve, 2012). For instance, one study found that environments supportive of an individual's autonomy "will be conducive to the satisfaction of all three needs" (Jang *et al.*, 2009). Bonem *et al.* (2020) argue, after an analysis of 14,000 student surveys, that *what* one does in the classroom is not as important as *how* one does it. Their analysis suggests that students in highly autonomy-supportive learning environments experienced significant increases in satisfaction of students' basic psychological needs, student motivation, course evaluations and academic performance. It is important to note that autonomy does not equate to unbounded choice but instead to structured options. For example, students are more likely to feel choiceful in their learning if they have an option to choose one of three topics for an essay rather than the ability to choose whatever topic they would like (Vansteenkiste and Ryan, 2013).

Additionally, there are validated instruments that measure whether classroom experiences are designed in ways that support student perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These include The Learning Climate questionnaire (Williams, *et al.*, 1996), Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Levesque-Bristol, *et al.*, 2011) and Perceived Knowledge Transfer Scale (Levesque-Bristol, *et al.*, 2022). Such instruments could be administered post-instruction to determine if archival instruction was executed in a student-centered way. These scales have been used previously in library and information science (LIS) research. Flierl *et al.* analyzed a dataset involving 3,152 students with measures of basic psychological needs, self-determined motivation, and information literacy and found evidence of a relationship between students synthesizing information and higher levels of student motivation (2018). Flierl, Maybee, and Bonem's findings from a dataset involving 6,791 students suggest that how students

perceive using information to learn may be related to how motivated they are to learn disciplinary content.

## Diplomatics as Pedagogy

While a considerable amount of recent archival literature has focused on the instructional benefits, metrics, and assessment of using archival materials in the classroom, it is evident that there are still a number of challenges in doing so. Archivists have competing instruction goals ranging from general archival orientation to specific research method skills. While none of the literature introducing skills or competencies for instruction presents their lists as exhaustive, it can be challenging for archivists to determine what are the most important lessons to impart in the time allotted. Coupling the structured approach of diplomatics with aspects of SDT could allow archivists to help students in some of the more challenging aspects of archival research (such as constructing an evidenced-based argument or narrative, accounting for silences or missing perspectives, and formulating the next research question) in the brief time allotted for archival instruction. Diplomatics has many concepts familiar to North American archivists while offering a structured approach that could be applied to support student perceptions of competence and autonomy relating to archival research.

Diplomatics is defined by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) as “the study of the creation, form, and transmission of records, and their relationship to the facts represented in them and to their creator, in order to identify, evaluate, and communicate their nature and authenticity” (SAA Dictionary). Introduced by Benedictine monk Jean Mabillon in his 1681 treatise, *De re diplomatica Libri VI*, diplomatics was designed as an analytical technique to establish the authenticity of medieval charters and diplomas found in archives (MacNeil, 2004). Mabillon’s technique incorporated analysis of external and internal evidence - such as

handwriting, language, media type, and record-keeping practices - to distinguish authentic charters from forgeries (Skemer, 1989).

Since its introduction, diplomatics has evolved into an auxiliary science of history and became an important pedagogical tool in European archival and historical education (Skemer, 1989). While still part of the curriculum of European archivists, North American archival education has mostly viewed diplomatics in its historical application without relevance to modern records or archival practice which has largely focused on managing the bulk of contemporary records (Skemer, 1989). Despite this, European and North American archivists have made the case for applying diplomatic analysis to contemporary records (Carucci, 1987; Storch, 1998). Duranti, an archivist at the University of British Columbia, has been one of the strongest voices in North American archival literature advocating for a revival of what many would consider an old science. In a series of articles published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Duranti (1989a-b, 1990a-b, 1991a-b) examined the principles and concepts of diplomatics and introduced a modernized approach to address the challenges of contemporary bureaucratic records. While not all have embraced Duranti's argument,<sup>2</sup> diplomatics has proven useful in determining the legal status of modern records (Storch, 1998), and in maintaining and demonstrating the authenticity of born-digital records (Maftei and McAndrew, 2000).

MacNeil (2004) and Duranti (1991b) both discuss diplomatics as a method of inquiry. Diplomatics provides a sturdy, yet less explored, theoretical foundation for an archival pedagogy focused on students performing actual archival research and as Duranti (1991b, p. 12) states, diplomatics as a method of inquiry "offers the instruments for gaining...an understanding" of the archives. Contemporary diplomatics is based on a belief in the existence of an empirical reality; that through study and observation, the laws and principles which govern records creation, use,

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<sup>2</sup> Sharon Storch (1998) applied principles of diplomatics to modern documents at MIT Special Collections and University Archives and the University of Massachusetts archives and found that diplomatics often did not reveal new descriptive insights that justified the time spent.

and retention become apparent (MacNeil, 2004 and Duranti, 1991b). Through the awareness of the universal elements of document creation - the administrative or legal context, the act, the persons, procedures, and document form - one can begin a structured analysis where each element “can be used as a key” to other elements and lead to a more cohesive understanding of the whole (MacNeil, 2004, p. 208).

