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Archival Disposal - A Reflection

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This exercise was created for the [Archives and Climate Change Teach In](#) action, a solidarity effort for the 2019 Global Climate Strike. Teach In coordinators are encouraged to review the [facilitation guide](#) & the [design a teaching exercise guide](#).

Learning Scope

This teaching exercise focuses on the issue of disposal for archival equipment and supplies using a critical archival framework defined by Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand as a critique of the current state of archives and archival practice and a call to enact meaningful changes to that state. Discussion areas include current archival practices of identifying equipment for disposal, assessing the lifecycle of equipment, review local or institutional policy on disposing of waste, and reflect on current approaches, perspectives, and habits regarding waste and disposal.

Learning Objectives

Discussions will encourage participants to

- Explore and evaluate alternatives to disposal
- Analyze research findings on the harm produced by e-waste sites
- Locate existing archival practices that addresses long-term impact of the culture of waste
- Document relevant policy on waste at individual's institution

Intended Audience

Exercise focuses on the experiences of practicing archivists regardless of years of experience as well as archivists in training. Exercise works best with groups of 10 to 30 people.

Anticipated outcomes

Participants should leave with a firm grasp on the continued lifecycle of archival equipment and supplies beyond its immediate use, as well as an emerging ecological and political awareness on how their respective professional principles, practices, and values contribute to non sustainable and environmentally damaging outcomes.

Time

This exercise requires a minimum of 1.5 hours, but can be expanded to 3 hours or more.

- Introduction: 10 to 20 minutes

- Investigation: 20 - 40 minutes
- Diagramming: 20 - 40 minutes
- Follow Up Investigations: 10 - 20 minutes
- Debrief: 10 - 20
- Planning Next Steps: 20 - 40 mins

Materials

The following supplies are encouraged for better visual teaching and learning, but digital tools can the place of majority of the listed supplies although conscious decisions on energy use and a group's carbon footprint should be heavily considered.

- Large Sticky Pad paper (2-5 sheets)
- Letter sized paper (1 sheet per participant preferably using recycled paper)
- 1-2 laptop or mobile device (to be shared with among participants)
- Connection to internet if using laptop/mobile devices for online investigations
- 1 printed copy of each core reading (on recycled paper if possible)
- 1 printed copy of the diagram for the following: information lifecycle, records life cycle, and/or records continuum model

Readings

CORE (these readings establish the basic grounding for participants to engage with discussions)

- "Dying Well In the Anthropocene: On the End of Archivists" by Samantha R. Winn
 - Download: <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/107>
- "Sustainable Digital Scholarship: Shrinking Our Footprint, Broadening Our Impact." by Stacie Williams
 - <https://medium.com/on-archivy/sustainable-digital-scholarship-the-limitations-of-space-662627e19e37>
- "Why our throwaway culture has to end" by Dame Ellen MacArthur
 - <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/environment-and-conservation/2018/06/why-our-throwaway-culture-has-end>

SUGGESTED

- "Critical Archival Studies: An Introduction" by Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, T-Kay Sangwand
 - <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/50>
- "An Economic Theory of Planned Obsolescence" by Jeremy Bulow
 - <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/stable/1884176>
- "Disposing of Records" resources by the National Archives UK
 - <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/manage-information/policy-process/disposal/>
- "To Shred Or Recycle? No Need To Choose" by Iron Mountain
 - <https://www.ironmountain.com/resources/general-articles/t/to-shred-or-recycle-no-need-to-choose>

How to lead this exercise

Instructions are broken down according to the suggested order of the timed parts. Modifications will be done on a time or participant number basis with suggestions on removing the specific parts labeled as "not core" if adjustments need to be made.

- **Introduction**
 - During introductions participants should spend half the time journaling independently their reactions or responses to the following series of questions

- How often do you throw away your trash at home?
 - What does the culture of waste mean to you?
 - What is the difference between disposal, recycling, and throwing away?
 - Do you live a wasteful life or do we as a community of archivists contribute to wasteful practices and mentalities?
- Spend the second half of introduction with people stating their names, pronouns, and most surprising note they wrote during the journaling activity
- **Investigation**
 - Spend this time investigating what sorts of policies exist at the participant's place of archival work regarding disposal including contractors, processes for disposing, scope of disposal materials (does this include equipment), options for recycling, or departments, units, or personnel at the participant's institution that might be able to answer more specific questions
 - **NOTE:** Facilitator(s) can conduct this investigation and share insights on their own personal workplace and use their institution as the case study
- **Diagramming**
 - Participants will diagram the relationship between the information they found during investigations including how people relate to policies, practices, or values. Ask for 1 volunteer at a time using the large sticky pad sheet and assess how many volunteers can present given the time allocation
 - **NOTE:** Facilitator(s) can be in charge of diagramming in order to advance through participant examples quicker. Each participant can dictate the information they came across for the facilitator to draw.
- **Follow Up Investigation (not core)**
 - This time can be used to investigate and answer any unanswered questions or nearly proposed questions that arose from conversations around the diagram exercise.
- **Debrief (not core)**
 - Participants can either debrief in small groups (such as size of institution or randomly) OR debrief as the complete group.
 - Facilitator can also dedicate this time to make connections between participants and their respective situations
- **Planning Next Steps**
 - If the debrief component is removed, invite participants to either propose next steps or to use this time to debrief on findings, reactions, or to address remaining questions.

Source

This teaching exercise was created by Itza Carbajal (www.itzacarbajal.com) as part of the Global Climate Strike Archives and Climate Change Teach In action on September 20, 2019. Feedback provided by Stacie Williams.