10-1-2010

Student Gets Creative To Tough Out a Rough Economy

Noah Lenstra
University of Illinois, njlenstr@uncg.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter

Part of the Archival Science Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/macnewsletter/vol38/iss2/10

This Up-and-Comers is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in MAC Newsletter by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Student Gets Creative To Tough Out a Rough Economy

By Noah Lenstra

In December 2009 I found out that a $20,000 grant I wrote had been funded. I am writing this article largely to encourage anyone out there who may be having difficulties finding full- (or even part-) time jobs in archives to take the initiative, identify a project of suitable scope that interests you, and write a grant (or grants) to make it happen!

The project for which I received funding to implement is called: “eBlackChampaignUrbana (eBlackCU): A Collaborative Portal on African American Experiences in Champaign-Urbana,” and it was funded by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC).

The four goals of eBlackCU are to centralize information on local African-American history and culture and create new knowledge through this centralization; involve past and present community residents in the production of knowledge by soliciting their contributions, both in the form of personal memories and in the form of digitized personal archives; create a community of scholars, activists and citizens interested in learning more about various aspects of local African-American history and culture; and develop the best practices to scale this project up to the state level in the implementation of “eBlackIllinois: A Comprehensive Database on the Black Experience in Illinois.” Our Web site is at http://www.eBlackCU.net/, and we are also on Facebook and YouTube.

Creating Digital Connections

The project grew out of a volunteer project I had worked on to improve access to a then-undescribed community archive of local African-American history collected by the late Doris K. Wylie Hoskins. She was assisted by the Champaign County African-American History Committee (now defunct), a grass-roots organization primarily made of elderly African-American women in the 1990s; many of its most active members since have passed away. The collection eventually found its way to the Early American Museum in the nearby small town of Mahomet, Illinois.

In this project I not only wanted to improve access to the material amassed by this organization, but also, in my own small way, to continue the grass-roots, public history work of this important, if short-lived, organization. Additionally, as a student of community informatics at the UIUC, I am a firm believer that digital technology is changing our society in profound ways, and archives will not be excepted from these societal changes. In more specific terms, the concept of the network society and the ability to network people and information grounds this project.

One example will illustrate how this networking of information found in archives works within eBlackCU: the eBlackCU team—which includes, thanks to our grant, six high school- and community college-aged African-American youth—posted both to the eBlackCU site and to Facebook digitized photographs of an African-American business from the 1950s. Within a few days, the niece of the owner of the business, who now lives in Minneapolis, found the photograph and contacted us with more information and to encourage our activities.

For those interested in following this project and to see our research products, please continue to check the eBlackCU Web site. I also am using this project to fulfill the requirements of the Certificate of Advanced Study degree at the UIUC Graduate School of Library and Information Science. The final report on this project, including its grounding in the literature and history of archival science and community archives, will be available in early December.

Writing That Grant

And now for some insights into grant-writing for the up-and-coming archivist wishing to develop a grant-funded project to support a project of interest that you think deserves to be funded.

Be intrepid; don’t just look to the “usual suspects,” e.g., the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Institute of Museum and Library Science, and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for grant funds. There are other sources of funding to support projects, especially tied to university campuses and state governments that may require you to conceptualize your work within a discourse larger than archival practice/ science, but that nonetheless are available.

Don’t be discouraged if your first grant is not funded. In fall 2008, I took the lead in applying for a NEH grant, and the process was so draining and took so much time (Continued on page 24)
and energy, that it took me some time to want to begin the process all over again. Yet in our economy the ability to secure soft money, as grant funds are termed, is critical for archives of all types.

Take advantage of the resources that exist while you are a student, or stay connected to your school. One of the key factors to the success of this proposal was my ability to tap into what Manuel Castells calls the “milieu of innovation:” an environment that helps to foster the creation of new knowledge, processes, and products. Your faculty, even if you are no longer a student, should be able to help you connect to this network of innovation that grants exist to support.

Be creative and independent in your thinking and flexible in your presentation. You may need to spin your project to fit the funding and program requirements but don’t let this hurdle stop you! Thinking outside of the box and pushing beyond your professional and personal comfort zones can make you a stronger person and ultimately a more competitive candidate for more jobs.

Finally, don’t count on grants as a replacement for a full-time job. Grants are great for a short-term burst of funding to support something with a limited time frame and (hopefully!) some tangible benefits not only to the organization applying for the funds but also for the larger community that supports the granting agency. But they do not produce sustainable jobs. So, use them for what they can do, but don’t count on them for what they can’t.

In December, Noah Lenstra plans to submit the final report for the grant and earn his Certificate of Advanced Study from the Graduate School of Library and Information Science University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

WSU Students Get Hands-on Experience
The Wright State University (WSU) Society of American Archivists (SAA) student chapter’s first event of the new academic year was the fall kickoff party for newly admitted and returning students in the public history program. Other plans include the MAC 2010 Fall Symposium, the MAC 2011 Annual Meeting, and visiting several of Dayton’s archival facilities.

The WSU SAA student chapter includes many public history students who recently have finished their internship, capstone project, or are in the process of working on either requirement. Vice President Chris Bills interned at the Learning Tree Farm located in Dayton, and Secretary David Brownell completed his capstone project processing the Kettering Papers for the Special Collections and Archives Department at Wright State University Libraries.

Established in 1973, the Learning Tree Farm is a nonprofit, educational institution, which has accumulated a sizeable number of records and educational materials over its 37-year existence. It was founded on the idea that students should be given the opportunity actively to learn and explore nature through hands-on experiences. The Ohio Humanities Council gave a grant to the farm to contract a Public History graduate student to preserve, arrange, and properly house its records. Chris assisted in the application of standard preservation and archival methods to the collection. The project has given Chris the opportunity not only to gain valuable insight into the field of archives, but a chance to understand how a nonprofit organization operating under limited resources successfully has maintained its role as a significant educational institution within the community.

David has been working on his capstone project in the Wright State University Archives, processing the Kettering Family Papers. The bulk of the materials are from Charles F. Kettering, one of America’s greatest inventors. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Kettering was directly involved or aiding in the research and invention of the automobile self-starter, Freon, ethyl gasoline, and even the first American self-guided bomb (the Kettering Bug). Kettering was also a major philanthropist, and after the death of his wife Olive, he spent much time supporting and funding cancer research. The Kettering Collection includes a variety of materials, from business documents, scrapbooks, and newspapers to 35mm films and phonograph records. There are thousands of photographs and slides documenting Kettering’s private and public life, as well as his adventures around the globe on his yacht. As a result, David has had to learn to process a large variety of media, as well as some interesting points in American history.

This report was submitted collectively by the WSU SAA Student Chapter officers: President Liz Haeuptle, Vice President Chris Bills, and Secretary David Brownell.

UW–Milwaukee Students Tour Scottish Archives
Students from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM) spent two weeks in Scotland learning the differences between archival practices in the U.S. and the U.K.