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## Community Archives Pedagogies in Poland and the US – an attempt at a comparative study\*\*

### Abstract:

The growing number of community archives, as well as the increasing scholarship on them, can be observed not only in the Anglophone countries that are most represented in the literature (especially the United Kingdom and the United States), but also in Poland. Community archives are also becoming a more recognizable ingredient of archival education. The article looks at the presence of community archives in university programs in the United States of America and Poland through six interviews conducted with archival educators from both locations teaching courses on community archives. The interviews covered among other course content and student assessment methods; challenges of teaching community archives; broader learning outcomes associated with these courses; advice for future educators. The article also tackles local contexts of community archives pedagogies in the US and Poland.

**Keywords:** archival education, archival pedagogies, community archives, higher education

### Introduction

The growing number of community archives, as well as the increasing scholarship on them, can be observed not only in the Anglophone countries that are most represented in the literature (especially the United Kingdom and the United States; Welland & Cossham, 2019; Poole, 2020), but also in Poland (Wiśniewska-Drewniak, 2019). This growth necessitates answer to the questions for archival educators about how students are prepared to work for or with community archives and how changes in archival theory and practice brought about by community archives thinking is reflected in curricula. This article addresses such questions by reporting on a comparative study between community archives education in the US and Poland.

The purpose of this article is to attempt to look at the presence of community archives in university programs in the United States of America and Poland, specifically through interviews conducted with archival educators from both locations who are currently teaching,

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or have taught in the recent past, courses entirely or largely about community archives. The study was conducted during a three-month Research Scholarship at the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies at Queens College, City University of New York as part of a research visit sponsored by the Kosciuszko Foundation.

The scope of the study included the following: basic data on the courses taught by the research participants; course content and student assessment methods; and challenges of teaching community archives (including those related to defining community archives or potential controversies). Educators were also asked about the broader learning outcomes associated with these courses (i.e., less obvious learning outcomes that go beyond the group of basic skills and knowledge related to community archives), as well as their advice for those who would like to design a university course on community archives in the future.

The very understanding of the term 'community archives' and even the term itself in the US and Poland is different. However, since it is understood in different ways in this article due to the different uses of the term by the interviewees, it will not be defined and described here, except for the general remark that we are talking about grassroots archives that are at least to some extent independent.

### **Local contexts of Community Archives Pedagogies**

Although there is no generally accepted definition of the term Community Archives Pedagogies, in this article I use it as a synonym for archival education (primarily at the higher education level) concerning community archives. Community Archives Pedagogies will thus consist primarily of university/college courses, but also of other forms of education found in curricula, such as internships or apprenticeships, to help students gain knowledge of what community archives are and how they function and/or how to create and work in or with them. It should be noted that Poland and the US differ significantly in the contexts in which Community Archives Pedagogies are implemented.

First, the systems of higher education in these countries are organized very differently.

In Poland, which is a member of the European Union, the higher education system is highly standardized, subject to European regulations, primarily the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area created as a result (The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area, n.d.). It is to these international arrangements that the national regulations governing higher education in Poland (the Law on Higher Education and the regulations of the Minister of Science and Higher Education) are subordinated, which quite strictly regulate the way in which university education is organized from the formal side, although they leave substantive decisions and decisions on the content of study programs to higher education institutions. At the same time, education at public universities is free in Poland.

In the US, on the other hand, the higher education system is decentralized, dependent on state laws, as well as on regulations implemented by particular universities, which can differ significantly from each other, which is why they are not cited here in detail. In addition, college tuition fees are charged to students: these fees vary greatly according to whether the university is public or private, its reputation and location, but are generally expensive enough that many students need to take loans, which can represent a significant financial burden for many students throughout their lives.

The nature of university education in archival studies is also very different. In the U.S., archives programs (offered by 65 universities) are available only at the graduate level and are overwhelmingly (74% in 2022) placed within information studies, much less so within history (21.5%), with only two independent master's programs in archival studies (master of archival studies; 3% of all programs) and one program within liberal studies (1.5%) (Zhang & Poole, 2022).

In Poland, as in many European countries, archival studies is taught as part of history. It has been taught as a specialization in history programs since the 1950s, and to this day many universities offer such a model of archival studies education. In 2006, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń was the first to create an independent program in archival studies and records management - at first at the undergraduate (bachelor's) level, and in 2009 also at the graduate (master's) level. Since then, the number of independent programs in archival studies and records management in Poland has increased, albeit under different names; there are now five programs at five different universities. Several universities also offer one-year post-graduate programs.

An important context for the design of study programs is the mechanisms that validate their quality. In the United States, the main one is certification by the American Library Association (ALA). As of June 2021, 49 of the 65 programs were ALA-accredited (Zhang & Poole, 2022). The Society of American Archivists' Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies (GPAS), with its latest revision from 2023, is also supposed to be a certain standardization tool for American archival studies programs (Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies, 2023). Yet, GPAS usefulness has been debated (Zhang & Poole, 2022, pp. 660-665). As it is not used to accredit programs, where it is used, it is used as guidance. In Poland, on the other hand, there is no professional accreditation for archival studies programs, but a general accreditation process, carried out by the Polish Accreditation Commission. Although this process is obligatory for all study programs at all public universities, it is always tailored to a specific discipline by, among other things, hiring appropriate experts. Also the Society of Polish Archivists has attempted to reflect on the shape of university training of archivists in Poland. This happened simultaneously with the creation of the first independent program in Toruń (2006) and shortly thereafter resulted in the creation

of “The Model of Professional Competencies of an Archivist and Records Manager” adopted by the society in 2010. The model includes a list of minimum competencies that a graduate should have, but it is flexible and leaves the way of obtaining learning outcomes to be determined by particular universities (“Model kompetencji zawodowych,” 2010). To what extent this model is currently used by universities in Poland requires further analysis.