This is an acutely useful framing for archival instruction. Novice archival researchers do not have the same administrative, historical, or legal understanding of records as archivists and even if this information is communicated through tools such as the finding aid, it may not translate to an understanding of that context within the records. Archival instruction should focus on how to build this contextual awareness through the records themselves— a key strategy of diplomatic description. Diplomatics provides a structured progression for knowledge building particularly well-suited to aid the student researcher and therefore contributes positively to students’ perceptions of competence in archival research.

## Three Themes of Diplomatics-Informed Pedagogy

The following will discuss three themes of diplomatics and why they are useful when considering learning outcomes, assessments, and learning activities for archival instruction. The themes identified here do not focus heavily on the analysis part of *diplomatic analysis*, rather they focus on the guiding methodology of diplomatics in a manner that can be applied to instruction. This makes diplomatics an approachable and flexible framework to employ pedagogically and not just a descriptive methodology. The themes also highlight the ways in which this approach provides structured choice for students--an integral aspect to creating a learning environment that is student-centered.

Some of the most useful concepts of diplomatics are its emphasis on structure, pattern, and repeatability. When teaching students how to use and navigate the archives, these themes,

drawn from diplomatics, may help archivists design authentic, student-centered instructional sessions. The guiding methodology of diplomatic analysis includes three essential themes:

- progresses from the specific to the general;
- treats context as a coequal focus of inquiry (with content);
- and emphasizes the various relationships found within archival records.

These themes provide a specific framing to help archivists design their instruction to focus on the tasks and concepts students find most challenging, demonstrate the utility of tools such as finding aids or other reference materials, and set students up for success in future archival research settings.

### Specific to the General

A key principle of diplomatic analysis is its structure. While somewhat rigid, it provides useful scaffolding opportunities for archivists in the classroom. The structure of diplomatic analysis moves from the **specific to the general**, focusing first on a document's form in order to understand the procedures, action, and organizational environment in which the document was created or used (Duranti, 1991a). Diplomatic criticism and description progresses from the *extrinsic elements* which describe the material make up of a document to the *intrinsic elements* which describe the intellectual makeup of a document. Extrinsic elements can be observed largely without reading the text of the document in a process akin to bibliographic description, focusing on the medium, script, and other physical traits of a document. Intrinsic elements represent and describe the internal intellectual structure of a document (Duranti, 1991a). Diplomaticists have asserted these features are present - in one combination or another - in documents from medieval to modern times and that their presence allows archivists to quickly identify the form of a document without close reading of the text (Duranti, 1991a).

The theme of Specific to the General has many of the hallmarks of a document analysis activity where students observe a document's features and qualities, make meaning based on their own understandings, and question how it fits within a larger narrative.<sup>3</sup> The progression from specific to general serves another purpose in the archival classroom. We suggest using this concept to depart from the existing practice of archival instruction in which the initial orientation to the archives includes a buffet of broad concepts such as the types of archival repositories, the collecting focus of the local repository, and an overview of the featured collections. Archivists may also feel compelled to begin archival instruction sessions with an introduction to collection arrangement which would be authentic to how archivists experience the archives, but not how a researcher -- especially a novice researcher -- might. This is not to say these general pieces are not important to archival instruction, they are. In many ways, they are critical lessons to help students succeed in future archival environments but how and when archivists incorporate them into the lesson can have real impact on student motivation and perceptions of basic psychological needs. What we propose here is to rearrange the order of instruction to reflect inquiry driven by student questions.

## Context and Form

A second key feature of diplomatics is the **focus on the context, not content**. Context exists outside of the document but has bearing on the document's creation and interpretation. As Schwartz (1995) notes in their application of diplomatics to photographs, decoupling the context of record creation from the content creates space for new observations on a record's evidential and informational value. Diplomatic description, composed of the extrinsic and intrinsic elements, presents a description of the context of a document's creation (Storch, 1998) and is expressed more fully through the document's form. A broader understanding of

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<sup>3</sup> For example, this document analysis activity from the National Archives and Records Administration <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets>

documentary forms and their structures in turn reveals a document's content. Context can be studied and understood separately from the record's content (Duranti, 1997). But in order to fully understand the content, one must also consider the context.

