

Feeling Democracy: Connecting students with civics using primary sources and government documents – Transcript of audio

Welcome back, everyone. We have arrived at our final session of the day. I am please to hand it over to your presenter, Mr. Allan Van Hoyer.

Allen, you are on mute.

Is that better?

Yes.

Sorry. My name is Allan Van Hoyer. As you know, I'm a government information and literacy librarian at CU Boulder. I will try really hard to monitor the chat, but I'm not very good at monitoring the chat and talking at the same time and I apologize if I miss questions. I hope there will be a lot of time at the end. I will give you a little bit of background about how this came about. If you were in the last presentation, you can guess a little bit about how this came about. Over two years ago, CU Boulder library went through a reorganization and government information was put in what we call the rare and distinct collections department. Before that, we were in social sciences. This is probably familiar to those of you who were in the last session. That was a pretty major shift for me in terms of my position and before this move I had focused on information literacy type classes and far less on the primary sources in the government collection or archives or special collections. With that move, because my area of expertise is really been instruction, I started teaching a lot of classes with the people who teach in our greatest thing collections like other classes. And how that looks, depends on the class but we will pull material from our archives into a classroom and students will look at them but it is based on an assignment from a professor that has contacted us, but not always. Just sometimes it is about experiencing what it is like to come into the archives or special collection in looking at our stuff. We had a good collaboration in the past with this department but one of our colleagues moved on and retired. They faltered a little bit. It was something we wanted to try to get going. I will talk about how this look specifically as I get going. But that is the background where were at. I want to make sure the picture I have is a picture that I took of a collection some of our students put together call the afterschool special. These are documents or posters we put together that are hanging around our floor, the government information floor. It's supposed to show the goofy afterschool special kinds of things. I think the reason I show this is a lot of this presentation is about that emotional connection to documents and how we can use that to get students and the community in general engaged with their other things. I think some of the things from our last session will be present it in here. I will go to the next slide. I do want to shout out my colleagues. This is not a new concept necessarily this kind of teaching is in a new concept for us. I would say putting it into the category of effective learning and critical -- and other theories is probably not something that is been talked about too much. Outside of a conversation we're having. But the idea of trying to connect students with objects, different objects to get them to look at things beyond just general information literacy is not necessarily new for us the radical science writing book arts approach is something my colleagues have done in the past. They took a science class and had them build their own display in our book and artwork and how that influences the scientific process. It is really interesting. The key to this class is about that emotional connection to the sciences and what you are creating. My other colleagues in the math library have been doing this for years and years. They talk in this article a lot about the using maps to tell a story. I think that is something that is -- I want to say new to me. That phrasing of telling a story. It is a new way of thinking about information literacy and our approach. I haven't really thought of that until I started moving into object base instruction. This is just about how they do that in the math library I want to call them out -- shot them out because they had done some amazing work. Both of these groups really have informed a lot of what we are doing. I want to highly recommend you read these. I will read the citations at the end of the presentation as well. I will also say, I am a terrible

