

ACADEMIC OUTREACH AND THE “NEW HISTORY”: NETWORK CENTERS CAN STIMULATE GREATER USE

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Since the discovery of the “New History,” scholars have shown an ever increasing interest in and enthusiasm for utilizing primary sources to interpret fully the events of the past and how they relate to the future development of man and his environment. The two most prominent catalysts for this “New History” have been the availability of the computer to help historians identify, classify, and interpret large masses of primary data, and the much increased accessibility of primary sources as a result of greater archival activity nationwide.

For instance, in Ohio labor records historically have been closed to the academician, because they have been identified incorrectly as records of a secret organization and because union leaders were skeptical of the scholars’ credentials and research motives. A comprehensive program, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, enabled Ohio’s Network Centers, through established acquisition programs, to gain the confidence of numerous national and local unions. This confidence led to the acquisition of over 150 collections now available to the research scholar. Similarly, the Center for Archival Collections (CAC) at Bowling Green State University, whose responsibility includes the acquisition of archives, manuscripts, newspapers, and other primary sources, also sought grant monies from national and local funding agencies to implement special acquisition projects aimed at agriculture and women’s history.

As a result of this archival activity, scholars' imaginations also have become more diversified through the 1960s and 1970s. Biographies and articles on great men, wars, and other national events have given way to such subjects as: "Woman's History is Local History: Free Love in Ohio"; "Jacob Beilhart and the Spirit Fruit Colony"; "Tobacco and Sex: Some Factors Affecting Non-Marital Sexual Behavior in Colonial Virginia"; "Things Fearful to Name: Sodomy and Buggery in 17th Century New England"; and lastly, "Where Does Old Age Begin: the Evolutions of English Definition."

Generally, the archival community advocates scholarly research, with collecting emphasis being placed on history and related disciplines such as geography, political science, sociology, and economics. For years academicians/archivists have assumed that only these disciplines could utilize the voluminous holdings of primary sources. However, CAC experiences have proven to be an exception to this assumption. CAC researchers have included the following professionals examining records related to their work: psychologists—case files; businessmen—administrative files; educators—pupil records; urban planners—planning commission records and demographic studies; politicians—voting and election results; and students of law—the voluminous court records.

Serving the research and scholarly community is the vital objective of archival institutions, even though many primary sources are also applicable to other types of research—genealogical, antiquarian, legal, fiscal, etc. If a network center is fortunate enough to be located at a major academic institution, then it has greater research potential as well as archival responsibilities because of the captive audience of faculty and students. The center must be supported institutionally, employ adequate professional staff, have the necessary storage and public use areas, and have a large enough budget to implement acquisition, cataloging, conservation, and preservation programs. Its scope and programmatic functions must be clearly identified and should support established as well as new curriculums.

For network centers to survive, they must promote, enhance, exemplify, and implement programs related to scholars and the academic community. The CAC was primarily established in conjunction with the Department of History's graduate program

in American history with emphasis on local, urban, social, and Great Lakes maritime history. It collects within a nineteen county area in northwest Ohio. The strength of CAC collections lies in 19th and 20th century American history with specific emphasis in labor, urban/rural agriculture, local/state history, Great Lakes maritime history, and the history of the university. Collections include local government records (court records, vital statistics, naturalizations, tax lists, proceedings, records of social institutions and asylums, law enforcement files, military records, marriages, wills, divorces), and records of all other official as well as unofficial functions of county, municipal, and township governments. The Center's manuscript collections consist of proceedings, correspondence, subject files, reports, literary productions, legal documents, financial records, scrapbooks, maps, printed material, photographic material, and audio-visual recordings of social, labor, business, religious, political, and economic institutions and organizations as well as papers of private citizens and public officials. Lastly, the CAC is responsible for acquiring historical as well as contemporary newspaper collections. Presently, it has over 400 newspaper titles, which collectively span the period from 1832 to the present.

