Documenting and Digitizing the Student Experience: A Collaboration Between Iowa State University's Carver Academy and the University Archives

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Documenting and Digitizing the Student Experience:

A Collaboration Between Iowa State University’s Carver Academy and the University Archives

Tanya Zanish-Belcher
Patricia Randolph Leigh
Iowa State University
Introduction

- Collaborative documentary project
  - Two-fold purpose
    - connect these students with their own individual college experiences
    - provide historical documentation for students of color
      - Most difficult to collect
      - Digital archival creates new challenges
Carver Scholarship

- 400 students (100 incoming freshmen)

- Merit based scholarship targeting
  - High-achieving high school seniors
    - GPA
    - ACT or SAT entrance exam scores

- Multicultural – balance of underrepresented ethnicities
  - Native American
  - African American
  - Asian American
  - Pacific Islander
  - Hispanic/Latino/a
  - Multi/biracial
Carver Scholarship & Academy

- Designed to promote
  - holistic development
  - acclimation to ISU
  - academic success
  - individual identification
  - community service
  - leadership skills
  - career goals
The Carver Academy

- offers guidance and enrichment to its participants in an environment that fosters continuous learning, achievement, diversity and integrity.
Carver Academy Courses

- **U St 105**
  - Required for First-year students
  - Transition to university
  - Explore issues of culture and social identity

- **U St 205—Leadership and Peer Mentoring**
  - “engaging students in explorations of topics concerning racial and ethnic identity development; the histories and experiences of underrepresented and underserved social identity groups in U. S. society; and the definitions and meanings of diversity in academia.”
Carver Academy Courses

- U St 205—Leadership and Peer Mentoring
  - Sophomores act as peer mentors to freshmen
  - Faculty mentoring of both groups
  - Sophomores create the narratives to be deposited in library archives
Special Collections Archives

- founded in 1969
- contains over 16,000 linear ft. of archival collections
Special Collections Archives

- 1,000,000 photographs;
- 10,000 motion picture films
Special Collections Archives
Special Collections Archives

- 55,000 rare book volumes
Special Collections Archives

- with the earliest dating to 1475.
Special Collections

- Is accepting digital and electronic records, the most recent being 225,000 digital images received from University Relations in the summer of 2011.

- Department’s first effort at collecting primarily digital records for documenting the student experience.

- The 21st century archivist has the responsibility to “identify, collect, and administer this valuable record no matter what the format of the records.”

Marjorie Rabe Barritt
In addition to their narrative project, the students also toured Special Collections/University Archives, in order for them to better understand the context of the project.
The Narratives

- Designed to allow students to reflect upon their experiences at Iowa State University both as members of the Carver Academy and the university and Ames communities as a whole.

- Students developed autobiographical narratives in several formats, primarily textual, digital, photo and video. Students could begin with a description of their family or community, or to focus on the here and now.

- Each student granted permission for their narrative to be archived as part of the University Archives.

- This is a “conscious documentary effort,” as articulated by Helen Willa Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities,* p. 78.
Results: The Narratives

- 29 projects were donated to the Archives, and were in a variety of electronic formats
  - 9 Powerpoint presentations;
  - 10 MS word documents;
  - 3 PDFs;
  - 1 audio; and 1 video slide show.
  - 2 in hard copy format
    - 1 was text,
    - other was in a scrapbook form, using printed photographs.

- All the projects were accessioned (accessioning includes the collecting of information about the collection) as part of the Department’s regular workflow for all donated collections. In addition,

- Students signed a deed of gift donating their collections to the Department, and transferring legal title and copyright.
In regards to the preservation, the University Archives chose the easiest methodology for preserving these materials for the long term:

1. Saving digital versions to the library server, ensuring continual migration to new formats

2. Also preserving a CD copy, providing the easiest access for any visiting researcher. However, CDs face significant degradation over time (a life span of an estimated 5-10 years) and need to be continually copied to new formats. In addition, technological obsolescence, and the ability to actually read the CD is a continual problem.

3. Also providing print copies in the collection. Print does not replace digital and its context or software to appropriately view the material, but still can provide a backup for the user.
Challenges

• Server space
• technological obsolescence
• needed metadata (description about these digital materials)
• preservation of software to read digital documents
• the difficulties in access and need for equipment
• staff skills and time
• long-term preservation of web sites, blogs, Facebook, and other Web 2.0 social media
Conclusions

• This kind of documentation project extremely important for preserving the experiences of students
  • especially those students whose stories may have been left out of the traditional university history
    • It offers each of them the opportunity to ensure their stories are included
    • allows them to see themselves as part of the wider picture of American history

• Archives will need to become even more creative about
  • collecting
  • preserving and
  • providing access to student records such as these in the future
Questions

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