speller. There is another 99% chance that I misspell something on the slides. It is what it is. It will be there. I apologize ahead of time. The background, I want to talk about the theoretical approach I'm talking about. After I talk about this, I will talk about practical steps and try to get some practical examples of how this might look in practice. One thing I should mention in my background is that as an undergraduate, study literature and history with the idea becoming a teacher. I have taken quite a bit of education classes, I worked on a PhD in education in addition to my work in the policy and Library and information science. This really informs the approach that I have taken this idea of effective learning. There are a lot of ways to define this. I am not going to be nuance about how I talk about this, but I want to acknowledge all of these are very much more nuanced and in-depth and I am presenting them. Please feel free to do research. I have included some articles that can be helpful in this approach on the last page. I want to mention that as you approach this, these are not necessarily what you have to do -- these are not the lenses you have to take. I think effective teaching is really important to what I'm talking about. But it is not the only way of thinking about that. That issue with critical pedagogy and very antral learning. Effective learning is concerned on how learners feel when they are learning. And how they internalize that learning experience. And their attitudes and opinions and behaviors. What it is about is this connection into how we are feeling in the classroom to how that affects what students get out of the classroom. For me, this is the really key part that is something they government documents and archives can have a really large role in connecting students to documents. I will get into this in a minute. One of the things I'm talking about is that ability to hold think it's really important to students, connected to things and that experience sometimes can help them to look further into what they are looking that they might not do if they were doing a Google search or a database search. There is something magical almost that happens when you have the objects in front of your face. It is not just concerning with that part of effective teaching also goes with how the teacher presents in the classroom for those are important. For this particular context, I am talking about the smell and the environment. Experiential learning is basically just the idea that you are engaged in the learning process and doing something. This is probably well talked about with Inge libraries. I think it is really key. This is different to a lot of information literacy that -- let me start over. It looks really different than a lot of information literacy classes we teach often we have students look through a database but the ability to look through a document and find citations or to smell it or flip pages is a really different experience. And I connected back to my colleagues. Sometimes they look like building an art, taking photos. We've had classes that have come in the right poem of objects but it is not necessarily about doing something specific. It is not a specific kind of experience, but that experience is really cool. I think critical pedagogy informs my approach this. Teaching and learning as a political act. This is talked about a lot. There are a lot of different ways to approach this. I would not get into the new one, but for me this idea of overturning power structure within the classroom, but acknowledging the power in the political act of looking at these documents in and of themselves is really important. So there is a combination here of archives or what we call rare books and government documents, so a lot of that is talking how do we get these items, when do we come to rare books and archives, when it comes to government documents and it can often be a conversation of whose voice is being heard. Who is a being heard? That kind of thing. It is really important to bring up with the classes. One thing I have realized as doing these classes and brought us approach into the classroom is because we are really trying to reach students on an emotional level, we reach students on an emotional level and sometimes that emotional level is hard. We have to acknowledge the power structure and gifted a space to understand the political context of what we're talking about. I want to be clear most of the classes I teach are not inherently political. I'm a political science librarian. That is the department I work with. The most of the classes I teach for this our English history, classes like that but not necessarily political and of themselves. But I also would argue everything is political and and how we interact with them but it is really important to acknowledge that. When going forward. Just some background on how I came to this approach and how it relates to

government documents. One of the first things I did when I started with I did a small survey of students in different seminars ahead what they knew about government information and if they had any concept of what it was whatsoever. What I found is that students really don't have a good sense of a government information is. I am using this as a really loose definition. On talking about GPO produced documents that we get to the FDL P but also other documents that may not be a part of that. Students don't really have a good sense of what that means. They often will capture one part of that. They understand it is produced by the government, but not why I was say the wife is a little bit less understated. In general, students don't have a really good understanding of what it means to when we say government information or government documents with to go back to this, that connection of showing the physical item can really be making that connection Claire for there are downfalls but I will -- especially when talking about current document. I don't know if we can always capture the breath of government documents when talking in these classes. But I think he gets that motivation started. Most students are very intimidated by government information. One of the definitions that comes up a lot is has to do with law and legal research. I think one of the things we can do to counteract that is to show that government information and research will government information is not always the research. Often times it is not. That is not all students, but all students -- the vast majority were very intimidated by going into the stacks or doing any kind of search for government information. That is probably true for a lot of our resources in general. But it seems to be more of a trend when we interact with government information. Students, students really underestimate government sources. And the breath and what they can do for students. This is particularly true in the humanities and I often hear students say things like what could a government document do for me in English class? Sometimes the answer is I'm not really sure but let's figure it out. It is a little bit easier to understand the context of political science and harder to understand when talking about English or any kind of literature of humanities. Government information and documents have something about just about everything. We often talk about that and I think students underestimate that. We can curate a class of outreach event to showcase some of the things they may not have looked at before. I did some formative assessment. That will be assessment within the classroom or I talked to students to get a sense for them in the seminars and students like to talk about touching things. This probably is not really a surprise. It was a little bit of a surprise for me how intuitive they are. Even if they don't really know what they are looking at or if they don't know what they are looking for, students like to have books in their hands. One response was it makes them feel like they are doing something important. To hold documents in their hands. That tends to be focused on the older documents, but not always. But students connect to an object, they wanted to know more about that. One thing -- and this goes to what is key. One thing I saw over and over again is we have limited numbers of documents we can share with students, and if students found the document which almost all students did, they wanted to know more about it and engage further into that process. Often times it had nothing to do with the class was about. But they were curious about something and wanted to learn more and that turned into research consultations, them looking through other resources and the background and history and engaging in that democratic process. A good example is a class I taught with September 11th. A lot of the students sat in the class were very young when September 11 happened. One of the things interesting about that class was all of the professors, myself and a couple of other librarians and the professor in the class were all alive we were all alive at different moments in our lives. Through the objects and through our stories we were really able to help create this emotional connection to the event itself. That students didn't didn't really have an awareness about. When in the things one student got really interested in about was what happened after 9/11? What did policy look like? We take that for granted because a lot of us live through that and we can see what happened with the patriot act and airplanes. For a lot of students, they have no concept of effort it created this whole project that ended up being this person sing your thesis. That can be a really powerful example of what I'm talking about. Students gravitate towards older items at first, but that is not necessarily the only

