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Improvisational Entrepreneurship and the Modern Library

In January of 2020, Dr. Lindi Roelofse, Academic Program Manager at UNI’s John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (JPEC), brought an ambitious idea to the library: she wanted students in her entrepreneurship courses (MKTG 3586: Strategic Entrepreneurship and BUS 3010: Entrepreneurship Fundamentals) to have a hands-on experiential learning session. This session challenged students in improvisational entrepreneurship using household items and various library resources.

Taking the experience to the next level, students were emailed instructions for the assignment and were told to report to the library on their first day of classes. Once arriving at the library, the class dispersed to five different rooms with experts to assist them with each portion of the assignment. Students moved through rotating class sessions in their visit to the library and, in just three hours, competed business research, a podcast, a video, 2D/3D product representations, and peer interviews. The even more inspiring aspect of the project was that each session expert concentrated on their area of expertise and were not aware of what the other sessions contained. This allowed for students and staff to grow and learn together.

In one of the sessions, Jim Kelly, Business Librarian, instructed the student groups in business research, including showing them how to find credible business news and how to perform industry and market research using Mintel and IBISWorld. He then made himself available to consult with groups as they worked through their research processes. Students created a short podcast and a one-minute video using equipment and resources in the Digital Media Hub (DMH) in Rod Library in another session. Anton Reiter and Rick Seeley, DMH staff, advised students on developing their creative ideas and assisted them in producing the audio and video products. The Makerspace at Rod Library provided students with resources to create 2D and 3D artistic representations of their products. Gail Bunz, Learning Commons Coordinator, acquainted the students with the tools, materials, and equipment in the Makerspace and facilitated the students’ use of the Makerspace to bring their artistic ideas to life. Lastly, the students were encouraged to do peer interviews about their products throughout the library.

The session’s success is a testament to the real-world nature of the assignment and the innovation and flexibility of the partnership between Dr. Roelofse, JPEC, Rod Library, and IT-ETMS. Not only was this collaboration a success for UNI students, staff, and faculty, it was also recognized by the United States Association for Small Business Entrepreneurship as the third-place winner in their Excellence in Entrepreneurial Exercise Awards on January 8, 2021. Congratulations for being recognized in what some describe as the Super Bowl of entrepreneurship programs!

Kelsie Willert: Connecting the Past with the People

Special Collections & University Archives (SC&UA) reduced their Reading Room hours this year because of the pandemic; however, that was no deterrent for one UNI graduate student. Kelsie Willert, a Public History department graduate assistant, has become a familiar face to the SC&UA staff. Kelsie can usually be found combing through images and boxes full of documents from the past, searching for information and answers. She came to UNI this year for the Master of Art in Public History Program after completing her undergraduate studies at North Iowa Area Community College and Grand View University. This may be her first year at UNI, but UNI is no stranger to her family. Both her parents are alumni, and her brother also currently attends UNI. Growing up in the fairly close town of St. Ansgar, Iowa, Kelsie visited many museums and history centers and found learning about history fascinating. The Public History Program at UNI was a natural fit for her plans to bring our knowledge, experience, collaborative spaces, and technology to this project.

The project of gathering information to form a historical timeline and narrative to celebrate the 50th anniversary in 2022 began during the Fall 2020 semester and will continue through next year. Kelsie began this process not knowing much at all about the Black Student Union. Little to no information could easily be found in online searches and required a trip to the Library’s University Archives. The project met with Jaycie Vos, the Special Collections Coordinator and University Archivist, who helped her think about how and where to start the search for information. As you can imagine, there is no neat little box of all the Black Student Union’s history waiting to be visited. Rather, information about the BSU’s history is sprinkled throughout many different records and collections within the University Archives. It will take many hours of searching through hundreds of photos, reports, correspondence, meeting minutes, newspapers, and other materials in the University Archives for names of people and other mentions of the group over the years. Kelsie described the process as a big tree stemming off in many directions. Archivist Vos has encouraged an open mind and that searching one area will often lead into another area to search through.

