

Mobile Device Policies in Archive Reading Rooms

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ABSTRACT

Humanities scholars increasingly use mobile devices such as laptops, iPhones, and iPads in their professional lives. We are exploring the opportunities for employing such devices for supporting scholarly activities in archive reading rooms. As a first step in this process, we are studying how reading room policies related to the use of technological devices impact scholars' interaction with the source materials in terms of capturing, organizing, note taking, and record keeping for future use of found materials. We studied the policy documents made available by thirty archives and complemented the results by soliciting the perspectives of administrators who craft these policies and scholars who use these archives. We present our analysis and an early prototype of a policy awareness mobile application called AMTracker.

Keywords

archive reading room, policies, mobile devices, AMTracker.

INTRODUCTION

Information behavior research in the humanities, including a growing number of studies about historians, has examined various facets such as scholars' understanding of the research process (Stone, 1982), research topic selection (Case, 1991), scholars' information seeking behavior (Tibbo, 2003), location and access of archival materials (Anderson, 2004), scholars' acclimatization processes in new archives (Delgadillo & Lynch, 1999), and the barriers they face in using archival materials (Rutner & Schonfeld, 2012). A crucial aspect of the information work of humanities scholars that is often overlooked are the information management strategies employed by scholars in order to capture, manage, track, collate, and cite the primary source documents in their research.

ARCHIVE READING ROOM POLICY ANALYSIS

Given the impact of archive rules and policies on the information gathering practices on scholars (Cox, 2007), we studied and analyzed the policies related to patrons' use of technological devices in archive reading rooms from three perspectives: documents published on archive web sites,

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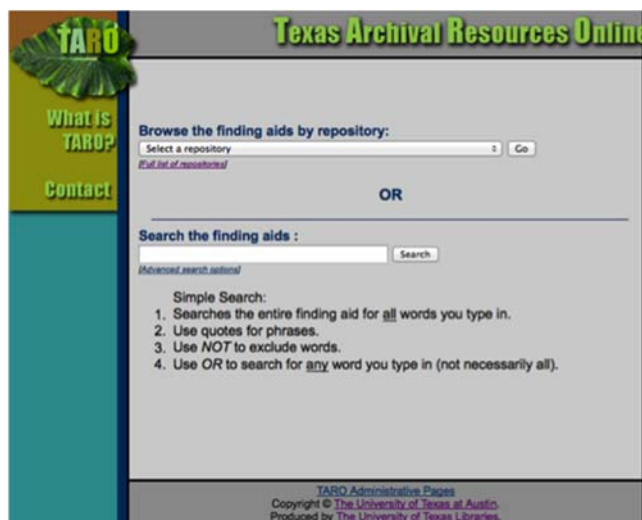


Figure 1. The TARO Web interface

interviews with administrators who frame and enforce these policies, and scholars who visit the reading rooms and whose research is affected by these policies. Our analysis is limited to the thirty-six archives that participate in TARO (Texas Archival Resources Online), a site that hosts finding aids for participating archives in the state of Texas. Scholars use the TARO interface, shown in figures 1 and 2, to browse and search for materials. Archive policies vary widely and patrons must locate these on the individual archive web sites.

Table 1 summarizes the nature of the institutions that host or manage these archives. We located the policies for thirty on their Web sites, focusing on sections related to the use of recent technological advances (such as laptops, cameras, and phones). Table 2 illustrates the acceptance of these devices various archives, classified into four categories: stated permission to use the device (allowed), permission with significant caveats (conditional), express exclusion of use (disallowed) and no mention of the device (unknown).

The policies have been crafted with three informally stated goals: the safeguarding of archival materials, ensuring that the archive gets credit for the use of its materials, and patrons can work unhindered by others in the reading room. While laptops and still cameras are most commonly addressed and permitted, video cameras and tablets are the least frequently discussed devices.

We have interviewed four archive administrators and five scholars so far, to supplement our understanding of the policies, yielding valuable additional insight. While tablets are not mentioned in the policies at all, some archives consider these to be laptops while others, smart phones. In two archives, smart phones are permitted while the policy states that they are not. Archive staff often make judgment calls to fill gaps in the policies, while adhering to the principles of non-disruption and protection of materials.