At Bowling Green, the CAC's most important objective is to orient the academic community toward the potential for utilizing primary sources within established curriculums. Successfully convincing the scholar to utilize on-campus primary sources rather than driving an hour to "undertake research" is like attempting to catch birds with a box, stick, and fifty feet of string: they are always around but they never "drop in." Several awareness techniques and orientation programs have been attempted by the Center. A few were successful; many others were not. The Center owes its success to the involvement of faculty either departmentally or individually.

First an advisory board was appointed by the Provost to assist the Center with its academic development. This board included faculty members from the History, Political Science, Sociology, American Studies, and Geography departments. Not only were the appointees to represent their disciplines, but the intent was for them also to serve as channels of communication for their departmental colleagues. The board also advises the Center on academic

programmatic problems. Its liaison with other faculty members as well as with the off-campus community has been invaluable.

Another Center priority was to maintain a high degree of visibility by identifying and establishing contacts with other disciplines that possibly could utilize the primary sources. These include education, English literature, art (history), business education (records management), popular culture, women's studies, journalism, and chemistry. Methods for establishing contact included departmental seminars, presentations, speeches, and inventories describing new acquisitions. Center staff also was extensively involved in class orientations, on-campus committees, and professional organizations. Time was allotted for on-site tours by departments and classes, which afforded the researchers the opportunity to familiarize themselves with a variety of primary sources. Several faculty members made individual appointments with Center staff to become acquainted with the content of local government records and manuscripts before assignments were made or personal research was undertaken.

Over the last ten years, the Center has provided a variety of primary sources to various departments that offered courses such as: Crime, Violence and Poverty; Historical Geography; America in the Thirties; History of Journalism; History of Labor; Women's History; Presidential Elections; Psycho-History; Seminars in American Studies; Early Education; American Creative Writing; State and Local History; Women in Crime; Ohio Folklore; Traveling Theatrical Shows; Ohio Schools; and Early Architecture.

One Center activity that did have immediate results was CAC's role in new graduate student orientation. At Bowling Green, new graduate students are required to attend a series of presentations, discussions, and speeches ranging from the local cuisine to the availability of primary sources. The archives session usually lasts from one to two hours and is well attended by twenty-five to forty students who represent the departments of the social sciences, Education, American Studies, Journalism, Art, Speech and Communication, and Popular and American Culture. Professional staff speak on the purpose of CAC and its collections of primary sources, discuss possible research topics, and generally describe the facility with a tour.

Another technique of involvement is to encourage faculty to

provide the archival staff with leads to new collections. On numerous occasions, leads from faculty members resulted in the acquisition of several labor and women's history collections. Care must be taken not to encourage the faculty to negotiate for collections; however, their assistance often is necessary for an expedient acquisition.

In addition to established curriculums, the Department of History three years ago established a new program in archives administration which included several new courses. The aim of this program was not only to attract larger numbers of graduate students to bolster decreasing history enrollments, but also to offer them new professional experiences in using primary sources. The additional courses included Great Lakes history, family history, historical editing, archives administration, the administration of historical agencies, and quantification of primary sources. Additional academic support was realized when Education and American Studies students also began to enroll in the new classes.

There also are advantages to establishing and coordinating "Friends" groups, although the objectives most often are fund-raising and acquisition rather than increasing research use. "Friends," representing both "Town and Gown," will have a positive impact on collection utilization.

A well established and coordinated on-campus as well as off-campus public relations and awareness program is mandatory. Comprehensive acquisition lists regularly are compiled and submitted to national, state, and regional professional journals and newsletters. News notes, announcements regarding the opening of collections, and articles regarding major collections, newly awarded grants, projects, and professional staff and Center activities are publicly announced through the university's news service bureau, which services over seventy-five weekly and daily newspapers throughout northwest Ohio. The results of such a program can be measured tangibly through the number and quality of acquisitions as well as the number of scholars/researchers utilizing the material on an annual basis. Several scholars, local researchers, genealogists, and interested citizens have often commented on reading about Center activities. The exposure also has provided the necessary entree to the sometimes difficult area of manuscripts acquisition. Over the course of the last four years, the Center has averaged forty-

five news releases annually regarding programming, acquisitions, special projects, and grants. Local academic and community libraries have often been informed of Center activities. Success has been realized by establishing, within these facilities, a variety of planned lectures and seminars aimed at the academic as well as the genealogical and research community. Granted, a large majority of researchers are identified as genealogists; however, many times they are so well-informed that scholars and researchers turn to them for additional sources and information. Academicians, scholars, and often genealogists are invited to visit the Center to examine the collections and learn more about their many possible uses. The staff is available to assist these researchers and sessions have been arranged on "special" nights or weekends. This technique has been quite successful.

