Students and Faculty in the Archives

A Project of
Brooklyn Historical Society

Final Evaluation Report
March 31, 2014

Submitted to FIPSE by

Education Development Center, Inc.
Introduction

Students and Faculty in the Archives (SAFA) was a project of Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS) funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). Over the course of three years, two full-time project co-directors designed an instructional program at BHS, working with 18 faculty members in three colleges to design and teach a total of 65 SAFA-enriched courses to over 1,100 undergraduate students. The project was intended as a way to enhance engagement and learning for 1st and 2nd year undergraduates through hands-on analysis of original primary documents. The participating Brooklyn campuses were St. Francis College, Long Island University Brooklyn Campus, and New York City College of Technology (City Tech).

The three-year project began in January 2011. BHS project staff and participating faculty spent the first year and a half, from launch through the end of the 2011-12 academic year, building and testing the core elements of their SAFA courses: in-archives exercises, selection of archival materials, designs for archives visits, and final student assignments. The second year and a half of the project – the 2012-13 academic year and the following 5 months – was spent refining these elements into a model for SAFA courses, and disseminating the model to a national audience. Throughout, the project was characterized by collaborative experimentation between BHS project staff and SAFA faculty.

During the fall 2013 semester, as permanent BHS staff began to assume responsibility for class facilitation, SAFA project staff conceived and produced TeachArchives.org, a resource-rich website featuring many of the products and findings of the SAFA project. Thanks to a no-cost extension, BHS continued to support a robust dissemination program for the SAFA findings and the TeachArchives.org website through December 2014.

The SAFA project had five goals focused on student learning, faculty learning, and outreach to other institutions:

1. Improve student retention and academic success for 1st and 2nd year college students
2. Build a collaborative network of three Brooklyn campuses and Brooklyn Historical Society aimed at enhancing student engagement and learning through archival research projects
3. Develop and implement college humanities, art, and technology courses for 1st and 2nd year students enriched by significant archival research projects
4. Improve faculty ability to integrate archival research into 1st and 2nd year humanities courses in support deeper and more engaged student learning experiences
5. Improve student learning of key inquiry and archival literacy skills
Students at the three Brooklyn campuses – New York City College of Technology (City Tech), Long Island University Brooklyn Campus, and St. Francis College – share many characteristics and challenges of students in non-elite urban colleges nationwide. A high proportion are minority and first-generation students, must work to support themselves and/or their families during school, and arrive needing remediation in literacy or math to do college-level work. Despite the challenges, many students arrive at these campuses motivated to improve their life and career prospects, and many are focused on career preparation, whether in nursing, architecture, or applied arts. Still, the proportion of students who withdraw during the first or second year is high, as it is for urban public and private schools across the country that serve minority and immigrant students. At the outset of the project in 2010, first-year retention rates were below the New York state average for two of the schools (City Tech at 61%, and LIU Brooklyn at 47%) and about the same at the third (St. Francis, at 80%).

BHS engaged Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), a research and evaluation firm, to evaluate the project and its outcomes. Evaluators gathered data for each project goal above. EDC collected institutional data on student retention and academic performance from each campus (Goal 1), observed working meetings and institutes with faculty and staff to understand the collaborative work process (Goal 2), examined faculty syllabi and observed selected classes at BHS and on campus to understand how the use of archival materials was integrated into courses (Goal 3), administered questionnaires to gauge faculty learning (Goal 4), administered pre/post online assessments to measure improvements in students’ document analysis skills,¹ and interviewed and surveyed selected students about their engagement in SAFA activities and the influence the activities had on their learning and their academic plans (Goal 5).

EDC developed several metrics to gauge progress toward these goals:

**Pre-visit/post-visit assessment**
At the beginning and end of each term, students took an online assessment in which they analyzed a primary source document (such as Dorothea Lange’s iconic photograph “Migrant Mother”) along with brief contextual information. The assessment gauged whether participating students showed improved document analysis skills after visiting the archives. Students also reported on their experience in the archives.

**Classroom/in-archives observation**
For most of the 18 participating instructors, evaluators observed at least 1 visit to BHS and 1 classroom session back on campus.

¹ The project began with a somewhat broader goal of improving students’ “archival literacy,” but this was refined to “document analysis skills” as it was discovered that both faculty and students had difficulty with these arguably prior (and for college students, priority) skills. See Yakel, E. and Torres, D., “AI: Archival Intelli-gence and User Expertise. American Archivist 66 (Spring/Summer 2003): 51-78.

² This procedure introduced noise into the aggregate analysis because the SAFA and comparison groups were of different sizes; since there was often no direct match for each SAFA course, we
Interviews
Evaluators interviewed selected students and faculty from all campuses.

Reflections
Evaluators periodically solicited written reflections from all faculty over the grant period. They also examined student reflections posted to class blogs produced by each participating course.

Campus assessment data
Evaluators obtained anonymized grade and enrollment data from each campus' Institutional Data office. Evaluators compared student academic performance in SAFA courses and in comparison courses based on 4 metrics: the percentage of students completing the course, the percentage receiving a passing grade, the percentage receiving a grade B or better, and the percentage re-enrolling in college the following academic year.

This report summarizes outcomes from all three years of the project, focusing on outcomes from the two academic years in which SAFA courses were conducted, 2011-12 and 2012-13. The report is organized by each goal in turn. Included under each goal are the associated evaluation questions, data sources and methods, and outcomes.

Goal 1: Improve student retention and academic success for 1st and 2nd year college students.

Improving student retention has become an important policy focus for two- and four-year colleges across the country. Retention rates -- defined as the percentage of first-year students re-enrolling to their sophomore year and beyond -- at the three participating colleges hover between 61-78% (data collected from the National Center for Education Statistics website). Yet graduation rates within 6 year are less encouraging, ranging from just 14% (with 40% of students transferring to another institution) at CityTech to 52% at St. Francis College. Partner schools are at or below national averages; the national 1-year retention average in 4-year institutions is 78%, and the national average for graduation by 6 years is 59%.

Research on the reasons that students withdraw from college suggests several factors at play: financial burdens, a lack of connectedness to the campus culture, and a lack of engaging and inquiry-driven coursework (Attewell, Hei; & Reisel, 2011; Hossler, Ziskin & Gross, 2009; Kuh, 2011). The SAFA project tested the hypothesis that providing more engaged, authentic research experiences in first- and second-year courses might lead to higher rates of retention. More specifically, it asked if engaging in archival research about people, events and movements in the local community of Brooklyn would make
learning, and academic life in general, more personally meaningful and relevant for students. Since research on retention in higher education does not suggest that one course by itself can meaningfully impact student retention (Crosling et al, 2008; Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 1987), we looked for evidence of change not only in retention rates, but also in two things found to be closely associated with retention: higher course grades, passing rates, completion rates, and course satisfaction.

To investigate this hypothesis we divided our inquiry into two sub-questions.