While archive administrators interpreted few questions from patrons as an indicator of adequate clarity of the policy statements, the patrons expressed a different view. Policies are often difficult to locate, hard to interpret, and they hesitate to seek clarifications in order to avoid standing out

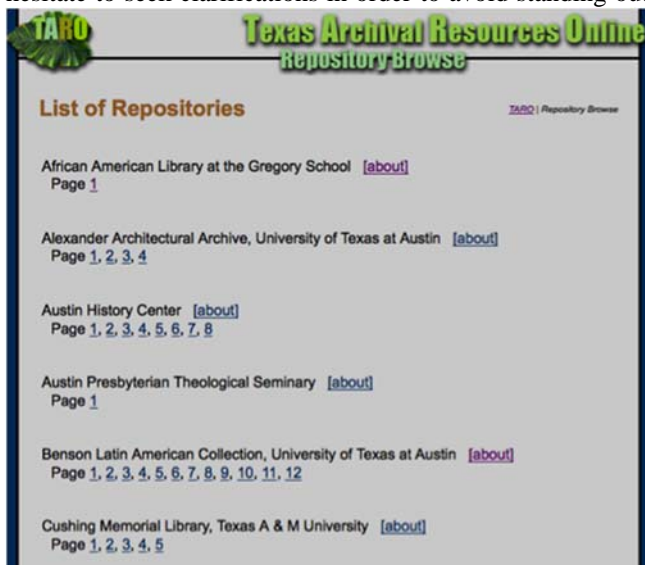


Figure 2. Browsing the TARO finding aids.

Institution type	Number (policies: 30)
Public academic	21 (19)
Private academic	4 (4)
Private	3 (2)
Local government	6 (3)
State government	2 (2)

Table 1. Distribution of TARO archives.

	Laptop	Tablet	Still Camera	Video Camera	Mobile Phone	Scanner
Allowed	20	0	13	1	6	1
Conditional	1	0	3	2	0	0
Disallowed	1	0	3	2	8	13
Unknown	8	30	11	25	16	16

Table 2. Technology-related policies.

in the archive environment or disrupting others who share the space.

AMTRACKER: MOBILE POLICY INTERFACE

As a first foray into supporting scholars, we have designed a mobile interface that facilitates the location of TARO archive policies. AMTracker, presents a unified view of device-related policies, favoring simplicity of presentation as well as interaction, in order to help elevate patrons' archival intelligence (Yakel & Torres 2003). The application lists TARO archives as shown in figure 3. Patrons may select an archive to view its policies as illustrated in figure 4.

The interface presents abstract yet familiar graphical icons that represent devices, color-coded to indicate its degree of acceptance. Combining a traffic light metaphor with web conventions, devices shown in red are disallowed, those shown in green are permitted, those in yellow are permitted with certain caveats (the Conditional category used in table 2), and gray icons indicate that the archive policies do not mention this device. Users may tap the device icons to read the policy statements on the archive web site. AMTracker uses the notepad and pencil icon to link to the archive's citation policies and includes links to the archive's home page and to its finding aids.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

We are continuing to interview scholars and administrators in an effort to understand the institutional as well as scholarly view of policies and the use of devices. In addition to providing simple, yet informative, overviews of reading room policies, our analysis will guide the design of tools that will enable scholars to capture, track and manage primary source materials over the course of their research projects.

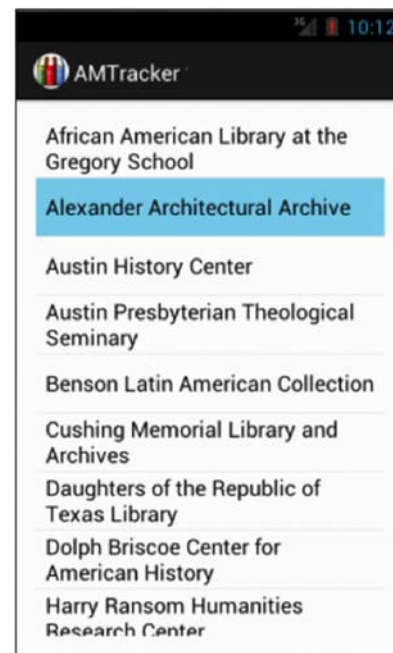


Figure 3. AMTracker—Listing of TARO archives.

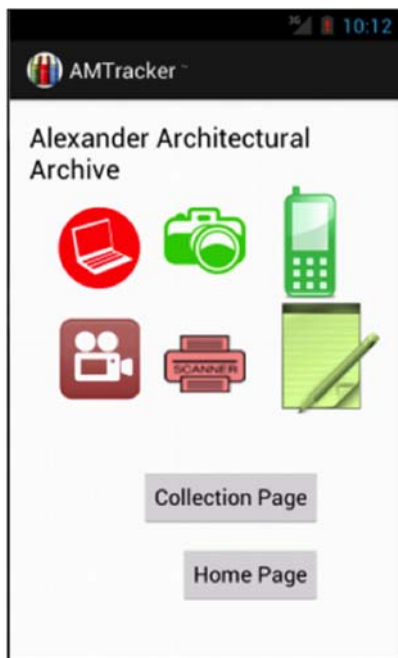


Figure 4. AMTracker—Policy display.

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