It is also worth noting that the different disciplinary positioning of archival studies education – in the US to information studies, in Poland to history – is also related to the different shape of archival research, primarily due to different research paradigms and methodologies. This is, of course, a much broader issue and only hinted at here, but in general it can be noted that researchers in the US are largely focused on studying the contemporaneity of archival institutions and solving current problems, responding to emerging social needs, using a variety of methods to study the present. In contrast, researchers in the field of archival studies in Poland are primarily historians by training, using primarily historical methods to study the past (including the history of archival institutions, the history of archival resources and fonds/collections, the history of archival theory and practice) or the historical/diplomatic analysis of archival materials. Contemporary issues and problems are represented to a much lesser extent. However, it is worth realizing that the first Polish master's students in archival studies left university walls in 2011. Moreover, it is not possible to earn a doctorate in archival studies in Poland, but only in history with a specialization in archival studies. So doctoral education can hardly address this methodology gap.

Finally, the phenomenon of community archives also has a significantly different social and historical context in the two countries. In the US, in particular, it is related to the great diversity of society (in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, among other things), as well as to issues of relations with Indigenous People and marginalized communities. Poland is a very homogeneous country in this regard, with a small number of ethnic, national, racial and religious minorities, so while these topics are present in community archives, they certainly do not dominate, and the most common type of community archives is the local one. Instead, many of the grassroots archives describe the personal experiences of ordinary people during World War II or during the totalitarian communist rule of 1944/45-1990.

In Poland, a very important element of the community archives context in recent years has been advocacy for grassroots archives - first (from 2012-2020) organized by Poland's largest community archive, the KARTA Center in Warsaw; then (from 2020) through the Center for Community Archives (CCA) – formally co-founded by KARTA and the Ministry of Culture, and funded by the latter but with core staff based on community archivists from KARTA. The CCA works to assist community archivists, providing tools and educational content useful in day-to-day work, helps in networking, as well as conducts and supports studies of community archives in Poland and promotes grassroots archiving (Zarządzenie Ministra Kultury i

Dziedzictwa Narodowego, 2020). At the same time, as also addressed in this article, the Center is an important partner for university archival educators.

In the United States, there is no single such dominant advocacy organization working for community archives, although there are various supportive and networking initiatives, like Community Archives Lab (UCLA-based initiative fostering research on community-based archives and funding internships in community-based archives) and Community Archiving Happy Hour (a virtual social and resource sharing space regarding inclusive archiving projects). In the US, on the other hand, the issue of collaboration and partnerships between communities and public archives and libraries (and thus information professionals) is very important, especially in the context of power dynamics and ethics in such relationships. This issue is practically nonexistent in archival research and pedagogies in Poland.

A comparative study in such different historical, social and cultural contexts can allow for interesting conclusions. The following analysis is very preliminary and certainly does not fully answer the question of what are the similarities and differences in teaching about community archives at Polish and American universities. However, it is an attempt to initiate thinking about how we teach about community archives today, including in the context of how we prepare future information professionals and scholars, and with what types of skills and what kind of knowledge will they be equipped.

The article is thus intended to stimulate discussion of Community Archives Pedagogies (also in different social and historical contexts) and to contribute to the internationalization and pluralization of scholarship on community archives, which is currently mostly concentrated on Anglophone countries. I trust that, to some extent, it can also provide inspiration or assistance to those who either already teach about community archives or will design such courses in the future. In the future, the goal may be to share experiences among teachers (on methods, tools, course scope, ways of evaluation, resolving difficulties, managing partnerships with community archives and advocacy initiatives), and among those responsible for preparing degree programs or with representatives of program advisory bodies (SAA, SPA) or certification bodies (ALA).

### **Literature review**

In the case of the United States, numerous articles have been published in recent years relating to archival education especially in the context of such pressing issues as, for example, the role of information professionals in contemporary American society, work ethics, equal partnerships with communities, and social justice. In her 2011 article, Gilliland considers how archival neutrality and issues of social justice might arise in the context of archival education by referring, among other things, to the scope of the "Community-based Archiving" course she was teaching at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) at the time and how it was

implemented (including the collaboration with archives) (Gilliland, 2011). In the same year, Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (as part of the Archival Education and Research Institute) considered ways to pluralize the archival universe by meeting the needs of the community, but also reflected on the possible challenges of this collaboration in archival education ("Educating for the Archival Multiverse," 2011, p. 79). In 2012, Lau et al. in their UCLA-focused study described the challenges and opportunities presented by archival pedagogy focused on working closely with community organizations (Lau et al., 2012). In 2018, Caswell described the idea of Critical Archival Pedagogy. Although Caswell's article is not focused on teaching about community archives, "critical archival studies" and community archives work often encounter similar questions of power, such that critical pedagogy is germane to community archives education (Caswell, 2018). In addition, recent years have also seen analyses of the state of archival education in the US: the topic of the presence of community archives in curricula, if it appears in them, is only on the periphery (Benoit & Force, 2019; Poole & Todd-Diaz, 2022; Zhang & Poole, 2022).

As for recent Polish research on archival pedagogies, the last 20 years have brought a number of articles and even monographs and multi-author books. This has been particularly associated with the discussion of the introduction of independent programs in archival studies in Poland. These items focus, among other things, on the content of study programs and the profile of alumni (Strykowski, 2009; Skupieński, 2009; Robótka, 2009), textbooks for teaching archival studies (Wnuk, 2012), as well as the history of archival education in Poland and an analysis of current offers at various universities (Kwiatkowska, 2020).

