

“New Technologies in the Library and Archives of Canada”

Brief

Submitted to

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Introduction:

Since the 2003 Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities in Halifax, graduate students across Canada have expressed intense concern to our Association regarding a specific service offered by the Library and Archives of Canada (LAC): expensive photocopying fees. In an atmosphere of rising tuition and limited funding, the added burden of higher research costs has raised concerns among graduate students about the potential implications of the new fee structure recently introduced by the archives. At the very least, it could result in several hundred dollars of additional debt to an already impoverished student. In the extreme, it discourages students from doing some photocopying and thus detracts from the quality and scope of their research. At times, materials which may seem 'non-essential' under fiscal pressure could at a later date prove to have been, in retrospect, important to the current or future research project.

The Canadian Historical Association (CHA) recognizes the LAC's policy of differential fees for students. Unfortunately, the policy is not well promoted and many students are unaware of this policy; we would recommend, at the very least, that a sign posted at the reference desk is the least the LAC could do to inform students about these fees. But the cost of photocopying remains too high for many students.

As an alternative to reducing photocopying fees, representatives of the LAC have suggested in our previous discussions the introduction of new technologies to reduce research costs. We welcome the LAC's recent announcement to implement a plan to allow the use of digital cameras and we recognize the potential of digital cameras to reduce costs. Yet the policy only supports those who can afford this expensive technology. The purpose of the following brief is to suggest additional ways the LAC can introduce new technologies to reduce research costs and expand the potential for research at the LAC.

Scanners in the LAC:

With the LAC's recent acknowledgement that digital cameras and scanners are not a danger to the preservation of documents, the next logical step (in addition to allowing the use of digital cameras) is to permit users to bring scanners into the archives to copy documents. Scanners would function much in the same way as digital cameras and could be easily set up on desks in the research room. In fact, scanners are much more economical and, although less mobile, are in many ways an easier technology to access and operate than digital cameras. Since

scanners are already stationed in other archives around the world, this would not be a revolutionary step.

There is one potential problem with the use of scanners. Documents bound together as a book or on metal rings could be damaged if forced on to a scanner bed. At the very least, there is no reason the vast collection of documents at the LAC *not* bound in such a way could be scanned (except restricted documents); a scanner policy could be introduced limiting their use to loose-leaf documents. However, many archives, including the national and several presidential archives in the United States, allow self-service photocopying. There is no more a danger of users misplacing or breaking the order of documents bound by metal rings than there is for those using non-bound documents in file folders, and the archives staff already routinely copy documents bound by metal rings. Thus, we recommend even documents bound by metal rings be available for scanning.

In this light, we recommend the LAC make plans to introduce a policy permitting scanners as it prepares to do the same with digital cameras. The two technologies should be introduced simultaneously. Limiting the changes in the archive's services to the introduction of digital cameras and not scanners would do little to alleviate the burden on students and leaves us with the original call for reducing photocopying fees.

Scanner Stations in the LAC:

To truly make the material at the LAC accessible and to reduce research costs, the LAC might go one step further and introduce a series of scanner stations into the reading room. These stations would effectively function much in the same way as the microfilm reading stations. Three to five desks would be set aside for users, each with a computer terminal and a scanner. People could sign up in advance to use a station and there would be a set time limit to allow all users access to the scanners. The computer terminal would have burn/copy-capable CD-ROMs for individuals to copy their images and documents on to a compact disk. A tutorial (one usually comes with the scanner software) would be programmed into the computer for the users to quickly learn how to use the scanner. Since most modern scanners operate on the same basic principles and are user-friendly, it would not be difficult for people to adapt to their use (no more so than any other tool in the archives).

The cost would, in reality, be minimal compared to the potential benefits available to the LAC's users. A commercial scanner capable of scanning images and text currently runs at an average of \$150 (depending on the model). Scanners being frequently used will generally last ten years (with warranty) and require minimal maintenance. New computers could be purchased or some could be transferred from the reference room.

The benefits of introducing scanners into the archives are extensive. Research costs would be reduced and the backlog for photocopies would be partially eliminated. Teachers searching for images to place on power points or overheads in classrooms but concerned about photocopying expenses would no longer be deterred in developing images for their classrooms. Users would have quick and easy access to documents and images available in electronic format. The archives may even wish to consider the possibility of maintaining a database of all images scanned by users, allowing the LAC to exponentially expand its database of digital imagery to be placed on-line. Perhaps most importantly, the introduction of scanners represents a further step in developing a truly modernized Library and Archives of Canada with services comparable with or superior to other major institutions across the world.

The ultimate goal of this proposal is for the LAC to act as a symbol to smaller institutions across Canada. As a national institution, the LAC has a responsibility to experiment with new services and technologies and to act as an example to other archives to demonstrate new and innovative ways of offering services to its clients. Once the LAC introduces scanners, the CHA can promote the implementation of similar services in archives across Canada. There is a vast potential in this proposal for a complete modernization of archive services across the country and, in doing so, reduce research costs for students and others.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. The LAC place a notice on the reference desk in the archives notifying users of the differential fees available to students.
2. The LAC introduce a policy (as it develops its policy on digital cameras) allowing users to bring scanners into the archives, with the possible caveat against using scanners on bound volumes.
3. The LAC set up a series of scanner stations in the reading room for users to scan documents and images electronically to copy on compact disks.
4. If the LAC chooses not to introduce scanners, we recommend the LAC reduce photocopying fees for students to their original levels.