

## Finding Aid Analysis

### Materials Needed

- Finding aids describing an archival collection
- If it is possible to hold this class session in an archive, a box or folder from each collection for students to compare to the finding aid

### Preparatory work:

- The instructor must possess an awareness of the purpose of finding aids, how they are created, and the archival processing that underpins them more generally.

### Instructions:

- Divide students in groups proportional to the number of finding aids available for analysis and ask them to consider the following questions:
  - a. Who is the intended audience for the finding aid?
  - b. What information about the collection is prioritized in the finding aid?
  - c. Is the format easy to follow and the information conveyed intuitive?
  - d. Is there any information missing that you wish were in the finding aid?
  - e. Does the finding aid structure adequately do what it seeks to do (i.e. provide access to archival collections)? If not, why not?
- Facilitate student discussion on the similarities and differences between finding aids. Are all written to the same standard? Are they written in the same level of detail or format? If not, why not?
- Then, if possible, ask students to compare the finding aid they have to the box or folder they have been given. Ask students to answer:
  - a. Does your box or folder contain the kind of materials you expected to see? If not, what did you expect?
  - b. Is there any information about these materials that you wish were in the finding aid?
  - c. How would you have described the materials for a researcher?
- Facilitate student discussion on their responses to those questions, then have students consider the following:
  - a. What other possibilities exist to create methods of access to archival collections?
  - b. What information would you add to this finding aid to improve access for anyone reading this after you? Would you make any large structural changes?
- Facilitate student discussion on their responses to those questions, leading to a final concluding discussion on what is gained and lost (such as prioritizing majority narratives in larger collections to the exclusion of fewer materials in the collection documenting marginalized people) when making descriptive choices.