On the topic of the presence of community archives in university education in Poland, there are two detailed studies by Tomasz Czarnota from 2012 and 2017, based on an analysis of study programs and syllabi, indicating that the topic, though still not very popular, began to appear more frequently in the various courses offered at universities in Poland with the passage of time between these studies (Czarnota, 2012 & 2017). However, during this period, there were no university courses concentrated wholly or mostly on community archives – the first were offered in the academic year 2019/20. Now there are at least six such courses, offered by six different universities and another is planned from 2024/25, so Czarnota's analyses certainly need to be updated.

Apart from one very recent article describing in detail the process of teaching community archiving at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (with description of e.g. the course objectives and content, Kuecker et al., 2024), we lack studies using empirical methods to learn about the presence of community archives in university education. This article, although it contains only a small sample of the phenomenon, tries to address this gap.



## Methodology and limitations

This research is a qualitative study based on two primary methods of gathering information: through desk research (scholarly literature, study programs, university websites, syllabi - publicly available or provided by study participants) and through interviews with archival educators.

People who teach, or have taught in the recent past, university courses largely or entirely devoted to community archives were invited to participate in the study. In the case of Poland, the initial contact was directed to all five people I knew (personally or through web-based searches) were teaching community archives (there was no additional criterion beyond agreeing to participate in the study). Three out of the five contacted educators agreed to be interviewed. In the case of the U.S., I tried to represent the geographic diversity of the universities and balance the number of participants with Polish participants. It should be emphasized that such a small group of survey participants is in no way representative of the population of archival educators in the US/Poland. It is also worth noting that there are no BIPOC individuals among the survey participants, which is not unusual for Poland (an almost entirely white country)<sup>1</sup>, but is unrepresentative of the US population, although it may to some extent reflect the fact that in this country LIS professionals, as well as archival and IS educators are disproportionately white (Caswell, 2017, p. 223).

Interviews with six community archives educators (three from Poland and three from the US) were semi-structured, the scenario comprised of 16 questions. Yet, the scenario was not followed to the letter, allowing for example a different order of questions or skipping a question if it was already answered by the interviewee before.

The full interview scenario was constructed as follows:

1. Do you agree to take part in the research?
2. Do you agree to be recorded?
3. Do you want to be anonymized or you want to be recognizable? (I will ask again at the end)
4. What courses that you teach have a component about community archives?

About the one course that is most concerned with community archives:

5. What is the duration of the course (hours/credits)?

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<sup>1</sup> Here a piece of official statistical data on racial characteristic of the Polish society should be quoted but, interestingly, Poland is so predominantly white the question of race was not present in the previous official census in 2021, even if questions about ethnicity, language, nationality/citizenship, and faith were present (Lista pytań w NSP 2021, 2021).

6. How long have you been teaching this course?
7. What groups of students take part in this course (is it obligatory or elective? Which levels and which programs?)
8. What is the content of the course?
9. How is it graded?
10. What were the challenges in teaching this course?
11. Did you struggle with defining community archives for the purposes of the course?
12. Do you think that the topic of community archives might be controversial and may cause some frictions in the classroom?
13. What students learn at this course (apart from information about community archives)? Does it somehow affect their attitudes or lives?
14. What would be your advise to a person who will be designing a university course on community archives?
15. Would like to add something? Maybe I didn't ask about something you think is important here?
16. Do you still want to be anonymized? / Do you still want to be recognizable?

The main part of the interview included questions focused on general information about the community archives course (question 5-7), course content (question 8), how students were assessed (question 9), challenges in teaching this course (question 10), defining community archives for the course (question 11), potential controversies (question 12), learning outcomes of the course (question 13), and advice for future archival educators (question 14). The scenario also included questions about the character of interviewee's participation in the study (consent to participation and recording, anonymity; questions 1-3 and 16) and an additional question to supplement the interview with information outside of the scenario (question 15).

The interviews were partly conducted in person or online, and ranged in length from 12 to 42 minutes. They were, with the consent of the participants, recorded in audio format and transcribed for further analysis, which for the entire corpus of data (interviews and desk research sources) was assisted by qualitative data analysis software. The analysis consisted primarily of data reduction, completion and comparison with other sources, coding according to an *a priori* code list (corresponding to the interview scenario), supplementing the code list with emerging themes, and then comparing the coded excerpts between interviewees to note similarities and differences.

The study is preliminary and has a number of limitations. The first is the relatively small number of cases (courses) studied, coming from two countries only. The selection of just the



US and Poland was related to the author's language skills and the opportunities presented by the funding received. In addition, only courses wholly or mostly on community archives were included in the analysis. Outside the scope of the article, therefore, were three important scopes of the presence of community archives in university teaching: courses in which the topic of community archives is present but not predominant; student internships and practicum in community archives sites; and the presence of community archives topics in graduate theses. These groups of study limitations simultaneously point to directions for future research, addressed in the final section.

## **Findings**

Results are presented in two parts. First, all participants in the study (six archival educators - three from Poland, three from the US) and the courses they teach are described. This description includes the following components: the name of the interviewee (none of the participants chose to be anonymized); the university at which the interviewee teaches the subject about community archives; general information about the course (name, length and credits, students of which programs attend the course); course content, including collaborations with outside partners (guest speakers, site visits, student projects/service learning); grading and assessment methods; broader learning outcomes perceived by educators as part of the course.

The second part discusses the following topics for all interviewees: problems with defining the term 'community archives' for teaching purposes; controversies around the subject of community archives; partnerships and collaborations during classes; challenges in teaching community archives; pieces of advice from the interviewees to archival educator who would like to design a university course in community archives.

## **Archival educators and their courses on community archives**

*Hubert Mazur, University of the National Education Commission (Kraków, Poland)*

Hubert has been teaching the course "Documentary Culture" since its introduction to the program of Archival Studies, Records Management and Information Brokering, that is since the academic year 2017/18. This is a compulsory course for all students in the program and it takes 15 teaching hours (1 ECTS)<sup>2</sup>. At the beginning, this course was offered in the first year of the master's program, and now it is in the last semester of the undergraduate (bachelor's) program.

