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HUMBOLDT IN THE TIME OF COVID: ARCHIVING HISTORY AS IT'S HAPPENING



By Suzanne Pasztor,
HSU History Professor

Like many faculty members, the shift to online teaching and learning in the Spring Semester of 2020 created a lot of anxiety. My biggest deer-in-the-headlights moment was when I began to realize how difficult it would be to support the History department internship program in a lockdown situation. As COVID began to shut down opportunities for sending HSU students into the community for hands-on educational opportunities became more complex,

those of us who direct internships and supervise Service Learning placements cast about for an alternative in the new virtual environment.

It was in this context that a funding announcement by Jon Parrish Peede, the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, pointed to a solution. "To the extent that healing is to come during and after this pandemic, it will be through humanities fields



from philosophy to literature to history to religious studies—through the act of documenting, preserving, sharing, and reflecting—that our communities will move toward a greater sense of wholeness,” Peede said. It was shortly after reading this quote that I attended a virtual meeting with internship and Service Learning faculty, as well as staff from the Center for Community Based Learning. What had felt like a frantic scramble for a solution was replaced by a sense of excitement, and by the conviction that we had a unique opportunity to engage our students in helping the community weather the pandemic. *Everyone* would have a story of living in this difficult time.

Why not send our students out virtually, to capture those stories? Why not enlist our students in capturing the raw material for a historical archive? And why not use that raw material, as we emerged from the pandemic, to create a museum exhibit called “Humboldt in the Time of COVID”?

As luck would have it, several university libraries, including our own, were also beginning to work on virtual archives that would capture experiences of the pandemic. Thus the two visions came together: internships and Service Learning opportunities for HSU students, and an online historical archive curated by Special Collections Librarian extraordinaire, Carly Marino. Because of relationships fostered over the years through internships, the Clarke Historical Museum in Eureka joined as well.

Our efforts began in earnest in the fall of 2020, when faculty from History, Politics, Religious Studies, Art and Art History, Sociology, Social Work, Business, Journalism, and Kinesiology began sending student interns and Service Learners to conduct virtual interviews. Their work was informed by a wealth of questions generated by the historic moment in which we found ourselves: How had the pandemic affected local businesses, and the local economy? How were faith-based communities

responding? What was the effect of the pandemic on the homeless population and the organizations serving that population? How was Humboldt County’s artistic community responding to the pandemic?

Dr. Berit Potter, a Professor of Art at HSU and the Director of the Museum and Gallery Practices program provided training in how to conduct oral interviews. The Center for Community Based Learning provided virtual space for Internship and Service Learning faculty to meet regularly to exchange ideas and assemble tip sheets and other resources for our students doing work out in the virtual “field.” Each faculty member catered the experience to students in their major field. For me, that meant pushing history interns to reflect not only on the impact of the pandemic, but also on the question of how this time might be remembered by future generations. As my students worked on their interviews, transcribed them, and prepared to submit them to the archive, we met regularly to share experiences, ideas, and impressions. At the end of the semester, as students readied their transcribed interviews for the virtual archive, each intern gave an informal presentation, sharing their findings and attempting to analyze the pandemic as a professional historian might.

From the start, the Humboldt in the Time of COVID project has seen a remarkable level of collaboration across campus. Stacy Becker and Loren Collins of the Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL) have provided invaluable direction to countless students, utilizing community connections that the Center has cultivated for years. Kelly Fortner, the CCBL Student Support Coordinator, served as the coordinator of the Humboldt in the Time of COVID team of faculty and staff. Carly Marino has steadily curated the archive, while herself supervising interns in the work required to bring the archive together.

Students have collaborated across disciplines, working together on interviews and community outreach.

Zayne Nordberg, a history major with an interest in faith-based communities, worked with Religious Studies major Madeleine Wilson to interview Rabbi Naomi Steinberg of Temple Beth El. Both students benefited from each others' insights as they crafted an "interdisciplinary" set of interview questions.

The Spring 2021 semester has brought a new group of interns and Service Learners to the Humboldt in the Time of COVID project. More stories are being collected and archived, and internship and Service Learning faculty anticipate another group of student participants next fall, perhaps even with the possibility of face-to-face interviews. As our students are learning, the effects of this pandemic will continue to be felt in myriad ways, shaping the experiences of countless individuals and providing a critical reference point for those who have survived. As a historian and director of an internship program, it has been a privilege to watch our students engage with this historic moment. As a member of the HSU community, it has been heartening to collaborate with other faculty across campus, with the Library, and with the Center for Community Based Learning.

It seems to me that Humboldt in the Time of COVID is an example of the best the university has to offer:

students and community engaged with one another, faculty and staff working together, across disciplines to share ideas and provide a quality program.

Link to the Humboldt in the Time of COVID Digital Archive:

[Humboldt in the Time of COVID - Digital Archive | Special Collections](#)

Links to examples of oral histories that students in Academic Internship and Service Learning classes conducted:

[Humboldt in the Time of COVID: Interviews with Rabbi Eli Cowen and Rabbi Naomi Steinberg](#)

[Humboldt in the Time of COVID: Oral Histories with HSU Students and Professors](#)

[Humboldt in the Time of COVID: How COVID Has Changed Coaching for Humboldt State Women's Rowing](#)

[Trailer for Homeless in Humboldt During COVID-19 documentary](#)

Humboldt in the Time of COVID Partnerships:

Karen August - Faculty, Sociology
Stacy Becker - Staff, Center for Community Based Learning
Kayla Begay - Faculty, Native American Studies
Katie Beusch - Community Partner, Clarke Historical Museum
Brittany Britton - Staff, Art
Michelle Cartier - Faculty, Film
Loren Collins - Staff, Center for Community Based Learning; Faculty, Political Science
Yvonne Doble - Staff/Faculty, Social Work
Kelly Fortner - Staff, Center for Community Based Learning
Sara Hart - Faculty, Religious Studies
Carly Marino - Faculty, HSU Library
Whitney Ogle - Faculty, Kinesiology
Ara Pachmayer - Faculty, Recreation Administration
Suzanne Pasztor - Faculty, History
May Patino - Faculty, Anthropology
Berit Potter - Faculty, Art
Victoria Sama - Faculty, Journalism and Mass Communication
Gordon Ulmer - Faculty, Anthropology
Nancy Vizenor - Faculty, Business
Jim Woglom - Faculty, Art and Teacher Education