thing. When students walk into our classroom, and I keep using classroom. Would always do this in the classroom. I will talk about examples outside of the classroom that are just as compelling. When students first walk up to us or walk into the classroom, they see all those old books were old documents and those are the things they gravitate towards. But students, just depends. They will pair an older document and a newer document depending on the context and the class has to do with the subject but for the election outreach, I have a random items that are somewhat related to the election but not directly. I have an older man he will of -- from the New York public schools. A mingle of patriotism from 1909 or something like that but I have that right next to President Trump's impeachment report. Students will gravitate towards that older book, but as they go through there a lot more interested into those other documents like the impeachment report -- impeachment document. One of the things that always happens the students are really impressed or don't realize how much that contains. It is volume at the volume and they are quite a condense. It doesn't always have to do with the older items. They tend to gravitate towards those but that is not everything. In practice -- here is a picture. Of the manual. It is not a GPO item. It doesn't necessarily have to be GPO but I thought this was really interesting. Something that came across our book -- our desk. In practice, I try to focus on things of interest. Either old, weird or really current events. I can see a lot of discussion and I apologize for those asking questions and I miss them. Being tangible is really important to this emotional connection. I want to also acknowledge that doesn't always have -- it is always practical. In terms of being able to hold it but I think there are different ways we can approach that. But this thing, being tangible is really important. I try to avoid things that are more digital, not because they are not value, but in terms of what I bring out what I try to do is connect those more digital items to the tangible items so when a student is interested in something like the manual of patriotism, try to connect them to something less tangible and walk them through that. Pictures are often helpful. I think when I'm picking items, we have a tendency to look for things that look really cool. But that is not always the most important thing. Pictures or drawings or any kind of visual well get students or the community people to look at them. But that is not always the thing that engages them the most. Some of the most engaging documents that we have in terms of government documents are just congressional reports or things like that to have very few pictures, but once you start reading it to them they are really interesting. That library smell my use that as a code word for that -- I have a hard time describing what this means. When you walk into a library, there is something about walking into it in there is the smell, the feel and the quietness, the environment. I think that is really important. This not mean you have to hold it within your library. It is more just that you can create that. You can let students or community members old and we flipped through an older book, you can smell that. At the same time, you can -- if you look through your documents, there's another smell that connects you to something like that makes you more interested in some ways. Context, I think that is really important. I try not to hold anything without some contextual understanding about it. Everything I pool, try really hard to be able to talk about the context of. Kate mentioned in the last presentation that we have a copy of -- signed by Adolf Hitler. I would never pull something like that with the other context, whether it is other documents in our collections. There is always the need to connect that to contextualize that greater. That is not something I would choose for an outreach event before a class that can be important because we can have those conversations. But I think that context is really important. What is next? For me, there is always this tension between what I'm trying to teach or get across and what a professor trying to teach or the campus is getting across. I always try to keep in mind when I picking items, what is coming next for this student? Sometimes it is a practical assignment they have to do for professor, but for me as a civic literacy librarian, what am I old is always to get them to look at the next level. I always try to think of things or bring out things that will get students to start thinking about what they are looking at a little bit more. Impeachment volumes are really good examples because regardless of how you feel about that, it brings up some emotion and used ink about what this looks like NBC the document in its breath, documents, the volumes, takes up a whole table or