**Question A: Do students in SAFA courses show higher retention rates than students in comparable non-SAFA courses?**

**Data Sources and Methods**

EDC obtained student retention data from each campus, and compared retention of SAFA students to that of students in matched comparison courses. Comparison courses, wherever possible, were the same course (e.g., History 1101) taught without a SAFA inquiry project, and taught either by the same professor or by a professor of a similar rank (e.g., Assistant Professor). Where no direct comparison section was available, multiple sections of the closest similar course were combined to become the comparison. For students who took a SAFA course in the 2011-12 academic year, we looked at their enrollment status in Fall 2012 (1 year retention rate) and again in Fall 2013 (2 year retention rate). For students who took a SAFA course in the 2012-13 academic year, we looked at their enrollment status in Fall 2013 (1 year retention rate). When data were available we counted students who transferred to other colleges as retained (for example, when a CityTech student transferred to another school in the CUNY system; LIU also collects this data but SFC does not).

Data were analyzed in two steps: an aggregate analysis, and then a second, more targeted analysis. In the aggregate analysis EDC compared average outcome data for students in SAFA courses at a given college (for example the mean rate of re-enrollment) to the average outcome data for students in all of the comparison courses at that college.²

²This procedure introduced noise into the aggregate analysis because the SAFA and comparison groups were of different sizes; since there was often no direct match for each SAFA course, we needed to group 4-5 sections of the closest course as a comparison.
Outcomes

*Aggregate analysis.* In the aggregate analysis, EDC found that SAFA students had higher rates of retention at one of three campuses, St. Francis College. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show 1-year retention rates for all three campuses. They show that:

- At St. Francis, 9 out of 10 SAFA students were re-enrolled one year after their SAFA course, compared to roughly 8 of 10 students in comparison courses.
- At City Tech and at LIU, both SAFA and comparison students re-enrolled at roughly similar rates: between 75-80% in 2011-12, and between 65-70% in 2012-2013.

**Table 1.1: Aggregate Analysis: 1-year Retention Rates (2011-12 Academic Year)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SFC</th>
<th>CityTech</th>
<th>LIU</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAFA courses</td>
<td>90% (n=117)</td>
<td>75% (n=236)</td>
<td>78% (n=126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Courses</td>
<td>77% (n=740)</td>
<td>76% (n=802)</td>
<td>75% (n=274)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.2: Aggregate Analysis: 1-year Retention Rates (2012-13 Academic Year)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SFC</th>
<th>CityTech</th>
<th>LIU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAFA courses</td>
<td>91% (n=136)</td>
<td>66% (n=260)</td>
<td>68% (n=265)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Courses</td>
<td>82% (n=812)</td>
<td>70% (n=881)</td>
<td>70% (n=745)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Targeted analysis.* In order to reduce the ‘noise’ in the aggregate analysis resulting from uneven sample sizes, EDC conducted a more targeted analysis, examining 15 SAFA sections for which we had *well-matched* comparison sections. Table 1.3 shows the results of the more targeted analysis for the 2012-13 academic year (the only year for which data were available for all three campuses). In the more targeted analysis:

- Retention rates of SAFA students are higher than comparison students at all three campuses.
- St. Francis SAFA student re-enrollment rate is still 10% higher than that of comparison students.
- At both City Tech and at LIU, SAFA student re-enrollment is 4% higher than that of comparison students for this period.
Table 1.3: Targeted Analysis: 1-year Retention Rates (2012-13 Academic Year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SFC (3 sections)</th>
<th>City Tech (6 sections)</th>
<th>LIU (6 sections)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAFA courses</td>
<td>87% (n=44)</td>
<td>81% (n=192)</td>
<td>73% (n=159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Courses</td>
<td>76% (n=72)</td>
<td>77% (n=219)</td>
<td>69% (n=227)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion
To date, there is no research on student retention that suggests that a single course by itself can significantly impact student retention (Crosling et al, 2008; Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 1987). Evaluators were therefore not surprised to find mixed results for retention, particularly at the aggregate level. However results of the targeted analysis (which focused on a smaller number of well-matched SAFA and comparison sections) suggest SAFA may indeed be moving students in the right direction. That is, these courses may be providing the kind of active learning strategies and engaging research experiences that have been found to be associated with improved retention (Attewell, Hei; & Reisel, 2011). Accordingly, EDC looked for additional evidence of change in two variables that have been found to be closely associated with retention: higher course grades, and course satisfaction.

Question B: Do students in SAFA courses show higher rates of course completion, higher passing rates, and higher course grades than students in comparable non-SAFA courses?

Data Sources and Methods
EDC obtained grade distributions for SAFA courses and for matched comparison courses from each campus’ Institutional Data office. Student grade distributions were divided into three metrics:
- Course completion (students of who received a grade in the course, including an F, but not including students who withdrew from the course)
- Passing rate (students who received grades above an F, not including withdrawals)
- Grade B or better (students receiving an A, A-, B+ or B, not including withdrawals)
Outcomes

Aggregate analysis. In the aggregate, EDC again found a mixed relationship between SAFA courses and student academic success. Overall, SAFA students at St. Francis College had greater success than peers in similar courses, as measured by the course completion rate, the course passing rate and the percentage of course grades of B or better. At the other two colleges, the performance of SAFA students was similar to or slightly lower than their counterparts.

Table 1.3 summarizes the grade data for fall and spring 2012-13. In sum:

- At St. Francis College, students in SAFA courses were more likely than comparison students to receive a grade of B or better. In 2012-13, 57% students in SAFA courses received a B or better, while 40% of comparison students did so.
- At City Tech, a slightly lower number of SAFA students grades of B or better than the comparison students (43% vs. 47%).
- At LIU, SAFA students and comparison students received grades B or better at almost the exact same rate of 57%.

Table 1.3 Aggregate Analysis: Percentage of students receiving a grade B or better (2012-2013 Academic Year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>SFC</th>
<th>City Tech</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAFA courses</td>
<td>57% (n=125)</td>
<td>43% (n=236)</td>
<td>57% (n=264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Courses</td>
<td>40% (n=842)</td>
<td>47% (n=782)</td>
<td>56% (n=742)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Targeted analysis. Again, to increase the rigor of the analysis, EDC examined those SAFA courses where we had well-matched comparison classes, i.e., classes of similar size taught by a similarly ranked professor or the same professor, one with SAFA, and one without. In the more targeted analysis, EDC found a clear positive relationship between SAFA classes and student outcomes at CityTech and LIU, while at St. Francis the academic outcomes were roughly equal.

Table 1.4 summarizes the percentages of students receiving a grade of B or better, across the three campuses. Here we focus on the 2012-13 academic year, for which data shared by campuses was most complete. (In other years, data shared by campuses did not allow a targeted analysis)
Table 1.4: Targeted Analysis: Percentage of students receiving a grade B or better

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAFA courses</td>
<td>73% (n=44)</td>
<td>65% (n=192)</td>
<td>60% (n=159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Courses</td>
<td>77% (n=72)</td>
<td>45% (n=219)</td>
<td>44% (n=227)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings include:
- At St. Francis College, students in 3 well-matched courses received slightly lower grades, on average, than their peers (73% vs. 77%). Analysis of the individual courses revealed that grades were substantially higher in one course, nearly the same in another, and significantly lower in the third. In the latter course, evaluators learned anecdotally that the instructor of this SAFA section was particularly demanding in work requirements and grading in the SAFA course. This illustrates the variability hidden by averages when courses are combined and scores averaged.
- At City Tech, students in all three well-matched SAFA courses (6 sections) performed better academically than their peers in non-SAFA courses.
- At LIU, students in all six well-matched course sections received grades of B or better at higher rates than students in the comparison courses.

