The principal record keeping instrument used in the Inka empire -- the largest state of the ancient New World -- was the khipu (or quipu; Quecha, "knot"). These were knotted-string devices made of spun and plied cotton or camelid ( llama, alpaca) fibers that were knotted in complex ways to sign numerical values in the Quechua base-10 numeral system. The identities of objects (e.g., names, statuses, etc.) recorded in khipus were signed by colors as well as by differences in construction features (e.g., spin/ply, knotting and attachments directions). This talk provides an overview of what is known to date concerning the use and storage -- i.e., "archiving" -- of khipus from archaeological sites along the coasts of Peru and Chile. The central question addressed is: What evidence do we find in khipu collections from archaeological sites around the former territory of the Inka empire that gives us insights into the production, use and performance practices associated with khipu archives?

Thursday, 20 November 2014 at 6.15 pm
Room 0001, CSMC