shelf. To see that, I guess you to think about more is more context that you might want to look at. That is something you can check out. But it tends to get students or community members to look further. I wanted to talk about a couple of case studies and what this might look like. This is a picture of what we are doing for voter outreach. I will go into that a little bit more. This is a picture of something we are doing for election outreach for the midterms. The first case study I'm here to talk about is what we call the ENV5 3020. This is a writing class for environmental study students. You can see the picture in the rental pamphlets. One of the things they do in this class, depending on the professor, is based around a grant proposal on something like they can propose to an undergraduate research opportunity grant. They are making a proposal to this. This doesn't necessarily directly relate to their assignment. But he gives them the context of what did family defense look like in relation to 1950s nuclear weapons. We also pull things from the EPA documents, we pull things from four sections. Civil defense, EPA documents, early 1940s literature about pesticides after post-World War II documents. And then they have 1980s EPA documents. We pull those all together. The archive will pull all the other books together and what they do is they go around this class and they look at these items and they try to come up with a topic and give that historical context to their grid. A lot of times with a will also do is take these assignments, take the documents and create a display to talk about what they're looking for. I noticed we pull in a lot of NASA documents. If you want to get students really connected to some thing, pull NASA documents. They are really cool. Students really like them. Especially photos. What we do is we give students time and able to look to these documents and take notes and take pictures. This is only one component of this. This is a professor that I work with for a long time. I also teach and information literacy session with them. I am able to take information literacy, component of things that require environmental databases and government documents and current government documents you can find a line and we look at these documents. We can weave it together. Basically, what we have is two or three classes that students are connecting all of this together and I try to do this class first because a get students really interested in that -- against them to start asking questions about what did pesticides look like in the past. How does that frame the questions we're looking at now? What I have seen is students will be flabbergasted by advertisements about deeds or something like that. Students will be like how could it ever be anything we talk about the history of that. One of the things I forgot to mention, one of the things really important is we over around with the students and engage in small conversations. We try to lead students another direction beyond this. If we were looking at this rule defense family defense pamphlet, we are -- part of what we are doing is talking about what does this mean and why did they choose this color and what is the timeframe -- what are people worried about? How does that change answering those questions? Early as for Lysol. I don't think we have done that yet. The pesticides once in the environment the science classes are the ones we get students really into. A lot of what the professor in this class once is also that rhetoric, focused on that. They talk a lot about that rhetoric and we reinforce that. We try really hard to connect that to other items. The idea isn't to -- this is really cool but it is what it would do we do from here. What is next? How to use this information to inform her research going forward? That is a really key part of this. Hopefully that is making sense. I will admit, it is hard to not be able to see people reacting. I still have never gotten used to that. The other two things are and election outreach we are currently doing and campus alumni event. If you are in the last session, talked about this alumni event a little bit, but I will talk more about this. I will give you some context. As we are going through it. Large groups basically are walking past the tables. Alumni events was focused towards faculty, admen, students who had just graduated, those kinds of things and family members. They had similar goals and that they were really trying to showcase what we have. The difference is that with the election outreach, we are trying to get people to engage in being informed voters. With the alumni event, it is we have got stuff if you want to give us money that would be great. A slight different approach with that. Both of these were partnered with archives and rare books. The election outreach is much more focused on government documents. One of the things we did was pair Tash we have a lot

