

# How Historians Search for, Access, and Use Primary Source Materials

ALEXANDRA CHASSANOFF

**Abstract:** Historian scholars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century face a vastly different research environment. The growth in online research tools, along with unprecedented access to archival materials through digitization, present a host of possibilities and challenges. Yet relatively few empirical studies have explored how these technological changes have impacted research practices in archival settings. This research poster reports on the information practices of historians using primary source materials in their research pursuits. Eighty-six historians filled out an online questionnaire describing how they search for, access, and use materials. Preliminary results show the methods historians use most frequently to search for materials, how they access materials, the types of documents they are most likely to use, and whether they access materials online or in-person. Findings also describe how historians are using digitized sources and what factors they consider important in their decision to use (or not use) online materials. Results from this research will help inform how archival research tools and technologies can better serve the needs of historian scholars working with primary source materials. Understanding this new information environment is critical to building effective infrastructures for scholarly inquiry.

## About the author:

*Alex Chassanoff* is a Ph.D. student at the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research interests include the information behavior of digital archive users, digital materiality, and curation and preservation environments. Her current research looks at how historians use digitized photographs as evidence. Alex received her MSIS in 2009 and was a Digital Curation Fellow at SILS from 2008-2009. Prior to graduate school, she worked as a database programmer, IT consultant, and digital asset manager.