Discussion
The pattern is clear: where our data are best, SAFA courses taught by faculty who used the program’s instructional strategies succeeded in fostering positive students outcomes – higher grades, and greater rates of course completion and course passing. Moreover, these are the very outcomes that are associated, over time, with higher student retention.

Thus, though our evidence of direct impact on student retention is uneven (and in any case should not be expected from a single course intervention), we have meaningful indirect evidence that SAFA courses, effectively taught, lead in the direction of greater retention.

Caution should be used in interpreting these findings, especially around grades earned. Because SAFA courses were unfamiliar and demanding for students, it is possible that SAFA faculty may have awarded higher grades to SAFA students partly as a reward for effort, rather than achievement, or that their grading criteria were somewhat more lenient for new assignments related to archival documents.
Goal 2: Build a collaborative network of three Brooklyn campuses and Brooklyn Historical Society aimed at deepening student engagement and learning through archival research projects

SAFA was a remarkably productive partnership between Brooklyn Historical Society and faculty from the three participating colleges. Participating faculty members agreed to:

- Attend the week-long Summer Institute in June of each year, and at least three project meetings per year during the grant period.
- Produce planning documents like Course Plans and Dossiers each academic year for a course that uses archival research in the BHS collections to construct deeper and more engaged student learning experiences.
- Collaborate with BHS on a SAFA course at least one semester each academic year of the project. Each participating course had to visit the BHS archives at least once in the semester.
- Select items from the collections to use with students, articulate learning objectives for class visits, design in-archives activities involving hands-on primary source research, and create follow-up assignments or activities.
- Require students to post reflections (and, in some cases, other assignments) to a class blog chronicling student learning experiences in the archives.
- Participate in dissemination activities at the end of each grant year, and at a summer symposium with a national cohort in summer 2013.
- Publish exercises and articles on TeachArchives.org and to further present or publish about SAFA experiences and findings.
- Participate in grant evaluation activities.

In turn, BHS agreed to:

- Create and manage an easy-to-use tool for class blogs, train faculty on implementation, and provide troubleshooting and other technical support to students and faculty.
- Pay an honorarium of $1,250.
- Provide easy-to-use online tools for creating digital exhibits.

The partnership was successful on many fronts. Three outcomes stand out. First, the project achieved robust and consistent faculty participation. Second, faculty taught more classes and created more products than were intended in the project design. And third, the design of teaching materials and student experiences was highly iterative and collaborative, leading to clear improvements in work quality over time.
Data Sources and Methods
To track the collaboration, EDC attended meetings, interviewed staff and faculty, solicited faculty reflections at four points during the project, and also reviewed course documents such as the Course Plans from the 2011 Summer Institute, Dossiers from the 2012 Summer Institute, course syllabi, assignments, and blogs.3

Outcomes
Robust faculty participation
Faculty participated at a high level throughout the project. 15 of 18 of faculty members moved on from the first year to the second year. While three dropped out, two became more active participants in the 2012-13 school year – one at LIU and the other at City Tech. Moreover, project faculty held 75 individual meetings with BHS staff, roughly 3-4 per person. These intensive individual meetings about pedagogy occurred in advance of each semester; in them each faculty member worked with BHS staff on the selection of materials, the design of assignments, exercises, and student handouts for reading and analysis, and the design of follow-up student projects.

Faculty participation was robust across all three campuses: 5 professors at St. Francis College participated in both years; 6 LIU professors in 2011-12, 7 during the 2012-13 year; 6 City Tech professors in 2011-12, 4 in 2012-13.

Classes taught, and visits to the archives
The number of SAFA classes taught by faculty, and the number of student visits to the archives, significantly exceeded expectations. All told, faculty made over 100 class visits to BHS (36 were anticipated at the outset of the project), and more than 1,100 students were served via the collaboration. In addition, within a given year, more faculty than expected returned to teach classes in the spring semester, after having a successful fall term.

Faculty conference presentations and peer publications
Throughout the project, faculty collaborated to present at conferences and write papers. The results were largely due to the initiative of the professors themselves, and not led by BHS. At the time of this report, these four conference presentations had been conducted by/with faculty. The conference titles were:


• Museums Work: Success Stories of Students and Faculty in the Archives. Conference organized by the Baruch College-Rubin Museum of Art Project: “Museums and

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3 Course Plans were agreements produced in Summer 2011 between faculty and BHS project staff, that included information on lessons, assignments, deadlines, and logistics related to the faculty member’s classroom use of BHS archival collections. Dossiers were forms produced in Summer 2012 that specified revisions and improvements to the above, based on the first year's teaching experience.

- *Using Brooklyn’s History to Enhance the First Year of City Tech’s Students.* CUNY CUE (Coordinated Undergraduate Education) conference. College of Staten Island, Staten Island, NY. May 11, 2012.

A full list of presentations by archives staff and faculty can be found at: http://www.teacharchives.org/presentations/.

**Discussion**

For many college faculty, opportunities for pedagogical professional development is rare, the change to collaborate on teaching with other faculty rarer still, and the chance to work with professionals in other fields -- such as archivists -- is truly exceptional. In this context, Students and Faculty in the Archives stands out. The relationship between BHS staff and the college faculty went far beyond the usual one-way service relationship. It was a sustained collaboration that focused on a core design challenge of higher education: constructing rigorous and engaged learning experiences that work for students. Specifically, the different parties brought distinct skill-sets and knowledge together in order to formulate a hands-on, step-by-step way of teaching students a fundamental but elusive skill, *document analysis.* Faculty brought their deep knowledge of academic subject matter and goals for student content understanding; and BHS project staff brought deep experience in sequencing students’ analysis of primary source materials – the back-and-forth process of scanning document features, noting source information, reading closely, posing questions and cultivating puzzlement, and especially contextualizing.

Four elements the collaboration appeared critical to its success: the use of iterative development cycles, cross-college sharing, a robust time commitment, and high levels of support for faculty.

- *Iterative Development Cycles.* SAFA faculty members were able to revise and refine their activities and to rearticulate how the archives would fit into their courses. Particularly during the 2012 Summer Institute faculty members had time to work together in small groups organized by college affiliation as well as by discipline, topic, and collections used. Over half of the professors took their BHS visit activity and related assignments and tweaked them over the course of the two years. Fewer professors tried new assignments or activities each semester. Overall, BHS staff found that professors who refined their SAFA assignments over time had more successful visits to BHS and student work at the end of the two years than faculty who tried new activities each semester.
• **Cross-College Sharing.** In the 2012-13 academic year several faculty members borrowed ideas from one another about their visits to BHS, how to incorporate the course blog, and their assignment design. Through Summer Institutes, January group check-ins, and individual meetings, BHS staff helped faculty members of the same discipline or with similar course goals connect and share resources.