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<sup>2</sup> ECTS – the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. It is a tool of the European Higher Education Area and a part of the Bologna Process. The system, among other things, allows European students to move between countries and have their qualifications recognized. ECTS credits denote learning based on certain learning outcomes and associated workload. One ECTS credit equals 25-30 hours student workload.

Initially, Hubert pursued topics literally related to documentary culture but after some time he related the terms 'documentary culture' and 'documentary activity',<sup>3</sup> after which he concluded that “community archives, or various documentary centers in general, can be considered the highest manifestation of documentary activity” (H. Mazur, interview, April 16, 2024). That resulted in concentrating the course mainly on community archives.

Hubert places great importance on students' understanding of the phenomenon of community archives and its contexts in Poland (the Polish system of heritage institutions and its gaps; changes in historiography and changes in interests of archival researchers and users; the recent development of community archives in Poland). The course also introduces students to the multitude of definitions of the term ‘community archive’ and how they have changed over time. Hubert does not aim to produce a single definition, but to make students aware of the terminological diversity, with an emphasis on understanding the nature of community archives. Accordingly, part of the course is devoted to discussing the characteristics of community archives, e.g. topics of collections, their accessibility and diversity.

During last year's class, the group visited the Włodków Foundation's community archives and the Manga Museum of Japanese Art and Technology (focusing especially on the personal archive of Andrzej Wajda). Students in the classes are also visited by employees of the Center for Community Archives.<sup>4</sup> In previous years, they spoke to students about the Center's activities. This year, one of employees is scheduled to teach a session on oral history.

Initially, students passed the course through a written test, but Hubert over time decided that this was not a method well suited to the nature of the course. More recently, students have been assessed based on essays on their own documentary culture.

The broader learning outcomes offered in this course, according to Hubert, are for students to learn about the value of personal and family archives (extending respect for archival heritage beyond classical public archives); to go beyond the standard framework of classical archival science, introducing students to new trends in the discipline; showcasing community archives as a potential topic for graduate dissertations; and introducing students to issues of ethics and sensitivity in archival practice (H. Mazur, interview, April 16, 2024).

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<sup>3</sup> The term “documentary activity” (“działalność dokumentacyjna”) in the Polish archival tradition refers primarily to the activities of public archives related to the replenishment of archival resources through the collection of sources beyond the materials that are transferred to the archives “automatically” in accordance with the law. Thus, it is especially related to the active acquisition or development of sources in the framework of, for example, collecting projects. It is worth adding that this is an activity undertaken by Polish state archives sporadically (Smoczyński, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Center for Community Archives is a cultural institution, established in 2020 by the KARTA Center Foundation (a community archive) and the Ministry of Culture; its goals include supporting community archives, doing and supporting research, advocacy activities and promoting grassroots archival activities; <https://cas.org.pl/centre-of-community-archives/>.

*Adriana Kapala, University of Warsaw (Warsaw, Poland)*

Adriana (staff member at the Center for Community Archives), along with Dominik Czapigo, were asked to teach a course in 2022/23 (as adjunct faculty) as a replacement for an absent oral history specialist. They then submitted a course called "Oral History and Community Archives" (so they added a section on community archives). It was an elective, chosen by history students from various specializations, from undergraduate and graduate programs, and even one person from a doctoral program. In 2023/24, educators changed the name of the course to "Community/Social Functions of Archives."<sup>5</sup> It was taught as an elective course, as part of the history popularization specialization on the History program. The two courses differed slightly in content.

The course "Oral History and Community Archives" (30h, 4 ECTS) included such topics as outreach activities of community archives, engaging with local communities, the landscape of oral history archives in Poland, oral history in community archives, comparison of the activities of community archives with public archives, characteristics of community archives, the Open System for Archiving<sup>6</sup> and the Community Collections portal<sup>7</sup>, the activities of the KARTA Center<sup>8</sup>, details about the process of recording and archiving oral history.

The group made two visits in oral history archives – to the History Meeting House (Dom Spotkań z Historią, an institution co-run by the city of Warsaw and the KARTA Center Foundation) and to the Museum of the History of Polish Jews Polin.

For course credit, students designed a hypothetical oral history project and described it according to a pre-prepared questionnaire, including potential interviewees, how to contact them, and what happens to the recordings.

The course "Community/Social Functions of Archives" (30h, 2 ECTS) provided information on the landscape of archives in Poland and the place of community archives in it, with a focus on the activities of community archives in the public space and how they use the archival materials they collect.

The group visited the National Digital Archive, the KARTA Center Foundation and the Archeology of Photography Foundation (both are community archives in Warsaw), and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews Polin.

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<sup>5</sup> In original: *Spoleczne funkcje archiwów*.

<sup>6</sup> In original: *OSA - Otwarty System Archiwizacji*; a digital system for archival description, offered by the Center for Community archives, designed specifically for Polish community archivists; <https://cas.org.pl/otwarty-system-archiwizacji/>.

<sup>7</sup> In original: *portal Zbiory Społeczne*; a web portal where community archives using OSA can present their archival description and digital/digitized materials online; <https://zbioryspoleczne.pl/>.

<sup>8</sup> At the time, the course's co-teacher, Dominik Czapigo, was employed by the KARTA Center Foundation - Poland's largest independent archive, specifically dedicated to documenting personal experiences of Poles confronted with the totalitarianisms of the 20th century (more about KARTA: Gluza, 2012).

As part of the credit, students prepared essays on the social functions of the selected archives, along with conclusions and recommendations. Although the assignment did not require it, most of the work was on community archives.

In both of these courses, Adriana sees the following broader learning outcomes: introducing students to a variety of catalogues, databases and digital repositories (including those provided by archives) and searching them - something that students were not very familiar with; making students aware of historiography's turn toward individual and grassroots history; during the site visits: observing what an archive looks like from the inside (they may not have this opportunity in other courses in history program) (A. Kapała, interview, April 4, 2024).