The use of publications also has been a successful means of distributing source information to specific scholars and other interested persons. With funds permitting, copies of guides, inventories, registers, indexes, etc., have been distributed without charge to those academic and community libraries within close proximity.

A successful program initiated several years ago, which continually contributes to the increased number of scholarly researchers, is the Center's microfilm program. When effectively combined with planned acquisitions, it serves as the catalyst for attracting the on-campus as well as the off-campus researcher. Problems of accessibility are virtually eliminated when the collection has been reduced to microfilm. Collections can be immediately referenced, duplicated, and could be made available through inter-Center loan. With this program, the Center provides a much needed service to the academic and research community, reduces the amount of original material it has to store, and permanently enhances the preservation of the collection. For example, since 1975, CAC has successfully negotiated annually an average of twenty-three microfilm contracts, which totally have accounted for nearly sixty collections and raised over \$90,000 in operational revenues, while disposing of over 4,000 linear feet of archival/newsprint material. User statistics for the same period indicated that archival/newsprint collections were the most heavily used not only by scholars but by other researchers as well.

While the successes have been few, the failures have been many. Open houses (two) for off-campus as well as on-campus patrons, faculty, researchers, students, etc., were scheduled on two separate days. The off-campus visitors, which included several scholars, many genealogists, and friends, outnumbered the on-campus faculty and researchers by a margin of three to one (150 to 50).

Special guests, including visiting professors, scholars, graduate students, and elected officials, have often been invited to campus to speak about research projects and the administration of records; however, this technique was usually unsuccessful. On one occasion, a well-known donor of labor records, whose career included possible Communist activities, labor strikes, House Un-American Activities Committee investigations, and international business, only drew 45 people to his lecture after extensive advertising.

Generally, exhibits are rarely used. In ten years the Center twice has exhibited archival facsimilies or duplicates. Local records, manuscripts, newspapers, photographs, and other literature were exhibited at the Toledo Zoo's Museum of Natural History along with collections exhibited by other regional, academic, and research libraries. The collections were exhibited for ten days and viewed by well over 50,000 people. Center statistics, however, reveal that only two scholars from the Toledo area ever inquired about the Center's resources. The other exhibit was displayed on campus at the University's Alumni Center and was no more successful in attracting patrons than was the Toledo Zoo exhibit.

Periodically, the Center staff has had an opportunity to be interviewed on television or radio. Usually this occurs with the acquisition of a major collection or in conjunction with a special project. Efforts are made to describe collections as well as to inform the public of new Center interests in collecting materials for specialized programs, *i.e.*, women's history, agricultural history, local photographs, and church records. Radio and television, as outreach techniques, have resulted in good public relations; however, the returns in increased collections and number of users often is marginal.

Those interested in obtaining additional information on outreach programs might read Ann E. Pederson's article, "Archival Outreach: SAA's 1976 Survey," published in the April 1978 issue of the *American Archivist*, with which the techniques employed by

CAC compared favorably. The report provides information on outreach programs utilized by archival institutions; however, because of the small number of respondents to her survey—90 of 400— and the lack of explanations regarding the successes and failures, the report's usefulness is weakened. Archival repositories, especially those located within academic institutions and whose collecting policies are defined within a cooperating network system, must develop and maintain academic outreach programs, the extent of which depends upon institutional resources of staff, time, and budget. Between ten and fifteen percent of CAC's resources have been allocated to developing and implementing its outreach programs. The results measured in both quality and quantity of users sometimes can be discouraging. The archivist should carefully weigh the need for both academic and non-academic outreach programs against the cost of the resources necessary to implement such programs, making sure to appropriate sufficient resources without slighting the primary responsibilities of acquisition, preservation, and reference.