STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A ROBUST ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM AT AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY

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Annual Meeting of the Oral History Association
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The Valley Library at Oregon State University
Institutional Context

• A medium-sized academic library...
  • $12.7 M total budget ($4.2 M for collections)
  • 58 FTE professional staff
  • 41 FTE student assistants
• ...that has learned to do more with less
The Resulting Point of View
Resulting Personal Context

• Library faculty are encouraged to be innovative in how they approach their work
• Seed money is made available for library faculty to explore new ideas
• Position descriptions are built with flexibility in mind, so long as one’s primary assignment doesn’t suffer from inattention
One Outcome: The SCARC Oral History Program

• 1975-1990 (pre-history): Oral history work falls under the purview of a campus museum

• 2011: SCARC faculty begin pursuing oral history as a scholarly interest

• 2016: SCARC formalizes its oral history program

• Today: ~1,900 interviews in 44 collections; 500+ conducted by SCARC faculty (3) and students since 2011
The Point of This Talk

• Convey our experiences (anticipated and learned) about:
  • Making your case (to administrators) to start or grow a program...
  • ...and doing the work in a way that will help to build momentum
Making Your Case: Collection Development

OREGON HOPS & BREWING ARCHIVES

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
Making Your Case:
Community Engagement

Oregon Multicultural and Queer Archives

Oregon State University
Making Your Case: Donor Relations

Tracy Daugherty

Jane Lubchenco

Bob Moore
Doing the Work: Get Your Legacy Collections in Shape

Bertha King, ’08, pauses in the Golden Jubilee activities to be interviewed by Jennifer Lee for the Oral History Program of OSU’s Horner Museum. Under the program, personal recollections of early alumni and other residents of the area are taped.

Miss King, a school teacher for many years in several western Oregon communities, now lives in Lincoln City.
Doing the Work: Align with Your Strategic Plan

• In our case:
  • Undergraduate experiential learning

• Instruction

• Community building within the library
Doing the Work: Leverage Existing Resources

This exhibit consists of a series of interviews conducted primarily in 1979 with a collection of individuals who maintained a connection to Oregon Agricultural College, as Oregon State University was known until 1927. The majority of these interviews were captured by staff working at the Horner Museum, which resided on the Oregon State campus for seventy years.

From 1975 to 1992, the museum provided support for a vibrant oral history program that collected the stories of individuals who were important to campus life and, indeed, to the fabric of Oregon on multiple levels. Read today, the narratives offered in this exhibit by alumni, retired faculty, and more casual acquaintances of OAC, stand as just one example of the richness, vision and lasting value of the museum’s oral history work.

Presented by the Oral History Program at the Special Collections and Archives Research Center, Oregon State University Libraries.

Powered by Omeka and the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer.
Doing the Work: If the Iron Heats Up, Strike
And Last But Not Least...

Once you feel you are ready, define yourself as a program!

- Easier to market yourself
- Easier to attract potential funding
- Very useful for internal organization
Conclusion

• Libraries and Oral History are a great fit!
• Building an Oral History program on limited funds is do-able!
• Library administrators have a vested interest in many types of oral history work...
• ...think strategically and get them on board.
Thanks!

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http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oralhistory.html