Finding historic information about the Black Student Union has been an involved and lengthy process. Research wouldn’t be complete without going back to peaceful protests and events that led up to the formation of the group at UNI. Events in the early 70’s involved the first Afro-American culture center, place of refuge and solidarity for minority students, being established on campus. Through the actions of the notable “UNI 7”, a key group of student activists, who were suspended after a sit-in at the UNI President’s house the idea of a culture house was born. The first mention of the “Black Student Union” wasn’t until 1972 after being renamed from the original Afro-American Society. The group’s mention in student newspapers was then more sparse in the 1980s, which required digging deeper in other resources and creativity in coming up with additional angles to search. Having primary sources such as alumni newsletters, flyers from events hosted by student organizations, calendars, and other records in University Archives is a way to go back to that time and see what was being said or what wasn’t being said or included. According to Jaycie Vos, “It is essential to keep in mind...
Brennan Hamilton: Sharing the Personal Side of History

A special project is underway at the UNI Museum as part of the Center for the History of Rural Iowa Education and Culture. If one were to look at the Rural School Collection, they would find photos, letters, documents, newsletters, and other objects from the past. The UNI Museum’s graduate assistant, Brenann Hamilton, and UNI Museum Director Nathan Arndt noticed that something was missing. The missing piece was the firsthand oral history of the students and teachers that lived during the era of rural school education. Brenann, a first-year public history graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa, planned to change that by beginning to collect these unique stories.

The project is a perfect fit for Brenann as her love for history began while listening to family members talk about “the olden days.” She often wondered what it would be like to live during those times and enjoyed taking a step back in time growing up when visiting the living history farms with her family. While she was excited to begin this project, it took extra planning and caution to capture these stories during a pandemic.

Brenann worked with several retirement centers, nursing homes, and through targeted mailings to contact a very much at-risk population during this time frame. She needed to create a poster and, due to COVID-related restrictions, offer alternatives to meeting in person while also addressing potential technology barriers. Collecting stories has included phone calls and Zoom interviews which required a quick technology lesson for those being interviewed.

She interviewed people from all over Iowa and one person from South Dakota. The majority of the stories she has collected so far are coming from people who were in school during the 1950s. This is when the Baby Boom generation experienced the shift from rural schools toward city schools. Stories from the 1960s and 1970s show another shift in education as those Iowa schools consolidated even further into larger schools. Vivid stories of the progression from the one-room schoolhouses of the 1920s and 1930s to the modern school district of today are on full display through these informational and emotional oral histories.

When asked about the most interesting thing about the project so far, Brenann talks about the contrast of what teachers talked about then versus now concerning mental health and bullying. The stories have given her insight into how those topics did not exist in schools back then. That is not to say teachers of yesterday had it any easier than today. In fact, she did hear about one school’s hazing that included wearing a chicken head around one’s neck. She also noticed a difference in how schools handle discipline in different eras. She mentioned that “if you got in trouble now at school you might get detention or an email sent to the parents, which is nothing compared to the story of getting a cleaning solution put in your mouth.”

One of the most impactful lessons that Brenann has taken away from experience thus far is that one should not take things for granted or assume you know the narrative because that is what has been taught. She stressed that one should “not write a person’s story for them and let them tell their interpretation because what they say might surprise you.”

Brenann’s project will continue throughout the next year, and she hopes that with fewer COVID risks, more people will be willing to share their stories. The project’s goal is to leave the UNI Museum with something for future researchers to enjoy and gain insight into those times. As Brenann shared, “the project will allow researchers to know about the personal side of history.” The UNI Museum has left a lasting impression on Brenann as well, for after she graduates in May of 2022 with Masters of History, she hopes to stay in the museum field where she can help others love history as much as she does.

Keeping Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Forefront

Rod Library’s ongoing commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has continued to expand. The library provides DEI collections and services for the UNI campus and broader community, engages in DEI professional development opportunities, researches and incorporates DEI initiatives and policies into everyday practice, and participates in nationwide library DEI activities such as American Library Association’s National Women’s History Month and the Association of College and University Libraries’ Academic Library Trends Survey about DEI.

The library’s collection strategists actively build collections that represent books and other materials written and published by people from diverse populations and that represent diversity in content. So far this year, 413 materials purchases have noted a DEI area as one of the main subjects. Recent service improvements include a commitment to include closed captioning on all library instructional videos and the purchase of new screen readers that can be checked out. Rod Library faculty and staff are always striving to improve our collections and services and provide a welcoming environment.