Context plays a crucial role in the work of an archivist and at times can seamlessly integrate into their work. Students are less rehearsed in the added work of meaning making and context building. A diplomatics-informed pedagogy encourages an archivist to illuminate the contextual elements that comprise a document's form and aid students in constructing their own understanding of the landscape of documentary forms. Just as diplomaticists study specific forms to better understand and extrapolate their purpose (Duranti, 1991b) in order to make more general assumptions, so too must students practice a micro analysis of form and context so that they may begin to form their own concepts of the documentary landscape represented in the archives.

### Emphasize Relationships

Diplomatics understands the documentary world as a system and that within that system are contextual elements - the environment, the action, the agents or persons, and procedures - which inform document creation (Duranti, 1990b). A document's form is the standardized embodiment of the elements which produced it. An archivist's understanding of how a document's form relates to its creator, the action and procedures also allows the archivist to see how the document relates to other documents. Duranti (1989b, p. 15) observes the multilateral relationships appearing within records:

“...a single fact manifests itself in a fragmented documentary form, and each document guides us not only to a small portion of the fact it is about, but, possibly, to a chain of other documents and/or facts.”

Understanding these relationships aids the archivist in appraisal, records management, processing (Duranti, 1991b) and so too could it be employed in an instructional setting. We

propose the final diplomatic theme of **emphasizing relationships** as key to helping students establish a structure within the archives, a roadmap to broader understanding of context, and an aid in determining the next step in a research inquiry. An awareness of the diplomatic contextual elements and the various relationships that connect a document to its juridical context are critical to deeper engagement with the documentary landscape evidenced in an archival collection.

## Enabling Self-determined Learning Through Diplomats

The themes found throughout diplomats - the intrinsic and extrinsic elements, the connection between context and a documents form, and the relationships between form, people, actions, and procedures - all provide structure to the research process, a process which can feel messy compared to students' other research experiences using books, journal articles and other academic resources. Yet it also aims to avoid being overly prescriptive and formulaic—giving space for students to pursue avenues of inquiry that interest them. The goal of incorporating a diplomatic perspective in archival instruction is to illuminate to students this seemingly “hidden” structure of documentary forms, elements, and relationships so that they are able to orient themselves within a particular archival research environment. Understanding this structure will not alleviate all pain points and challenges in archival research but it is likely to contribute to student perceptions of autonomy and competency.

Diplomats as a method of inquiry provides the tools for greater understanding of the whole (Duranti, 1991b) - whether that “whole” is the rest of the archival collection, the documentary context, or a historical narrative surrounding an event or an individual. Presenting contextual elements as building blocks to archival research allows students to find success in the task at hand but also walk away from the archival instruction session or assignment with an ability to locate the “building blocks” in a future research scenario.



The three diplomatic themes presented above inform, influence, and reflect each other, with explanations of one often bleeding into description of the other. When employed by instructional archivists, these concepts can provide students a structured and repeatable approach for analyzing an archival document, navigating an archival collection or archival repository, and constructing an argument based on primary sources. Thus, focusing valuable class time on helping students to learn through practice. Using diplomatics as a basis for archival pedagogy creates an authentic learning atmosphere where students will experience struggle, confusion, and failure under the guidance of their instructors and archivists. These “negative” elements are universal in any research process yet SDT provides concrete pedagogical guidance for how to negotiate them in a student-centered and motivating way by focusing on the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

To implement a diplomatic-informed pedagogy, an archivist could make a number of small but meaningful modifications to existing instructional plans. For example, an archivist might begin instruction with the object (the specific) and use class discussion or guided prompts to pull in reference material such as the finding aid or introduce concepts such as archival arrangement or other repository types (the general). Alternatively, an archivist could ask students to identify individual elements of an item they have familiarity with such as the time period, the materiality, or the tone and use that as a prompt for more general discussions, presenting the contextual elements as structured choices for further exploration (context over content). This allows students to be volitional about what they find interesting while also doing so in a supported and structured environment. Another class activity could divide students into small groups with each given a portion of a collection (or a number of related collections). Each group would be asked to convey to the larger group the events or message revealed in their portion and the class as a whole would slowly piece together the chain of events or the timeline, with the archivist providing assistance. For example, the ensuing discussion may make explicit

the many links between the documents, the individuals who created them, and the actions they symbolize (emphasizing relationships).

Such examples demonstrate ways to build student perceptions of autonomy (by allowing students to investigate documents that interest them within a set of documents) and competence (by starting analysis first with concepts they may already be familiar with like the time period). Assessment of desired student learning outcomes of such work could take place in a variety of modalities including via oral presentations, graphics, or text. While a research paper may be the final method of assessment, the archivist can incorporate assessment events throughout their instruction which will provide immediate feedback to the archivist and validation for students. Assessment of a student's ability to apply the lesson can take place orally where students are prompted through think-pair-share, concept mapping, role-playing, or other active learning activities (Barkley and Major, 2016). Written assessment can evaluate analytic and critical thinking skills through concept mapping exercises, minute papers, or content, form, and function outlines. These assessment activities not only work well with the diplomatic themes presented above but they could also contribute to an autonomy-supportive learning environment.