• **A Robust Time Frame.** The project grant covered three years, which included two academic years for teaching plus a semester before and after those years for preparation and dissemination. Particularly with regards to the professional growth that faculty demonstrated, the two-year teaching commitment to this project seemed to be an important length of time. This enabled faculty to brainstorm, develop, pilot and then refine the way the archives fit into their course. As they reflected back on the two years of the SAFA project, 80% of faculty said they were more confident in the second academic year in how to structure the experience with students and the level of depth or detail to attempt.

• **High levels of support for faculty.** Three kinds of support for faculty appeared important to the success of the project – support from BHS, financial incentives provided by the grant, and support from campuses. First and foremost, BHS support built and sustained the collaborative work relationships and routines with college faculty that led to the substantial curriculum design and teaching output in each year of the project. BHS hosted weeklong summer institutes in June 2011 and June 2012 to give faculty members time to work in the archives, find sources, plan their courses, and get feedback from BHS staff. (During the summer of 2013, BHS facilitated a two-day Institute that included time to instruct faculty on preparing their contributions to the project website and a presentation from EDC evaluators.) Faculty also spent substantial amounts of time researching in the archives outside of any structured event, and BHS provided extensive reference consultations, research support, and scholarly advice; this went far beyond the services normally provided to regular library patrons. Faculty members also met individually with BHS staff at least once before each semester to get individual feedback in more detail (for a total of 75 meetings). There were also mid-year meetings in January 2012 and January 2013 so that faculty members could hear from one another about their experiences, share best practices and make mid-year adjustments. In the final phase of the project, staff worked closely with faculty as they prepared articles and assignments for publication on TeachArchives.org and for use by a global audience, extensively editing their work. Second, faculty were clearly motivated by the stipends the project provided. The U.S. Department of Education grant provided for $1,250 in stipends per faculty per year for their full participation in SAFA. Finally, campus support for the project varied, but generally included the following: Participating faculty were typically given enrollment caps for the SAFA courses, in acknowledgement of the greater workload involved in an intensive and innovative course; they were often given a greater choice of class times, and room choices...
(e.g. some needed the computer lab and were given it); each campus hosted a project event one or more times; and administrators and staff from each campus attended BHS and SAFA public events.

All of this support yielded enormous benefits, in the amount and quality of work produced, and also in the quality of the relationships created. Eighty five percent of faculty said in they highly valued the collaboration with BHS. In particular they called out the historical and pedagogical knowledge and expertise of project staff, as well as their high level of planning and organization, as key to their success.

Characteristic faculty comments from January 2012 include:

*This ended up being one of the best professional development experiences I have had.* —American Studies professor, SFC

*Julie and Robin were more than invaluable to me. They provided so much help as to make teaching and learning smooth and enjoyable.* —English faculty, LIU

*Both women are indispensable! I can't praise them enough for their knowledge, patience, and organizational savvy. They anticipated every potential problem so that our experience, from the summer seminar to the course conclusion, was enjoyable and seamless.* —English professor, LIU

Goal 3: Develop and implement college humanities, art, and technology courses for 1st & 2nd year students, enriched by significant archival research projects

SAFA’s course development goals were ambitious. Project staff sought to work with a wide range of faculty from very different disciplines to develop and implement a hands-on archival research activity. As the project developed, project staff also developed an innovative teaching philosophy that presented a way to model document analysis. In summers, they designed and ran a Summer Fellowship program, providing a more in-depth research and design experience to selected undergraduates. And at the conclusion of the project, BHS project staff produced a robust website, TeachArchives.org, that disseminates materials, tools and strategies for teaching document analysis to audiences nationally.

Data Sources and Methods
To gauge the effectiveness of the project’s course development work, evaluators reviewed course documents, such as syllabi, assignments, and student reflections in
course blogs, as well as conducted observations of selected course visits to BHS and in the classroom, to determine how SAFA activities were integrated into these courses.

**Outcomes**

The success of the project’s course development work is evident in four ways: the number of SAFA courses taught, the variety of those courses, the quality of course archival research assignments, and the engagement of students.

**By the numbers**

- Over four semesters, 18 SAFA faculty taught 65 SAFA courses, far exceeding the expectation of 36 courses. Whereas the original project description called for professors to teach one SAFA course a year, many opted to teach one each semester.
- Over four semesters, Brooklyn Historical Society hosted over 100 visits from SAFA classes, in which students spent time closely analyzing primary documents.
- Over the four semesters the project served a total of over 1100 unique students.

**Varied disciplines**

The variety of SAFA courses is a hallmark of success because it demonstrates the project’s ability to build worthwhile pedagogical bridges between the archival holdings of BHS, and the skills, practices and concepts in a range of humanities and social science disciplines. A sampling of the disciplines represented in SAFA courses during its first year include:

- English Composition and Literature (9)
- History (5)
- Art History (3)
- Religious Studies (1)
- American Studies (1)
- Miscellaneous (Public Speaking, Photography, Architectural Technology)

**Varied assignment models**

Another sign of the project’s success was its development of varied types of document-based assignments, to fit the needs and of the different SAFA courses and instructors. The number of class visits to the archives varied from one to seven per class, and visit models included a range such as a focus on document folders, a pick-a-document approach, a collaborative focus on a key document, and document ‘stations’ through which students would rotate, or not. The project staff determined that an ideal group size for collaborative work around documents, for example, at a ‘station,’ was three to four students. Finally, the end products of courses varied as well, including final papers, annotated documents, blog posts, and walking tours.
**Improved assignments**

According to class observations and review of syllabi, assignments in Year 2 were more likely to have the following features of effective archival pedagogy, consistent with the “best practices” for teaching with archives that the project formulated:

- Fewer documents in each visit/activity/assignment than in Year 1
- More small group work in the archives, as opposed to individual or large-group work, than in Year 1
- Clearer articulation than in Year 1 of how work in the archives fits into course goals
- Handouts with more explicit guidance for document analysis
- Follow up discussions and blog prompts that more explicitly invite students to summarize and share their findings and interpretations

On the whole, faculty noted that their courses, particularly in the second year, successfully integrated an archival research project with their course content.

**Student engagement and interest in archives**

Another indication of the success of SAFA courses was in the feedback gathered from students about their course experience. In surveys and interviews, students told evaluators that they found the experience meaningful academically, professionally, and personally.

*Engagement during visits.* Asked to write what they learned in their visit to BHS, students’ answers fell into categories that aligned closely with the goals of the SAFA program. As figure 3.2 shows, students identified both historical information and range of research skills as things they learned most.

**Figure 3.2: What students said they learned most**

![Visits to BHS helped me learn...](image)
Students most frequently wrote in things they had learned about Brooklyn history, followed by document analysis skills (including comments about analyzing, observing and citing documents), and archives-specific skills (such as comments about preservation, handling and care of documents and reading/transcribing documents). The specificity with which students identified the historical topics and document-specific skills, beyond simple answers such as “history” or “research” is unusual in these types of surveys.

**Student experience in the archives.** Also in a survey, students responded to the question, “What was this experience [visiting BHS] like for you?” by free-writing. Students were overwhelmingly positive about their experience, using words like “enlightening,” “exciting,” “rewarding” and “informative.”