In order to stay abreast of DEI trends, issues, and conversations in higher education and libraries, Rod Library faculty and staff have committed to participating annually.
in at least two professional development activities related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This year library faculty and staff participated in events such as the Economic Inclusion Conference, the Queer College Conference, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ Winter Meeting themed Walking the Talk: Leading the Equity-Centered University. Further, the library’s Diversity Committee hosts internal events and discussions for library staff. Recently, in response to an article published in School Library Journal and subsequent criticism of that article, the Diversity Committee hosted a library-wide discussion focused on recognizing and responding to white centering in library spaces.

Rod Library staff look for visible opportunities to support DEI. Many library staff exhibit their pronouns on their name badges or on the specialty pronoun buttons created by the Diversity Committee. Library staff and committees seek to continue work to enhance, identify, and promote the use of library materials created by or about diverse voices through the creation of DEI displays and signage. The Diversity Committee curates physical book displays featuring library resources focused on various topics such as Black History Month, Student Activism, and Women’s History Month, along with curating online resource guides showcasing information ranging from scholarly articles to TED Talks. The library’s “shhh!” signs, located in quieter areas of the building, were updated to feature an inclusive art piece created by a UNI student and featuring a diverse group of UNI students.

With every small step toward a more diverse, equitable and inclusive campus, the library faculty and staff continue learning and growing.

UNI is Sharing Knowledge with the World!

While the pandemic was at the forefront of all of our minds and news feeds for the last year, something extraordinary was quietly happening in the Digital Scholarship Unit at Rod Library. With little fanfare, the rich content of UNI ScholarWorks came into its own as a valuable tool for many worldwide during isolation.

UNI ScholarWorks hosts the institutional repository of UNI’s student, staff, and faculty research output, among many other impressive resources. When UNI ScholarWorks went live in 2015, it took five years to reach one million downloads. But when COVID-19 hit in March 2020, UNI ScholarWorks downloads skyrocketed in part due to the accessibility of the platform. In just over a year and a half, access to the site has nearly doubled, reaching the next milestone of nearly two million downloads.

At UNI, students are encouraged to place their theses and dissertations on the site in order to allow the world to see and utilize their research. The hard work and research that went into their writings can be celebrated and showcased on a global scale, rather than gathering dust in a personal file, never to be seen by anyone else. Seeing one’s work published is something to be proud of, and it provides a great opportunity to share one’s accomplishments with potential employers. Those same benefits are available for all staff and faculty research and other works shared on the site.

The influence of these works is apparent both here at UNI and across the globe. The UNI ScholarWorks feedback feature provides incredible stories of how the accessibility of this information is helping to fulfill both personal and research needs around the world, and how much it is appreciated.

One individual described how “Introversion: relationship with mental well-being” by Elizabeth A. Balder helped them in their own journey of self-discovery: “I read a piece on introversion and extroversion, and it helped me coalesce some ideas I had regarding my mental health problems (a trauma that had implanted, as it were, a false extroverted attitude on my natural introversion and the negative consequences of that). It helped explain a lot.”

A high school student in the Netherlands reported: “Every senior in the Netherlands has to write a research paper of at least 25 pages. I chose to do mine about transracial adoptees in college...”

Feedback like this continues to confirm that UNI ScholarWorks is a significant tool for demonstrating the reach and impact of programs and departments at the University of Northern Iowa. The UNI repository also hosts much more than student, faculty, and staff research: there are searchable collections of art, conference presentations, old UNI yearbooks, digitized UNI football films, and many other objects and documents from the library and museum collections. Exploring these resources, created by and for the University of Northern Iowa community, is well worth your time! For more information, you can visit the UNI ScholarWorks website.

Notable Collections with UNI connections

- Palczewski Suffrage Postcard Archive was collected by a UNI faculty member, Cate Palczewski (Communication & Media).
- The Frank Lloyd Wright Structures Image Gallery was collected by a UNI Faculty member, Carl Thurman (Biology).
- The Journal of the Iowa Academy of Science | Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science (1887-2015) is from the Iowa Academy of Science an important state-wide organization which is hosted at UNI.
- The UNI Yearbooks and UNI Commencement Programs are a part of the University Archives

Mary Ann Bolton Undergraduate Research Award 2021 Winners

- First Prize, Frani Elizabeth McDermott, "Understanding the lived experiences of Asian American transracial adoptees in college."
- Runner-up, Madison Motz, "Assessing the Implicit Curriculum in Social Work Education: An Examination of the University of Northern Iowa Students’ Experiences."
- Runner-up, Shyanne Sporrer, "The Moderating Role of Mindful Awareness in the Associations between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Coronavirus Exposure with Sleep Patterns."