*Arkadiusz Więch, Jagiellonian University (Kraków, Poland)*

The course "Community Archivistics" was taught at the Jagiellonian University for the first time in 2023/24. The course is placed in the master's History program, in the specialization in Records Management - Archivistics. It is a compulsory course, lasting 30h (4 ECTS). Previously, Arkadiusz pursued the subject of oral history as part of the course "Workshop of the historian-archivist".

The course had the following topics: the history of community archives and their origins (in Poland as well as Western Europe and the USA), the definition of community archives, the nature of collections, activities of community archives, the practical side of setting up a community archive - all this especially in the context of local community archives. Students in the course also used the Center for Community Archives' database of community archives (<https://cas.org.pl/baza-archiwow/>), looking to see if the archives in question still exist and what activities they undertake. The second component of the course, besides community archives, was oral history - the principles of interviewing, transcription, the practical and formal side of the process.

For credit, students independently experienced the process of recording oral history accounts - reaching out to one person, interviewing them, transcribing the interview, ideally - submitting it to a local community archive (two students managed to do this final step).

Meetings with community archivists were not possible this year, but Arkadiusz plans to include them in the course next year. He also plans to perhaps establish a deeper collaboration with a local community archive in Kraków, whose materials students will describe using the Open System for Archiving (a free and open software for archival description designed for community archivists and operated by the Center for Community Archives).

The broader learning outcomes from the course, according to Arkadiusz, are interpersonal skills and sensitivity development related to recording oral history, important especially for students with difficulties in social interactions (A. Więch, interview, May 16, 2024).

*Michelle Caswell, University of California Los Angeles (Los Angeles, California, USA)*

The course Michelle has been teaching for about 9 years is called “Community-based archives.” It is a standard length Master of Library and Information Studies course on graduate level (4 units, three and a half hours per week through one ten-week quarter). It is an elective course, mostly attended by MLIS students but also students of, for example, public health, Chicana studies, African American studies, Asian American studies, world arts and cultures, also by information studies PhD students.

The content of this course is divided into two main parts: theoretical/conceptual and practical. As for the first part, the class look at concepts related to community-based archives (definitional issues, issues of identity, how community-based archives challenge dominant Western archival theory). The students also go on field trips to local community archive sites. In the second half of the class students discuss questions on the relationship between community-based archives and universities/dominant institutions, as well as practical aspects of running community-based archives based on Michelle’s experience as the co-founder of the South Asian American Digital Archive (e.g. decision making, collection development policy, fundraising and sustainability issues).

For credit, students have a choice of final paper or project (almost all choose the latter). Students are paired with community archives based on their already existing relationships or through the field trips or Michelle’s relationships. They are supposed to work at those sites for 20 hours and meet the need of a community archive and then to write a brief reflection paper on that experience. Students are also expected to prepare a midterm reflection paper that has to engage with three of the previous readings. It can be students’ critical reflection of the field trips, or it can be based on students’ own personal experience with community and community archives or can talk about one object from the Fowler Museum (an anthropology museum on UCLA campus) in the context of themes from community archives.

The broader learning outcomes that Michelle sees in this course are teaching students a sense of humility in approaching community archives (that community practices are as valid as the dominant Western tradition) and that students learn how hard it is to sustain a community archive – so they learn fundraising skills but also to use their skills (like description, digitization, reference services) in low resourced environments (M. Caswell, interview, May 6, 2024).

*Maggie Schreiner, New York University (New York City, New York, USA)*

Maggie has been teaching the “Community Archives” course since 2019. It is an elective course, offered at the MA and PhD level every two years as part of the history program; it counts towards either a public history concentration or an archives concentration. In recent years, the group of students taking the course became more diverse, coming also from

different programs and even from different universities (as part of the consortium that NYU is a member).

The content of the course is divided into halves: the first is more theoretical and based on the literature; the second is practical - working with a local community archives and includes two components - the archival component and a public facing component. Each time Maggie chooses a different partner to collaborate with. So far she has worked with three different organizations but is considering looping back around and engaging again with previous partners.

The manner of grading students during the course is related to the partner chosen in a given year and the conversations held in advance about the needs and expectations and possibilities of the archive. Typically, students are given two smaller assignments - one more theoretical and focused on scholarship, and the other focused on a specific community archive. Previous assignments have included, for example, cataloguing materials from the archive; writing a blog post contextualizing one object from the archive chosen by the student; writing one profile of a community archive; reviewing a tool used by a community archive; writing a profile a community archive information project. The final nature of the project also depends on the needs of the students and the organization, and can be more theoretical (e.g., a research paper or the preparation of a white paper for the archive) or more practice-oriented (e.g., the preparation of an online exhibition or a contribution to a digital archive).

Asked about the broader learning outcomes, Maggie says that she often thinks about this course as actually a course in archival ethics, which foregrounds considerations of power differentials in archival work. Maggie has heard that her students have applied ideas from the course to non-archival aspects of their lives. So as a wrap-up exercise Maggie and her students sent themselves an email reflecting on what they want to carry forward from the class. They use a website "Future Me" which sends the email one year after it is written (M. Schreiner, interview, May 13, 2024).

*Christine D'Arpa, Wayne State University (Detroit, Michigan, USA)*

The course "Community Archives" has been taught at the Wayne State University once before, in 2022. It is a standard duration course (3 hours/credits) for master's programs and it is offered as an elective, available based on interest (infrequently). Students who took this course were primarily LIS students (not necessary archive students), with representation also from history, public history, anthropology, and English studies. Like the whole program which this course is a part of, it is offered in an asynchronous online manner.