art books and educational books. We paired some of our education books about what it means to be a good citizen with some of our government documents. Alumni has come this campus administration and admin for all libraries and being seen is really important. This picture is something I put together for the hundred anniversary for the 19th amendment. Just another example of outreach we have done. How this looks is it is really different. We are really trying to get students and faculty and community members who come to us. In the election outreach, what we are doing is handing out Colorado blue books. The state ballot information blue books Colorado is really good about this. A lot of times what happened in the past is students will come to campus and they don't get the blue books because they are sent to whatever address you are registered to vote. Students often get to their parents house, but they don't have the election information. What we are trying to do and I think it's been relatively successful is we have all these old books that have to do with elections or government information in general we're trying to get students to come and we will say a lot of this has to do with the election regardless of how you feel about the impeachment of Donald Trump, voting is really important and being informed voters really important and we hand them a voter information guide. We have also created a bookmark which I probably should have uploaded, but I forgot. We create a bookmark that links to a guide. I'm not a huge fan of the guides but it is like other ways to get information about the election. The whole point of this outreach is to help students to know -- to engage in that curiosity about the election. It is not about registering students to vote. On our campus we have plenty of organizations that are getting sooner to register, Colorado is also really easy and you can do same-day registration. It is not something we feel like we need to do. It is about getting students to be informed voters. The way we do that is we get them to be emotionally connected to something on the table. We are meandering around a little bit as well. That helps get students to them but it also help students to know we have a large connection. Our collection of items in students tend to ask questions. What if I want to look at this? I'm interested in crime statistics and we talk about FBI crime statistics and how that looks and we can turn that into a conversation about prison reform and things like that how all of these government documents can reach and understand this is she. We don't just point to government documents. But the government documents really get students engaged. The alumni event here this is where NASA stuff was. I wish I could encapsulate in some way just how ridiculous populated the NASA stuff is. For whatever reason, we had a lot of engineering students in engineering faculty at this event. That is probably part of it. I had brought out the binders of photographs that from NASA photographs and most of them are from the 1980s like space shuttles and really cool and pretty and I feel like they are super engaging. I am not an engineer. I don't see it from that perspective. I said look at this really cool piece of artwork. I would like to know more about NASA. But we also have nested NASA technical report from the 1960s, catalog of NASA documents from the 1970s, a bunch of documents like that. There were engineering alum who were looking at this for like an hour at a time. They could not get enough of these documents. Which is not what I expected at all. They look to the pictures and thought it was cool. But they were looking at some of these technical manuals and it was I cannot believe the connection they made. To go further to this point of effective teaching, connecting with the emotional and bringing students into the conversation and expanding that, what happened was we talked to these alum and students for a long time and gotten probably 70 consultations from that one event over time. Duplication with the same people, because they were so interested in these government documents. Sometimes they want to look at them, which is great. With the other -- a lot of times they say you have this technical manual and I been trying to find this manual for a while. You think you could find that? That becomes a conversation about we have a voter information or you can look at this about -- had a student who is interested in recruiting female engineers into Lockheed Martin. All of a sudden, she wanted to know historical documents relating to recruiting and for New Year's. It created this whole narrative and understanding between us. It all started by that basic emotional connection. I want to talk about keys. This is a book on prison design. I often bring it out for criminology classes or sociology

classes. The number one key for me is civics is participatory. I wasn't sure how to phrase this hopefully that makes sense. The premise to all of this is we want people to be anticipatory in the government. One of the things I found working in civics upon campus is that students think participating in civics is boating. Which is great. We want students to vote, but there is so much more to it than that. One of the keys is so documents codes of federal regulations or things like that other ways that students can participate within the government. We also talk about the issues surrounding government. We talk about historical documents, the census is one that comes up a lot. We talk about the historical problems with sentences and how race was defined and how families were counted and how that was defined in the Constitution and all of that can create really interesting conversations as well. One of the keys, getting students to recognize -- community in general is that civics is participatory and not just voting. It takes time and you have to keep working towards this and that is something I really try to emphasize when interacting with people when we have these conversations. That effective part is really and that experience is really about getting that initial connection, not to me but to the documents themselves. Acknowledging barriers is really important. Not everybody has -- works in a R1 institution like I do. These are things that we can do without having a large collection. A small library that probably have interesting things that you can put out that students can use. One of the benefits of government documents is often times the preservation need is not as great as it is for something like archives. I want to acknowledge some things are fragile and we don't put those things out just for people to look at. But having that ability to look at something is really important and that is something government documents have that rare books and archives often do not have the ability to do. Talking about feasibility, I think having a display is perfectly appropriate as long as we can connect to that emotional connection. Access is also really important to think about in terms of barriers. Not everybody has the same access. This is something I really thought about and I want to work towards making digital access better. Preserving digital items. I don't actually have a great way to look at that, but I think it is really important. Acknowledging barriers and barriers when you interact with students. One of the hardest classes I taught was a class on slavery and we had a slave documents and the government documents relating to it. We had a couple of African-American students who were very -- emotionally connected to this because they are a course. We navigating that emotion it was really difficult. One of the things that we made sure to do with tell this if they need to take time to step out, this is not something they have to talk about. If they need access later for whatever reason they had that. I think that goes into giving people time to process but this is not the thing that works really well unless you can get people to stop. They need time to process what they are looking at. This is particular true for things that are not really beautiful documents. I think that is really important, giving the time to process and is been really key for me to have someone who can speak about the documents we are talking about. I think you can do this in a way that is not necessarily mean your present. We tried this a few times and have a display case underneath a display screen. We have been able to connect with some of our documents I think it is feasible to connect people outside of having conversations. But I think it is important and should be in a space and a place they can have time to process. Knowing your audience is really important. This goes both in terms of knowing your audience in terms of if you're teaching a class, but also know your community members. I also try really hard to think about things that are hot topics on campus or in Colorado or just generally speaking, it always pick things of hot topics because sometimes that can be less helpful than you wanted to be. But knowing your audience and what they will be interested in is really important. Interesting items are more important the relevant items. What I mean by that is if you have the choice between something really fascinating but only kind of has to do with what you're talking about or something that has something to do with your talking about it is not interesting, I would choose the thing more interesting if you have the ability to contextualize it. That is the caviar. Pictures are not everything. They will get people to stop, but that is not the thing that really captures their emotions if they had time to process. A lot of times what captures people's intentions are things like

