Honors Students in Special Collections and Archives: A Long History of Experiential Learning

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Objectives of this Talk

- Examine the case study of Special Collections and Archives in the OSU Libraries as a fruitful environment for experiential learning by OSU Honors students.
- Trace changes in the relationship between OSU Honors students and Special Collections/Archives that came about as a result of institutional shifts within the OSU Libraries.
- Discuss new infrastructure created to further Honors experiential learning in the OSU Libraries Special Collections & Archives Research Center.
Special Collections: 1999-2011

Context

- Small staff: Administrator, Projects Director, Webmaster
- No dedicated professional reference staff – reference desk staffed entirely by students
- Student Staff: 2 FTE
- Repository for a few dozen archival collections
- Heavy focus on Linus Pauling
Linus Pauling: 1901-1994
Early Relationship with the University Honors College

• Honors Chemistry Class
• Improved Efficiency in Hiring
  • UHC effectively serves as a pre-screen for high-caliber student employees
• Assumptions about Honors students:
  • Intelligent
  • Motivated
  • Able to work independently
  • Strong written communications skills
  • Strong oral communications skills ??
Experiential Learning in Special Collections

- 100% of Reference Desk staffing
  - Able to do because of small number of archival collections
- Special Events
  - 2001 and 2007 conferences
  - Biennial Award Event
- Drop-in Tours
- Specialized skillsets, especially Graphic Design
Experiential Learning (Continued):
Technical Support for Digital Initiatives

- Digitization all done in house
- Students support:
  - Scanning
  - Metadata
  - Transcription
Experiential Learning (Continued): Linus Pauling Day-by-Day

May 18, 1940


Activity Listings

- AIP writes cheque to "Nancy Bowen." $10.00. [Filed under LP Biographical: Business and Financial, Box 4.015, Folder 3]
- Letter from Dr. Franklin T. Goucher, Jr., Department of Chemistry, Northwestern University, to LP RE: Requests LP inform suitable candidates of a post-doctoral research assistantship in chemistry. Explains details of amino acids. In a postscript, notes that they also need graduate assistants. (Note in left margin: "Howard!") [Letter from LP to Goucher June 4, 1949] [Filed under LP Correspondence: Box #140.5, file #140.5]
- Letter from Dr. J.G. Kirkwood, Acting Chairman, Cornell University, to LP RE: Apologizes for the confusion surrounding Hopkins and promises that he and Prof. Pappas will write when the matter has been discussed with him and other staff members. (Letters from LP to Kirkwood May 15, 1940, May 28, 1940) [Filed under LP Correspondence: Box #118.4, file #118.4] [Kirkwood, John G.]
- Letter from LP to Dr. L. Hayes, Royal Biological Institute, Hungary. RE: Invites him to speak at Caltech during his summer trip to the U.S. next fall or summer. Notes Prof. Zechmeister informed LP of Hayes return in June 1940. [File: Correspondence, 1940]
- Letter from LP to Industrial and Engineering Chemistry RE: Submits a wage advertisement for a spectroscopist. [Filed under LP Correspondence: Box 41822, file (Industrial and Engineering Chemistry - Correspondence, 1940)]
- Writes cheque to "The New Yorker." $7.00. [Filed under LP Biographical: Business and Financial, Box 4.015, Folder 3]
- Writes cheque to "Nancy Bowen." $10.00. [LP Biographical: Business and Financial 4.07]
Experiential Learning (Continued):
The Pauling Blog

Campbell, Pressman, Pauling and the Binding of Antibodies

Drawings of the interaction between an antibody and an antibody by simple denaturing proteins and allowing them to bind and refold in the presence of antigens.

Dan Campbell first collaborated with Linus Pauling on a fellowship at Caltech in 1940, during which time the duo tried to explain how antibodies are formed. At the time, Pauling believed that antibodies were proteins in the making that needed to be bound to antigens in order to form and complete their structure. Pfeifer and Pfeifer thought that it might be possible to create artificial antibodies by simply denaturing proteins and allowing them to bind and refold in the presence of antigens.