Christine teaches the course as an online seminar based on readings and students discussions and interaction in an online forum around the assigned scholarly articles or popular media entries. The course revolves around the following topics: community (understanding and



perception of one's community and other communities); juxtaposing traditional archival theory with emerging theories around community archives; community activism in the US; the politics of memory; sustainability; partnerships; arrangement and description challenges in community archives. Students also do a short online-based research on community archives in their localities and discuss it in the forum. The course also includes guest lectures from community archives practitioners – pre-recorded and shared or in live time.

Students are assessed based on their online forum entries and discussions, primarily their level of engagement, their ability to demonstrate understanding of assigned readings, and their critical skills. The final project type is tailored to students needs and interests. Students identify their research projects and format and submit their proposal, after which Christine meets with them to discuss, for example, if the proposal is doable in the short time for the course. The project is usually a research paper but all format types are required to include a literature review to demonstrate engagement with the scholarship.

In terms of the broader learning outcomes of this course, Christina points to enhancing students' critical thinking skills about scholarship and traditional heritage institutions. Also important is a more nuanced understanding of community and challenging their assumptions about the role of information professionals in community work - allowing more introspection and more self-awareness. According to Christine, the course has an emphasis on critical listening skills and should leave students aware that their professional knowledge is not an absolute and it might not always be relevant, also stressing the importance of open conversations with community members who already do community work (C. D'Arpa, interview, May 22, 2024).

### **Issues related to teaching about community archives**

#### *Definitions*

I will not here analyze in detail the understanding and definitions of community archives used by the interviewees (in fact, data on this topic was not collected) and how this affected the scope of the courses. Here, I have only analyzed the educators' opinions on whether defining community archives in the courses was a challenge for them.

Contrary to the author's prediction, educators did not express the opinion that defining community archives for archival education was a major problem. Each of the interviewees discusses the issue in class with students, and each notes the multiplicity of definitions and their variability. At the same time, the strategies used by educators towards defining community archives were different.

Hubert even uses this variability of definitions (without finally arriving at one "best" definition) to make students aware of how archival theory, including archival terminology, is shaped in a discursive way:

“[...] this is often a problem with students, even at this stage, that they still expect ready-made solutions, a bit like in school. I like topics where there is a multiplicity of definitions, and I like to show them that this is what scholarship is about, that people should argue and discuss, not just nod their heads. [...] I absolutely wasn't going in such a way as to acknowledge that any definition [...] is better or worse. I just wanted to show that they are different and that it is something variable” (H. Mazur, interview, April 16, 2024).

During the class, Adriana used the definition proposed by the Center for Community Archives, a cultural institution working towards Polish community archives, where she works. Maggie took a very broad approach to defining community archives and, as a result, to the selected community partners for the practical classes. Arkadiusz used the simplest possible definition and broad understanding of community archives, also including the documentation activities of cultural institutions. Christine also saw no problems in defining community archives for the purposes of the class, although she is aware of its variations and relations between the questions of community, memory, and power and hopes that students will use the work they do throughout the course in ways that result in a common set of characteristics of community archives. Michelle, on the other hand, draws attention in class to the importance of defining community archives and the distinction between different types of activities that can fit within the broad spectrum of the term 'community archive':

“So I show them the website of the Beverly Hills Historical Society, which is a very fancy neighborhood. And I say ‘is this a community archive?.’ And the answer is ‘yes’. It's not a minoritized identity-based community archive, but it is a community archive. So we really get at the heart of that distinction and I tell them about why it's so important to be clear about that definition” (M. Caswell, interview, May 6, 2024).

### *Controversies*

The educators were also asked whether or not they thought the topic of community archives might cause any controversy or friction in the classroom. None of the participants answered in the affirmative.

The idea of community archives itself does not seem controversial to the students in any way, although Arkadiusz recalls that when he tackled the topic with students in other classes taught 6-7 years ago, they had some objections: “Initially, on the part of the students themselves, I had the impression that there was some distrust, that this was not really archival science” (A. Więch, interview, May 16, 2024).

Michelle points out that many students are politically engaged so the idea of engaged archives taps into their worldview:

“There's always frictions between the students in the classroom, but I don't think that that topic is any more controversial than any other topic. I think many of our students want to do

community based work and are very politically active and motivated and don't see community based archives as something outside the scope of what they're here to do, they really value it" (M. Caswell, interview, May 6, 2024).

Maggie believes that the topic is not controversial, and students "embraced it arms open" (M. Schreiner, interview, May 13, 2024). Since I knew that one of Maggie's partners in the class was an LGBTQ+ organization I asked her directly about this – whether this was the cause of friction in the class. She reported that it was not which is not surprising in New York, a generally liberal city. But Maggie also pointed out that before contacting a partner she prepared students for it - first they read literature about an issue or community (here: LGBTQ+ communities/rights movements), and then about that community in an archival context (here: LGBTQ+ archives). Maggie says: "So I do kind of set them up" (M. Schreiner, interview, May 13, 2024).

Hubert does not think it is a controversial topic for students either, although he notes that "maybe it would be different if I talked to some long-time employees of the state archives, then maybe they have different perspectives; I heard a couple of times somewhere that it's such a strange creation [community archives]" (H. Mazur, interview, April 16, 2024). At the same time, Hubert encountered one student's disapproval of the LGBTQ+ focus of archives: "After all, we also have minority-based community archives. [...] Once a student, a mature person [...] firmly in her 40s, responding from the topic of community archives, laughed at the fact that lesbians have community archives. So it seems to me that it's not so much the topic of community archives [that is controversial], or rather just such immaturity, lack of acceptance, understanding. Probably if I had a class with anti-Semites, they would probably laugh at some archives centered around Jewish themes" (H. Mazur, interview, April 16, 2024).

Adriana, on the other hand, had no such experience, and when informed her students of the existence of the Lambda Archive in Warsaw and the queer museum under construction, the students expressed great interest.