Figure 3.3 is a “Wordle” summary of the most frequently cited descriptive words students used. Please note that some words were omitted because of overuse – words such as experience, document, and BHS.

**Figure 3.3: Student responses to visiting the BHS archives (in 2012-13)**

A theme running through many students’ comments is that they gained a richer and more vibrant understanding of the research process – and that it can be fun.

“It was such a new interesting experience. I felt like a detective looking at the documents, trying to solve the case of answering all the different questions that I had after seeing each document. I loved the notes and first draft documents because I felt that gave me a feel of what those historical people went through, something that is not given in textbooks.” - SFC student in English Class

“My experience of the BHS was one of surprise. I did not know the importance of such documents until I came here.” – LIU student in English class
“The BHS visit was life changing in my education. Researching is not based on internet sources only.” – LIU student in English class

“It was wonderful to be able to do hands on research. It really makes the process much more exciting and interesting for everyone.” – SFC student in Art History class

Deeper understanding of history. Students often commented that the experience sparked an interest in knowing more about the historical event they studied. For example, one student who had looked at runaway slave ads wanted to know the stories of the individual ads they had looked at, and also wondered why more men than women ran away. Also, almost universally students said they wanted to see more documents.

Some of our knowledge about slaves was [at the time of the first BHS visit], I would say, shallow, compared to what we learned over the course of the semester. —LIU History student

Through my history course I've learned that some of the history I learned isn't necessarily wrong, but it is shortchanged…Our history professor tried to teach us to look at history from a neutral perspective, and when you’re writing about history to try and write from a neutral place. —St. Francis History student

Awareness of how to combine an interest in history with a profession. Of the students we spoke to, many were enrolled in a degree program (such as Pharmacy, Architecture, Accounting) that left little room for electives like history or literature. Many expressed disappointment that they couldn't take more humanities classes that would include archival research projects. But in the two students we spoke to a year after taking their SAFA course, both had started thinking about ways to combine their love of history and cultural institutions into a future profession. An Accounting major at SFC said, “[The SAFA course] made me want to visit museums more and learn about history. I love history. … I want to take history classes every semester.” He added that he had been thinking about working at a museum or other non-profit institution where he could use his accounting skills but really love the place he worked for. An architecture student from City Tech who took a SAFA history course in Fall 2011 said she had been thinking about internships in museum exhibit design.

Visiting Cultural Institutions independently. A few students said they had returned to BHS to view the exhibits for fun with friends or to use the resources for other class projects. For example, an architecture student at City Tech who took a SAFA course in Fall 2011 said that she had taken only one other course that required use of primary source documents, but that on her own she had included documents from BHS in other assignments. Another student mentioned he had returned to see an exhibit about Brooklyn Baseball with friends. There was a sense from students that they had not previously been aware of BHS and other institutions like it, and what they offer the public. Now, they said, they wanted to return to BHS.
The Next Step: The SAFA Summer Fellowship

While students in their courses visited BHS one to four times, some students got the opportunity to build on that experience in the SAFA Summer Fellowship. The Fellowship program offered 25 students a deep dive into in-archives research and showed the progression of research skills that students can gain through extended primary source interaction and analysis. Representing a significant amount of pedagogic effort by BHS, it was also one of the project’s key successes.

The SAFA Summer Fellowship was designed to give selected SAFA students an intensive experience in independent archival research. During the 2012 and 2013 summers, SAFA students were invited to apply to a 4-5 week long Summer Fellowship. Roughly a dozen students were selected each summer who would help curate a small exhibit and who would each produce their own scholarly or creative project based on secondary and primary source research. The fellowship focused on 19th century journals by a Brooklynite named Gabriel Furman⁴ because the wide range of research topics covered that would appeal to a group of students with diverse personal, academic, and professional interests. This opportunity gave students time to go in depth into a research project of their choosing and to produce a final project in a variety of creative formats, such as websites, walking tours, music, etc. Although the opportunity was open to all students, the fellows primarily came from St. Francis College and CityTech. In 2012, 26 students applied and in 2013 22 students applied. In all, 13 students participated in the first summer, and 11 in the second, for a total of 24 fellows.

Fellowship outcomes

The two most significant outcomes of the Fellowship are the products students produced, and the experiences and attitudes students took away. The products are described on the SAFA website at http://safa.brooklynhistory.org/fellowship2012; fellows’ experiences and attitudes are described here.

**Fellows’ experiences and attitudes towards learning and careers**

SAFA Fellows were deeply engaged in their work; all but one student per summer were able to fulfill all of the requirements for this rigorous fellowship.⁵ They presented their independent research publicly through a website and at a public symposium at BHS, tasks that required them to summarize their work and to connect with an audience.

⁴ http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/bhs/arc_190_gabriel_furman/arc_190_gabriel_furman.html
In interviews and a survey, Fellows described the Fellowship as a deep learning experience, and said they improved in their ability to do research, to work within a group, and to present to an audience. They also said they gained new knowledge about Brooklyn and its history. The structure of the experience—a 5-week, 3 days per week, paid independent research project—worked well for students who nearly all had significant obligations outside of the Fellowship (such as summer courses, jobs, or family responsibilities). They particularly called out the support from BHS staff as clear, supportive and constructive.

Many students commented on how the fellowship had an impact on their confidence both in their academic skills and their presentation skills, as well as their improved ability to hone an argument:

This taught me the most, from research skills to presentation skills, most of all it helped me become a more confident person.

I thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship and I came out of this experience feeling confident in my intellect and scholarly work. THANK YOU!

As a SAFA fellow…. I [was] also able to learn to narrow down research into key points, to stay on task, and to take correction positively.

I am grateful for the SAFA fellowship for showing me that I have great ideas and insight.

My public speaking skills were never that great, but I feel with all the practice we’ve been doing, I feel a bit more confident.

Other comments revealed how students acquired a more nuanced and rich understanding of studying history. Asked whether and to what extent they grew as a scholar or a researcher, students said:

[Regarding the individual research project] Something I really took from this aspect was honing in on a specific argument, sticking with it and moving forward. There’s not any extra time to sit around and rethink yourself over and over. Just go for it head on.

I would say yes, because it became clear to me that research is not about being correct but about loving the truth.

I feel more responsible since starting this fellowship. I never truly realized how significant history is to me and many others.

For a handful of students, the experience influenced their ideas about future careers.

The SAFA fellowship introduced me to different career options and it also helped [me] decide if I still want to major in political science. Most political scientists have to do some kind of research wiring and public speaking, and the fellowship had 3 in 1.

As an English major, I enjoy reading books, articles and even biographies on someone’s life. By researching in health and medicine, I found a new interest that may lead to a future career. I’m glad I took the time to expose myself to something different.
SAFA has set new career goals for me. I came in as an ex-Nursing student and am leaving as a (hopefully) graphic designer.

TeachArchives.org

BHS program staff built an innovative website, TeachArchives.org, that offers teachers, administrators, librarians, archivists, and museum educators a comprehensive resource for learning about and replicating the project’s approach to teaching in the archives. TeachArchives.org stands out as an unusually thoughtful and comprehensive effort to make the assets of the project not just visible but useful for a wide range of practitioners. In the experience of the evaluators, TeachArchives.org is the most substantive and well-designed web dissemination resource we have seen in any educational development and implementation project of this scope.