Despite the fact that Campbell’s initial test results contradicted his collaborator’s theory, Pauling went ahead and published his ideas, hoping that further research could support his paper. This began a lengthy study of antigen-antibody binding in which Pauling and Campbell attempted to develop a complete theory. Along the way, Dan Campbell’s research at Caltech would become very important to the Institute as well as to Pauling.

In 1943 a Caltech research fellow named David Pressman agreed to join Campbell at the Pauling Research Institute. Pressman and his wife Emilie lived in a small cottage near Caltech, and Pressman’s daughter, Emily, would later become a noted biochemist. As Pressman and his wife lived in the cottage near Caltech, they became good friends with Pauling and his family.
Special Collections & Archives Research Center (SCARC): 2011-Present
SCARC: Context

• Created from a merger of the Special Collections department with the University Archives. (2011)
  • Two departments had existed for a combined total of 75 years, and had developed own specific cultures, despite doing similar types of work.

• SCARC Staffing:
  • Ten faculty and professional staff
  • 4+ FTE student staff

• More than 1,200 archival collections

• Five major collecting areas: OSU History, History of Science, Natural Resources in the Pacific Northwest (including Hops and Brewing), Multicultural Communities of Oregon, Rare Books

• More and trickier reference inquiries

• Heavier foot traffic in the reading room
SCARC: Broad Shifts in Student Duties

- Direct support for individual faculty rather than generalized departmental support
- Support for reference services, rather than majority responsibility
- Shift in focus to arrangement and description (1,200 archival collections vs. a few dozen) and away from digital initiatives (mostly now centralized elsewhere in the library)
A Diminished Presence of Honors Students in SCARC

- Why?
  - No legacy of hiring from the Honors College for the University Archives
  - **But More Importantly:** OSU History students actively sought out employment with SCARC
    - “Archives” in the name of the department struck History students as a more natural organization to seek out when looking for experience (as opposed to “Special Collections”)
    - Economic downturn students more eager to seek out volunteer opportunities during college years, with hopes of getting a leg up once graduated.
      - As a result, a new hiring model emerged quite unexpectedly: new student assistants hired from the department’s existing pool of student volunteers (mostly History students) as opposed to being recruited from outside of the department.
Reinvigorating the Connection with the UHC

- **The UHC Student Archivist Postion(s)**
  - Funded equally by the UHC and the Library
    - One position in 2014-15, two in 2015-16
    - Open only to UHC students
  - Requires selected students to present quarterly workshops to UHC students introducing them to SCARC’s resources and discussing the practice of archival research
  - Has reopened the UHC recruiting pipeline
  - An excellent opportunity for both UHC and Library donors

The University Honors College
Special Collections & Archives Research Center

Partner to Offer the Position of Student Archivist

This position represents a collaboration between the University Honors College (UHC) and OSU Libraries’ Special Collections & Archives Research Center (SCARC). The UHC and SCARC have a long-standing relationship that has allowed Honors students and faculty to engage in world-class archival resources like the Ava Helen and Linus Pauling Papers. Over the years, many SCARC student employees have come from the UHC, gaining valuable experience in archive description, access, and preservation. The UHC remains committed to connecting students to these valuable employment opportunities and to supporting the appointment of a selected student to the prestigious position of Student Archivist.

Additional Information on the program and the application procedure is available at [www.oregonstate.edu/dept/honors/SCARC](http://www.oregonstate.edu/dept/honors/SCARC)
Outcomes for Students

• For Honors Students – a richer experience
  • Many UHC students are not in the humanities and would not otherwise be exposed to the archival enterprise
    • One student actually changed her career path

• For all students – an improved skillset
  • Oral and written communication skills cannot help but be enhanced
  • Often will have a tangible product to show for their work

• The case of the Library Awards survey

Differing interpretations of what they did...
Thanks!

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