### *Partnerships and collaborations*

One very interesting issue is the partnerships and collaborations that teachers engage in as part of a course on community archives. With that said, the nature and role of these partnerships are variable - Christine collaborates with community archives only as part of virtual guest lectures that archivists give to her class, due to the nature of her course, which is entirely online and asynchronous. Adriana and Hubert collaborate with community archives primarily by visiting them with students. Arkadiusz has not cooperated with community archives so far as part of his community archives course, although he planned to initiate such cooperation, but this academic year it did not come to fruition. What is more, students expressed in post-class surveys that they expected this from the class. In the future, Arkadiusz

perhaps plans to build a more permanent partnership with one of community archives in Kraków and, together with students, use the Open System for Archiving to co-describe materials from that archive.

Maggie for her classes enters into, as she calls them, “in depth partnerships,” adding that “It's probably not for everyone, but I do really love it” (M. Schreiner, interview, May 13, 2024). Because of the students' commitment to the archives and negotiating the nature of the partnership before classes begin, both Maggie and the archivists spend a lot of time and energy managing the relationship. Maggie forms partnerships with archives and individuals with whom she has had previous contact. Interestingly, she has noticed that since her classes have become more popular and students know that each time the course is based on a collaboration with a different organization, they are interested in who is going to be the course partner that year. Maggie, however, is adamant that this particular partnership is the reason her course was selected:

“I'm resistant to that because part of the point of the class is that when you're working in community archives and when you're working in partnership, you don't get to do exactly what you want to do. A big part of the lesson is you do the work. It's not maybe your main jam and you do it, your very best, with your whole heart. And that's the point. So I'm hesitant to tell people in advance” (M. Schreiner, interview, May 13, 2024).

Most of Michelle's students choose 20 hours of work at a community archives of their choice as a final project. Some come to class already with knowledge of where they would like to work, some relationships are formed while visiting archives during class, and in part Michelle also uses her personal contacts. She also points out that sometimes when things do not go well during students' work in the archives, she has to intervene, which is time-consuming. In the perspective of placing students in classes in different archives, Michelle also reflects on working for a community of which one is not a part:

“I think it's a big issue about whether or not students are doing work from their own communities or are outsiders to the communities that they're doing work in. [...] So I think this is a big question of what is the role of an outsider in a community-based archive. And even though I'm an outsider to the community-based archive I'm the co-founder of, I think that's a topic that is not settled. It needs to be discussed thoughtfully in class” (M. Caswell, interview, May 6, 2024).

Interestingly, all of the interviewees from Poland (as well as the author of this article in her classes) collaborate with the Center for Community Archives in some way (guest talks) or use the materials offered by the Center (database of community archives, Open Archiving System, manual for community archivists, portal *Zbiory Społeczne/Community Collections*). This indicates the important role of the Center in Poland, educators' awareness of the possibilities

for cooperation, as well as the Center's openness and readiness to engage in university teaching about community archives.

### *Challenges*

The educators were also asked what challenges they see in teaching their courses.

Michelle mentioned that in the context of crediting the subject by working in community archives, some of the students are eager to do this work, because some of the community archive sites are in their neighborhoods and they are part of these communities, but some students (especially those who are not from Los Angeles and live in university housing) do not want to travel far away and to unfamiliar spaces. Another challenge she mentions is the ethical issues of the political engagement of information professionals in their workplace. She also sees managing relationships with community archives sites as time-consuming, especially with a large number of students.

Maggie also finds selecting partners and creating assignments for students a challenge. Like Michelle, Maggie points out that managing partnerships is time-consuming, and that working on certain projects in archives may first require the educator to learn skills they did not have before (e.g. organizing a digital archive). She also notes that because students are working with real archives, the educator has less control over the process and situations can sometimes happen that they did not anticipate before. But she concludes: „the work going badly or being harder than expected... that's actually the learning experience” (M. Schreiner, interview, May 13, 2024).

Hubert points out that it can be a challenge to break students' stereotypical thinking about archives through the lens of the classic types of archives they know from other classes, including thinking of an archive as an institution or a place, which is not necessarily useful when talking about the phenomenon of community archives (especially digital ones).

All three educators from Poland also note the logistical problems associated with traveling with students out of town or to a remote location in the city to visit an archive; these problems include the bureaucratic procedure for funding an out-of-town trip (Arkadiusz) and the too short time for one meeting with students (90 mins). Adriana, for this reason, in her second year of teaching, asked her unit to combine the classes so that they lasted 3 hours every two weeks, allowing for more study visits.

Arkadiusz, also based on his experience teaching another subject including community archives, notes that maintaining partnerships with community archives is somewhat of a challenge, not least because of the different levels of student involvement in the work.

Christine finds some challenges in the students' initial top-down approach to looking at the needs of the community and the fact that, according to her „we place ourselves into more insular communities, especially post COVID” (C. D’Arpa, interview, May 22, 2024).

#### *Advice to Archival Educators*

The educators were also asked about their advice for those who will want to design a university course on community archives.

Maggie emphasized that in-depth relationships with community archives are a very good tool - although she stressed that due to the level of involvement of both parties, this is not a solution for everyone. She also recommended involving students in real, tangible archival work: “I think students really love doing work that exists in the world. And so definitely, I would encourage people to think about that” (M. Schreiner, interview, May 13, 2024).

Arkadiusz advised the same, saying: “It's great if that work students do in class can later be used in a positive way, to archive those materials” (A. Więch, interview, May 16, 2024).

Maggie also pointed out the need to stay up to date with the literature on community archives, as it is now growing faster than it was just a few years ago, so syllabi need to be updated regularly.

