FINDINGS

The following statements reflect the results of our study:

1. Historians are concerned that new means of accessing digital information do not allow for serendipity.
2. Traditionally, historians, is not just the desire for the printed book, but also involves the physical research process, and the sensual experience (going to the stacks, browsing, material, etc).
3. Despite some anitities and concerns, historians were curious about the ways that digital tools could facilitate their research.
4. Historians are beginning to introduc new ‘heuristic’ forms of serendipity.
5. Most faculty are still teaching their students to go the stacks for their resources. The chance encounter with text is still seen as a rite of passage for historians.
6. Historians think that serendipity might be built back into the digital realm. Some faculty are teaching their students to use the digital shelves of their institutions much like they would the physical.

“Still tell my students that, with all the online searches, there’s still no substitute for going to the stacks and looking through and seeing what’s there”

“Googlebooks, however, has sort of just come into my life, because a Googlesearch is, you know you’re looking for a subject and then books come up and you can stumble across them that way, I should add that I use Googlebooks much more than the official bought library Ebooks”

“And then one wonders, well, what are the other ways we can leverage the digital realm to provide different kinds of serendipity that you wouldn’t have thought of”

REFERENCES:


Some university libraries are already making use of virtual reference shelves more apt for the serendipitous find by allowing stacks to become one of the shelves on either side of the book they have selected.

This research makes it clear that serendipity plays an important role in the traditional research practices of historians. The interviews showed that going to the stacks to browse and seek out the possibility of a chance encounter with information were a formal and part of the selection of evidence; and are perceived by historians as a rite of passage. Tradition, or the desire for the printed book, is a central aspect in the concern toward the sole reliance on Ebooks (Braunson 2008, Walton 2008). For historians, it is not just the physical book that is traditionally associated with their research, but also the act of going to the library, selecting material and possibly having a serendipitous encounter. For historians, tradition is more than just accessing information in old fashioned ways, but rather it encompasses the information practices that allow for new insights to form in the context of historical scholarship. Adoption of digital tools by historians is also occurring, though at a slow rate. Secondary source material is already being read and analyzed online. The reintroduction of serendipity into the online research process would likely see their adoption of these tools increase.