Archival research is a time-consuming process where practice and time-on-task is critical to future research success and feelings of competence and confidence. The diplomatic themes outlined in this article synergize with common pedagogical practices guided by SDT. Diplomatics gives the instructional archivist a pedagogical foundation, structure, and guiding methodology to approaching novice researchers in the archives and SDT presents how to implement such an approach.

## Limitations

This study is theoretical and diplomatics as a pedagogical foundation has not been tested in the specific archival context presented here, however, those working and teaching with rare books and manuscripts may recognize pedagogical techniques similar to their own instructional practice especially when considering lessons in book history or the materiality of texts. While diplomatics has historically been implemented as a pedagogical tool to educate archivists it does not necessarily mean it will be a successful basis for novice researchers in academic settings. Additionally, SDT employs rigorous research methods and has been researched in LIS (Flierl, *et al.*, 2018 and Flierl *et al.*, 2021) but it has not been used as a basis for a specific pedagogy in the manner we have described in the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education literature. These limitations suggest the need for further research into the viability of such a pedagogy. Lastly, it could be argued that diplomatics alone is a sufficient theoretical basis for the targeted type of pedagogy. While this may be true, SDT is an important modifier for a purely diplomatics-based pedagogy—with such open-ended prompts as “emphasize relationships” it would be easy to label/identify almost any type of archival research exercise as being based in diplomatic principles. Understanding the overlap between SDT and diplomatics narrows the scope of this pedagogy to ultimately focus on the student perspective. The two theories harmonize to become greater than the sum of their parts—with diplomatics describing what aspects of archives are essential for novice researchers to experience and SDT providing necessary guardrails to steer learning outcomes, assessments, and learning activities towards greater student motivation and engagement.

There are also risks to de-emphasizing archival policies and procedures and the unique research nature of archives within archival instruction. The archives is an unfamiliar landscape even to those with other types of research experience. We argue that archival rules are often overemphasized in instruction. This is a notable dimension of archival instruction, as policies

and procedures are posted in various places - online, on registration forms, in reading rooms, and recited by reading room staff. Key to a diplomatics-informed approach is creating an environment where students feel welcome, inspired, and motivated to explore the archives. Encountering rules too early in this process can be demotivating and alienating but with diplomatic approaches the purpose of rules or other idiosyncrasies of the archives can be made clear within the context of learning how to conduct archival research.

## Conclusion

A diplomatics-informed pedagogy offers many further avenues for research across different types of archival materials, levels of experience, types of repositories, and types of library instruction. There are opportunities theoretically as well – specific aspects of diplomatics may be more or less useful with students more experienced with archival research. Finally, such a pedagogy is ripe for creating new and interesting types of learning activities and assessments for novice archives researchers. While we provide a few examples, we believe that there are many more creative instructional avenues to explore at the intersection of diplomatics and SDT. It is worth noting that such a pedagogy is in alignment with contemporary trends in information literacy instruction in its use of rigorous theory and promotion of developing a line of inquiry over finding definitive answers. This is in contrast with the now rescinded ACRL information literacy standards which emphasized discrete and quantifiable skills with binary results—either one met the standard or did not (ACRL, 2000). Contrast this with Informed Learning pedagogy which uses Variation Theory (an educational theory based in phenomenographic methods) to focus on students' ability to be more creative and intentional in how they use information to learn disciplinary content (Maybee, 2019). Lloyd focuses on the sociological and cultural practices of a discipline or profession (2010) while critical theorists like Whitworth (2020) demonstrate the political and ethical dimensions of information use through learning activities involving mapping

one's information landscape in increasingly complex and dynamic ways. A diplomatics-informed pedagogy and recent information literacy developments both emphasize different lenses through which students can experience and use information or data in more educationally purposeful ways.

Having students perform actual archival research in a structured, autonomy-supportive way is a viable pedagogical strategy to create successful research experiences. Rather than focus on enabling students to learn about archives – it may be more motivating and student-centered to give students authentic research experiences to justify learning about how finding aids work or why materials are organized in certain ways.

What's more, this pedagogical approach gives a reproducible structure to the instructional archivist, helping to organize classroom learning outcomes, assessments, and activities in alignment with evidence-based research and well-established archival theory. A diplomatics-informed pedagogy is a new, theoretically viable approach to archival instruction for novice researchers.

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