Particularly notable are several features of the site:

• **A balance of “the big picture” with detailed “how-to’s.”** For practitioners in archives, museums, libraries and in universities, the site calls attention to both the big ideas and the details of students working in the archives. The ‘Articles’ section features a carefully articulated Teaching Philosophy, and summaries of High Impact Practices in higher ed, and these sit alongside detailed how to’s of teaching and learning in the archives such as “Teach Care and Handling,” “Provide Context,” “Build Paleography Skills.”

• **Archivist and Faculty perspectives on archives-based work.** Right next to the collection of articles by project archivists, users find a collection of thoughtful reflection pieces by project faculty. Faculty describe key elements of archives-based teaching from their own perspective, under headings such as Engaging First-Year Students, Digging Into the Collections, Designing Your Visit, and Models for Historical Survey Courses.

• **Comprehensive teaching materials.** Most important for faculty wishing to replicate the project’s work in their own college, TeachArchives.org makes 14 teaching exercises available, in great depth and detail, and with easy-to-use navigation. These materials represent the project’s accumulated wisdom about how best to integrate archives-based learning into undergraduate courses in a wide range of disciplines. The teaching units are extremely well organized and presented. They show in detail how to guide student learning in topics such as “Exploring the Rhetoric of Slave Bills of Sale before and after Gradual Manumission” (for a freshman English course), “Politics and Religion in Civil War Letters” (for a course on the American Religious Experience), and “Research from Start to Finish: Using The Archives in a Scaffolded Research Project” (for a course in U.S. history). Users have available everything they need to use and adapt an exercise: the learning objectives, a description of the context, the visits, examples of the end products students produced, access to the archival material used, and all the lesson handouts. Also included are bios of all faculty authors, to help users
humanly contextualize the instructional materials – and contact them if they wish to.

- **Resources for Replication.** For museum, archives and library professionals interested in replicating important aspects of the SAFA model in their own institutions, a Project page takes users ‘backstage’ and offers details about each of the key design elements of the project: how Class Visits to the archives were scheduled and managed; the project’s Summer Institutes for faculty; the Summer Fellowships; and the digital tools used by the project, as well as the new teaching tools it developed. Also available are all the project’s research and grant reports, to help others build a case for their own work.

**Goal 4: Improve faculty ability to integrate archival research into 1st & 2nd year humanities courses in support of deeper and more engaged student learning experiences**

SAFA undertook a significant faculty development challenge. At the outset of the project, SAFA faculty had extremely varied experiences with primary sources. Some, mostly the handful of historians in the group, were seasoned archival researchers; others had spent little or no time in an archives. Some had experience helping students learn with primary materials, and a few had even taken students to an archives for research; most had not. Few had collaborated with archive staff to significantly reshape a course around a collection of archival materials assembled expressly for their students.

Over the course of the 3-year collaboration, faculty had what amounts to an extensive professional development experience. It included intensive summer institutes focused on the design of archival learning experiences, coaching and assistance from BHS staff in selecting sources and constructing learning activities, piloting of materials and teaching techniques in class visits to the archives, and collaborative reflection on the quality of student work outputs. Over the course of the project, many faculty reexamined and refined some of the basic elements of their classroom practice such as the breadth and depth of their course goals, the pedagogical design of their assignments, and how they supported students through a process of inquiry.

**Data sources and methods**

Evaluators looked for evidence of faculty growth in three places – evolving course assignments and materials, observations of teaching in the archives and the classroom, and in their own reflections, logged throughout the project in surveys and interviews.

We also interviewed BHS project staff who, because they facilitated all 100 class visits and worked so closely with the entire group of faculty, gained a deep familiarity with the
professors’ various skill sets and approaches. Based on this, BHS staff determined that the following 8 ‘best practices’ defined effective teaching with archives:

1. Defining and articulating learning objectives that align visit goals with course goals
2. Selecting a small number of appropriate documents for students to examine
3. Creating tailored, specific prompts to guide students
4. Design document analysis activities to connect to larger assignments and course objectives
5. Carefully consider logistical decisions related to the archives visit
6. Providing thoughtful facilitation and a challenging wrap up during archives visits
7. Providing necessary context to students before, during, or after an archives visit
8. Working collaboratively with project partners to tweak the variables above, based on interim results

EDC found that these 8 dimensions of practice nicely captured the variations observed among faculty in course assignments, interviews and classroom observations, and used them as a basis for analysis. We coded 2-4 artifacts for each faculty member -- for example, an early and late assignment, an early and late interview, or an early and late observation -- for evidence of these practices, positive or negative, and looked for any changes from earlier to later in the project. The analysis had limitations, since artifacts that offered evidence of every dimension were not available for every faculty member, but the data were sufficient to support the following general statements.

Outcomes

Three cohorts
By triangulating course assignments, observation data, and project staff insights, EDC found that the project faculty clustered in three groups on the 8 best practice dimensions. Three of the 18 participants (17%) were already “Competent” in archival teaching at the outset – that is, they began the project with four or more of these practices already in their repertoire. This group had strength in three areas in particular: they could articulate specific learning goals for students’ archival project that aligned closely with their course goals (Practice 1); they were strong in the ‘teaching with documents’ skills (selecting documents, creating tailored prompts, Practices 2 and 3); and they were eager collaborators, willing and able to tweak their exercises based on pilot experiences (Practice 8).

Six faculty (33%) were “Approaching” competence – they had two or three of the practices in their repertoire. And nine participants (50%) were “Developing” competence – they had at most one of the practices solidly in their repertoire.
Table 4.1: Faculty competence with archival teaching practices, pre and post

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Developing Competence</th>
<th>Approaching Competence</th>
<th>Competent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 archival teaching 'best practice' in repertoire</td>
<td>2-3 'best practices' in repertoire</td>
<td>4 or more 'best practices’ in repertoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>PRE 9</td>
<td>POST 2</td>
<td>PRE 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>- 7</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Improvement in teaching**

EDC found that over the course of the project, 12 of 18 faculty members (66%) improved in two or more of the key areas of archival teaching. In particular, from their first SAFA semester (in 2011-12) to a semester in the second year (2012-13), these faculty designed and executed projects that showed:

- Greater clarity in learning objectives (related to Practice 1; 14 faculty)
- A smaller set of documents with more explicit prompts to guide students (related to Practices 2 and 3; 15 faculty)
- More strategic use of context, or background information (related to Practice 7; 8 faculty)

Individual faculty also showed improvement in other practices as well, but these were less evident for the group overall. Some were more effective facilitators when working with students in the archives (for example, creating time for a wrap-up discussion in which students prepared brief oral reports on what they had found, before leaving); others showed evidence of a more thoughtfully planned visit (for example, use of fewer documents, hand-outs that offered more specific guidance, and a room-set up that fostered more focused group work).

Less amenable to change in a short time across all faculty were: the quality of facilitation by faculty, and faculty willingness to collaborate and ‘tweak’ assignments to improve them. The latter, especially, could be viewed as a ‘screening variable’ for success in future archival teaching projects.