Hubert strongly emphasized the need to arrange meetings with real people, practicing community archivists, also for the sake of inspiring students and their overall humanistic development. Arkadiusz advised the same, seeing the need to show students the archival practice of community archives through both meetings with archivists (guest lectures) and visits in archives. In addition, both Hubert and Arkadiusz advise entering into cooperation with the Center for Community Archives.

Arkadiusz also paid attention to listening to the needs of students during classes:

“[...] because they [students], if they get into it, are interested in the topic, they may have very different ideas, and sometimes I think it's worth modifying these initial assumptions of ours as much as possible to be able to listen to what they have to say and to what they are interested in” (A. Więch, interview, May 16, 2024).

Christine, based on her own experience of designing a new course, suggested advising other educators who are already teaching such a course and recognizing the local landscape and how she calls it “the political economy of community archives.” She also suggests using both scholarly literature and popular texts in the classroom:

“I'm a strong believer in including, obviously using scholarly articles, but I think also popular literature is important and news articles to see what the dominant narratives are around this kind of work in popular culture, in popular media” (C. D’Arpa, interview, May 22, 2024).



Like Arkadiusz and Hubert, Adriana also stressed the great importance of visits to archives and the opportunity to show students real archival work, also linking this to the big presence of community archives in the public sphere: "Well, after all, community archives also go out to the people" (A. Kapała, interview, April 4, 2024).

### **Summary and further research**

As mentioned above, this article, due to the limited nature of the analysis, cannot claim to make broad generalizations about the status of Community Archives Pedagogies in Poland and the US. The very different contexts in which the phenomenon occurs in the two locations, i.e. differences in higher education systems, different systems of archival/LIS education, and finally the different nature of the community archives phenomenon and scholarship about it, significantly affect how local Community Archives Pedagogies look. Also important are local differences between universities, where courses are placed within different disciplines and programs (one even taught exclusively remotely), in universities that also have their own traditions, learning ecosystems and local dynamics. Finally, as with any knowledge acquisition process, a great deal depends on particular teachers. In the case of this course, where collaboration with external partners and relationships between the educator and those partners mean so much, this is probably an even more important context.

What was not addressed in this article is the professional status of educators and how it impacts their approaches to Community Archives Pedagogies. This issue is especially relevant in the context of addressing politically charged topics in the classroom, which is not atypical for discussing the motivations of minoritized community-based archives and radical archiving. Whether an educator has tenure or not, or whether they are employed in a tenure-track or non-tenure-track position, can have a significant impact on the coverage of these topics. The tenure system is not present in Poland, where, however, the educator's position, including having a habilitation,<sup>9</sup> and whether they have a permanent employment contract may be relevant.

It is also worth noting the status of such issues as the relationship of heritage institutions with communities and power dynamics of these relationships, ethical considerations, social justice activities, etc. In the US, these issues are widely discussed in the literature and present in daily work of many professionals, and therefore also important for archival educators (Gilliland, 2011, Lau et al., 2012, Caswell, 2018). In Poland, for archives, these topics are almost absent.

While all educators incorporate theoretical issues (e.g., definitions of community archives or community archives induced critique of contemporary archival practice) as part of their

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<sup>9</sup> Habilitation (Polish: *habilitacja*) is an academic level between a PhD and Full Professorship, which is present especially in some European countries. Scholar with a habilitation is called an "independent scholar" ("Habilitation," 2024; Wosiek, n.d.).

classes, a very important aspect of Community Archives Pedagogies turns out to be “encounters with real archives” - either through site visits, or by inviting community archivists to speak in class, or through student work in community archives. All of these forms, however, require time and commitment from both educators and archivists, can sometimes be logistically challenging, and, especially in the case of service learning, require careful consideration of ethical issues and clear discussion of the rules of the partnership so that it is not only beneficial, but also unharmed for all involved parties (Lau et al., 2012).

Polish educators unequivocally identify the Center for Community Archives as a partner in teaching their courses, whether by involving its staff in guest talks or by using the tools offered by the Center. In turn, the Center's experience in working with universities may prove useful for advocacy initiatives in other countries in the future.

None of the educators included in the study currently uses traditional methods of assessment, such as an oral or written exam/test. This may be influenced, first, by the desire to engage students in doing real work in the course, with a real community partner; second, by the complex and very diverse landscape of community archives (including the definitional landscape), which is very difficult to capture in tests or exams. In turn, these traditional assessment methods do not necessarily correspond to the learning outcomes envisioned in the courses which go broadly beyond knowledge of community archives or the theory and scholarship about them (Kuecker et al., 2024).

The topic of community archives can be an excellent pretext for addressing in the course a wide variety of issues with its framework beyond the strict subject of community archives, such as sensitivity and ethics in archival work, relationship building in heritage sector, critical thinking about the archival scholarship and practice, interpersonal skills, and fundraising skills. Thus, it is a potentially valuable, but also very flexible course, the scope of which can and should be tailored to specific local conditions.

At the same time, where the course was an elective, educators point to a diverse group of students, coming from various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. This indicates the cross-cutting value of the topic of grassroots archives and the expansion of the group of people interested in this phenomenon beyond just the information sciences. What is more, it could be an incentive for the creation of new courses offered to students outside of archival studies, LIS or history.

It would be worthwhile in the future to expand the study of Community Archives Pedagogies in two directions: both by increasing the number of cases, i.e. the number of interviewed educators, coming from different programs, universities, and locations, and also to deepen the study by focusing on a better understanding of the ecology of teaching about community archives. It is also worth addressing the relationship between the understanding of the term

“community archives” (in a given country and even by a given educator) and the scope of a particular course, which was not addressed in this article due to the preliminary nature of the study and the level of complications of varying understandings of terminology in different locations and languages. Perhaps, in the future, expanding research on the topic of Community Archives Pedagogies will also result in the possibility of exchanging experiences between those who teach about community archives and those who develop archival/information studies programs.

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