spelling, vocabulary that is weird, headlines, and I look at. In this book of prisons, death chambers, things like that. Regardless of the pictures. Pictures are not everything but I would say they are not necessarily key when looking. You probably want to have something, some sort of visual print but it is not absolutely necessary. That is about what I have. I have my citations and questions. I will scroll through and see if there any questions I missed. Hopefully all of this makes sense but I want to leave with his emotional connection can really be powerful and getting students community members interested in what you are talking about. In particular when it comes to engaging with government documents and it can -- he can really use that to change the way you interact with people. Let's see if I can -- if any questions came in.

There was a lot of great conversation and commentary, but I did not see any questions.

Awesome. I will wait and see if others have questions. I cannot wait to redo the commentary.

We will make sure you get a transcript of that as well. Anybody have any last questions for Alan?

I'm on a campus. We often see a lot of the same students over and over again. But I see a lot of return users. Especially from the outreach event. One of the things I thought a lot about what outreach is we don't have great outreach with our social media to students in particular. We try to campaign through social media, but we had a lot more success being out there. We do see a lot of return users from the sessions. In terms of the classroom session, it depends. I think one of the things I mentioned is librarians are easy to get a hold of than most people on campus. I get a lot of feedback from that. I think it helps on the liaison to political science, but I get a lot of students who are asking for more questions after. I see one that is the you pair old newspaper headlines. Absolutely. That is something the archives and rare books are good at. But those headlines are really, they can capture people in a way that others cannot. We try to do that as much as possible. It depends on the circumstances. What are your thoughts on whether something like I think that is a really interesting question. I point people to that guide a lot. I was teaching a civics class this semester and the first thing I had citizen was look at Ben's Guide. It is silly, but I think it is a really good overview of government and basics. I feel like one of the things the campus has talked a lot about his lack of civic education. I have mixed feelings about that. Having something like that would be really powerful. I'm not sure how it will look. I would want to see -- the national archives has something similar, but having pictures of the Constitution would be really valuable to this. I see a question. Do we do any work with new citizens, specifically students and their families are going to the naturalization process? We don't get a ton of interaction with people going through that process. But we have a fair amount of data students. Their questions are more related to telling their stories and trying to talk about what it means to be a DACA student. I would say that is an area we really need to grow on. We have some things that we check out, like the flash card for citizenships and test and things like that. One of the most powerful things we can do is to start the conversation of the history of immigration in general. And the ups and downs for lack of a better way of saying that and how that has looked. Occasionally, will answer questions from students about the legality of DACA. Those get referred to the law library because it is a little bit out of our expertise. I don't know that really answers your question that well. I would say in terms of students and families who are going through that process, that is probably something we can do better at. I will take note of that. I think we can bestow students in a better way. We have a really strong campus immigration office as well. Which is probably where a lot of students --. I have my email address on the slide it. I will put it in the chat. I am happy to talk about what this looks like or other ideas. I misspelled my own name. Let's try this again. Got it. I got it right this time. Please reach out if you have any ideas or thoughts. I would love to talk to anybody about this.

Thank you so much, Allan . Very interesting presentation and we appreciate you joining our conference. We are wrapping up day one. Tomorrow, we will be back at noon Eastern with two separate counsel sessions. We hope to see you then. Thank you and everybody for joining. [Event Concluded]