**Time for reflection and revision of teaching**

It is worth pointing out that post-secondary faculty rarely get time to reflect on teaching, and work in a sustained way with others to improve their teaching. The fact that SAFA enabled many to do this stood out as a great benefit for participants. However, several
faculty reported that the time to reflect on and revise teaching materials and strategies was never enough; future projects would do well to build this in as much as possible.

**Faculty self-reports**

Surveys and interviews serve to illuminate other evidence of change. All of the SAFA faculty (18 of 18) consistently reported that SAFA helped them improve their teaching. They said the project provided a unique professional learning experience, one that gave them unprecedented access to rich materials, an intellectual community of their peers, valuable time and space to design, test and reflect on pedagogical innovations, and the help of dedicated pedagogical coaches in archives staff. A tiny sampling of faculty comments, from among hundreds, will suffice:

> We engaged in [collaboration] at every level--with BHS staff, and with other faculty participating in SAFA —it was transformative. -- Photography Professor

> SAFA helped me figure out what my goals as a history professor are, and how to use innovative teaching techniques to achieve them in the classroom. -- History professor

> I didn't have much experience working with primary [documents]. Now I enjoy working with them and it is much easier to come up with ideas or exercises... I now know the kinds of questions to ask of these [documents]. -- Professor of English

**Goal 5: Improve student learning of Document Analysis Skills**

An important outcome of the SAFA project is greater understanding of the skills that undergraduates need to engage successfully in archival research. At the beginning of the project, faculty and BHS staff had ambitious goals of developing students’ inquiry and analysis skills, including their ability to analyze, contextualize and correctly cite primary sources as part of research projects (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2013; Krause, 2010). As the project evolved, faculty learned more about the challenges early college students face in reading and understanding archival sources. They saw that without two foundational skills —observation and summarization — students struggled to accomplish more advanced skills of interpretation, evaluation and contextualization. When they had these foundational skills, students were better able to engage the higher order skills. Accordingly, the project focused more immediately on developing and measuring these foundational skills.

**Data Sources and Methods**

EDC collected data on student skills and attitudes in three ways: via an online pre/post measure of their document analysis skills, administered by willing faculty; in one-on-one interviews with volunteer students; and through evaluation forms completed by the
Summer Fellows. Each is described below in detail; complete instruments can be found in the Appendix. Efforts were made to see if the National Survey of Education Engagement (NSEE) could be used to assess engagement, but the campus institutional data departments said that either they didn’t collect NSEE data, response rates were low (below 20%), and/or the data could not be aggregated by teacher. To the extent that campuses do collect and are able to analyze these more systematic data sets on engagement, future research should take advantage of them to examine programmatic interventions like SADA.

**Document analysis measure**
Evaluators asked SAFA faculty to administer an online exercise to their students at the beginning and end of each semester. In the exercise, students were given a primary source document (a photograph or written document) and asked to make observations and inferences about its meaning, importance, and place in history. In the 2011-12 school year, the online student assessment was modeled on an archival literacy questionnaire developed by Magia Krause (2010), and students answered questions about BHS documents that they had not seen before. In the 2012-13 school year the exercise was revised based on feedback from faculty members and BHS staff to more narrowly target skills their courses were prioritizing: observation and summarization, and well as contextualization. The revised activity was based on assessments from the Beyond the Bubble project at the Stanford History Education Group (see http://beyondthebubble.stanford.edu). While the Stanford assessments were developed for 6-12 grades, we deemed them appropriate for undergraduate students because of the challenging nature of these skills, and the fact that they are rarely taught explicitly prior to college. The original assessments measured skills of like attending to the citation of a document, thinking about the document in a historical context, and close reading, or observing and recognizing important details.

(See next page)
Faculty provided students with a link to the online exercise and an ID number, told them that the exercise would not be graded, but that completion of it would count toward their class participation grade. Faculty members did not see individual students’ responses, but did receive an aggregated description of students’ performance at various all-SAFA meetings.

Analysis of these data should be viewed as exploratory and suggestive, rather than definitive. As Table 5.1 shows, the response rate was modest. Many faculty did not follow up with students about completion. As a result, some classes had few students who completed either the pre or post-activity, while in other classes students completed one but not the other. The number of matched pre/post tests was therefore low, and the findings here suggestive of positive trends worth exploring further.
Table 5.2: Student Data from the Document Analysis Exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2011 (319 total)</th>
<th>Spring 2012*</th>
<th>Fall 2012 (345 total)</th>
<th>Spring 2013 (281 total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Pre Tests</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Post Tests</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matched Pre/Post</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Because the 2011-12 pre/post activity was a pilot, we only asked one of each of the professors’ courses to complete the assessment. All but one professor taught a Fall 2011 course, so most of the students completed it during that semester.

Table 5.3: Matched Pre-Post Tests by Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIU – 39</td>
<td>LIU – 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFC – 21</td>
<td>SFC – 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Tech – 10</td>
<td>City Tech – 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To analyze the data, two coders used the rubrics provided by the Beyond the Bubble project to score questions 2 and 3; a rubric for the first question was developed based on other rubrics measuring observation skills (see Appendix). Coders rated all students’ responses and met to discuss the scores until they were in agreement. Only students who “matched” (submitted both pre and post activities) were scored.

Outcomes

A. Student Performance on a Document Analysis Task

Across all campuses, students showed measurable improvement in skills of observation, interpretation, and contextualization. Additionally, evaluators found evidence of students moving away from accepting documents as historical fact and towards a more critical and analytic practice of questioning the information in documents. Further, students whose professors used multiple ‘best practice’ teaching methods (as defined by SAFA educators above) tended to perform better on the post-assessment than those of professors who did not use these practices.
Table 5.4 Average Student Scores on Pre-Post Tests, 2012-13 (N=65)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualization</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scores: 1=Basic, 2=Emergent, 3=Proficient

Table 5.4 summarizes the mean scores on the three analysis skills. Students showed modest but statistically significant improvement in observation skills. Changes in the other sub-skills, interpretation and contextualization, were in a positive direction, but were not statistically significant.

This means that, after their SAFA course, students were better able ground their ideas in evidence in the image. In the pre-assessment students described details in the image, but were less likely to use the details in an interpretation. By contrast, after the course students often were able to explain why details in the image led them to draw a conclusion.

For example, students had the following responses to a prompt about Lange's *Migrant Mother* image ("Describe what you see in this image. What details seem important? What do you think is going on in this image?"):  

*She is depressed and worried because she has wrinkles on her forehead and her chin is resting on her palm. Two children are shy as they are hiding their face. Their clothes are torn and look dirty.*  

– Student 1, post-test

*In this image a see a migrant mother who works on the farm along with her two children. They seem to be suffering, I think this because the mother looks troubled and her two sons are facing away from her.*  

– Student 2, post-test

Both of these students identified key visual details that led them to make interpretations about the woman in the picture.

Our findings reinforce research that shows that identifying and citing a source is challenging for students (Wineburg, 2001). A question that called upon students to use each image’s citation (or source information) in their interpretation remained difficult for students in both the pre- and post-test. Many students failed to notice or incorporate into their response key details such as the date of the photograph or where it was shown. This finding is in keeping with the work of Wineburg (2001) who has documented how disciplinary acts of reading like this are ‘unnatural’ for students, until explicitly taught.

**More detail, and more use of conditional language.** Evaluators noted improvements in two student skills not captured by the rubric, but relevant to the practice of interpreting historical documents and images. As compared to the pre-assessment, in the post-
assessment students were more likely to notice more details and to use conditional language. In this student’s responses we see evidence of both of these emerging habits.

- Student A, Pretest Response: I see black men, relaxing, talking, and just watching what others are doing.
- Student A, Post-test Response: The picture seems sort of bright for black and white photo. You see the kids faces turned away but yet parts of their bodies are showing. The kids’ hands are filthy. I feel like they are on a ship and that they are very poor. They have raggy clothes on, that are torn up. The mother seems to look very sad and in wonder of what is about to come. I think they are about to be moved into a new place.

While in her prior response this student simply lists what she sees as present in the image, in later response she includes much more detail about the figures, and also speculates about what these details mean. In the use of words like “seems to,” or, as found in other responses, “could be,” “might mean,” students in the post-test showed a greater ability to speculate about the possible meanings a historical document might have, rather than assuming it had one determinable historical meaning.

**Sample Student Responses to Pre/Post Document Analysis Exercise**

As an example of the kinds of improvements students demonstrated, a sample student’s response to the Pre- Post exercise is provided below. The student is referring to the pre- and post-assessment documents shown here. Tables 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7 show the responses of a student who demonstrated substantial change – a male first-year student enrolled in a SAFA undergraduate history course at Long Island University—to pretest and posttest prompts that call for observation, interpretation, and evaluation of the stimulus documents.

**Table 5.5: Observation Question**

Describe what you see in the image. What details seem important? What do you think is going on in the image?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student A - Pretest</th>
<th>Student A - Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These slaves seem to have some freedom here instead of harsh punishment or work. They also seem to be well dressed. Their homes look decent yet not containing enough space. At the same time, they appear to have had just finished some kind of chore, but the particular chore looks like it wasn’t very tough, which is implied in the outer appearance of these slaves.</td>
<td>I see a mother who is going through some depression mode and seems to have some hard times in life as her children also face similar obstacles. The children seem to rest on their mother in hope of finding some rest from what they are facing. The clothes, the looks on each one of their faces are very meaningful. The children seem to add on to the responsibilities that he mother holds on her shoulders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the Observation Questions about the documents, this student was attentive to details and grounded his conclusions in visual evidence in both pre- and post- responses. He therefore received a full score of 3 in both cases.
5.6: Interpretation Question
How might the photograph be useful as evidence of the living conditions of slaves?

Student B – Pretest
It may help to depict the poor situation that they live in as well as the low status that they fall into.

Student B – Posttest
Since she was hired and specifically asked to go snap shots of people who go through the problems of depression during the dust bowl.

In response to the Interpretation Questions, the student makes very general inferences about poverty and low status at Pre-test, and does not note the physical size or arrangement of slave structures. At Post-test however, he draws on the background information provided to speculate about the photographer’s intent. (Pre-score = 1; Post-score = 3).

5.7: Reliability Question
What about this source might make it LESS useful as evidence of the living conditions of slaves?

Student C – Pretest
The lack of white people’s attendance may make it less useful.

Student C – Posttest
The moment in which she took this photo. The mother seems to be wondering about a way to improve their situation while the children find settlement on their mother’s shoulders, which already hold lots of responsibilities.

In response to the Reliability Question, the student at Pre-test did not notice or use document’s creation date (1903) to think about whether the people depicted were in fact slaves (they were not); in the post-test, however, he notes details that make the photo seem posed at the moment it was taken. (Pre-score = 1; Post-score = 2).

Summary. We can see in this student’s pre/post responses an important shift: from demonstrating observation skills alone, to using observations to interpret a document and evaluate its reliability by using contextual information. While, according to our analysis of all the available pre/post data (above), most SAFA students did not make this shift to using citation information for contextualization, many did show improvement in the foundational skills of observation and summarization that we believe to be prerequisite to the higher order skills.
Conclusion

Students and Faculty in the Archives was a three-year collaboration between college faculty and Brooklyn Historical Society to develop and deliver innovative undergraduate curriculum that would improve first- and second-year students’ document analysis skills, enrich their college experience, and improve academic retention.

The project evaluation showed evidence of success in meeting these goals, and a host of sub-goals. Highlights include the following:

**Students served: 1,100**

BHS program staff worked with 18 faculty members in three colleges, developing enriched courses that reached over 1,100 undergraduate students.

**Courses enriched: 65**

Faculty and staff together designed and taught a total of 65 SAFA-enriched courses, more than double the number anticipated in the proposal, 36.

**Faculty participation**

Faculty participated at a high level throughout the project. 15 of 18 of faculty members moved on from the first year to the second year. Project faculty held 75 individual design meetings with BHS staff, roughly 3-4 per person, exceeding expectations.

**Student learning: Document analysis skills**

Among 68 students who completed pre / post-tests, 78% showed improvement in key document analysis skills of observation and summarization.

**Student course grades**

Where faculty used the program’s instructional strategies – things like providing clear instructional goals and explicit supports for document analysis – students had more positive academic outcomes, including higher grades and greater rates of course completion and course passing – compared to students in courses where faculty did not use these strategies.

**Faculty learning**

Twelve of the eighteen faculty members (66%) improved in at least two areas of archival teaching, between the first and the third year of the project. For example, compared to the early units they designed, faculty’s later assignments showed: a)
greater clarity in learning objectives; b) use of a smaller set of documents with more explicit prompts to guide students; and c) more strategic use of context, or background information, to help students make sense of documents.

**Student retention**
Where the data were best, students in SAFA courses were more likely to be in school a year later than were students in comparable non-SAFA courses. (One-year retention rates for 15 well-matched course sections were between 4-11% higher for SAFA sections.) SAFA courses were likely providing the kinds of active learning strategies and engaging research experiences that have been found to be associated with improved retention elsewhere (Attewell, Hei; & Reisel, 2011).

**Summer Fellowship**
Twenty four SAFA students participated in an intensive summer research fellowship at BHS over two consecutive summers, and produced creative works and exhibitions that are now available online as well as part of the institution’s collections. The fellowship is as a model for libraries, museums, archives interested in bringing undergraduates from neighboring colleges to their institutions for an intensive research and exhibit design experience. Combining training in research, and in exhibit creation, it focused on building students’ academic skills of document analysis, argumentation and literacy, as well as their creative skills. Students said the experience gave them important new skills (research, analysis, team-work), new means of creative expression, and new ideas for career and academic pathways that they had not considered.

**TeachArchives.org**
BHS program staff built an innovative website, TeachArchives.org, that offers teachers, administrators, librarians, archivists, and museum educators a comprehensive resource for learning about and replicating the project’s approach to teaching in the archives. The site stands out as an unusually thoughtful and accessible effort to make the assets of the project not just visible but useful for a wide range of practitioners. In the experience of the evaluators, TeachArchives.org is the most substantive and well-designed web dissemination resource we have seen in an educational development and implementation project of this scope.
References


