Documenting a Pandemic: COVID-19
Community History Project

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Project Overview
COVID-19 Community History Project at MSU

• The COVID-19 Pandemic has become a unique and significant part of world history. As these historic events continue to affect our everyday lives at Minnesota State University, Mankato and the greater Mankato community, the University Archives plans to document personal experiences in the form of a community history project.

• The University Archives will collect, preserve, and provide access to these COVID-19 Pandemic experiences for current and future researchers. Many of these experiences will be made accessible through our digital collections, freely available on the internet through ARCH, the University Archives digital collections site. We want to ensure we leave behind a substantial record for future scholars and historians.
COVID-19 Community History Project Collection

• Official University communications
• University social media posts
• Oral History Interviews
• Individual Experience
  • Self Interview
  • Journal or Diary
  • Reflective essay
  • Creative work (poetry, photography, drawings, etc.)
  • Other ways as suggested by Participants

“Fiesta Postponed” by Cali Cantu
Who would contribute to this project?

• Students in University courses
  • Some professors may include the oral history or individual experience documentation as part of their course. All donations to the Archives should be voluntary.

• Members of the Community
  • Individuals who want to contribute their experiences are welcome to do so.
  • This includes the campus and greater Mankato community.
  • This component of the project was launched June 2020.

• Student Workers at the University
  • In collaboration with University Archives staff, Student Supervisors can assign this project as a work task.
  • International Students were hired to specifically work on this project.
Project Management
A LOT of Student Employees

- Project Management Team
- Student Supervisors across campus
  - 18 supervisors from 9 departments
- Project website was integral to communication

Enhanced Training

- Supervisors
  - Project expectations and overview
  - All student training
- Students
  - Project expectations and overview
  - Readings on conducting oral histories, journaling, and more.
  - Weekly themed emails
Public Facing Tools (aka Software)

- LibApps by SpringShare
  - LibGuides
  - Project Website (public)
  - Project Website (student employee)
    - https://libguides.mnsu.edu/covid19historyproject
  - LibWizard
  - Training Quiz
  - “My COVID-19 Experience” submission form
## Thoughts on LibApps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complications (Minor)</th>
<th>Successes (Lots!)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Quiz was attached to the creator</em></td>
<td><em>Overall ease of use in a team environment</em></td>
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<td><em>Sending the wrong link from the LibGuides</em></td>
<td><em>User friendly for team and project participants</em></td>
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<td><em>Use this project as a framework for future collaborations to strengthen University Archives and Southern Minnesota Historical Center collections</em></td>
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Internal Management Tools (aka Software)

- **Microsoft Teams**
  - Stored all submissions in a COVID-19 Team
  - Excel Tracking Document
  - Stored all social media and campus communications

- **Move-It Securely**
- **Shared Email**
  - archives@mnsu.edu
Thoughts on Microsoft Teams

Complications

• Can only have one Team open at a time
• Not video friendly

Successes (Lots!)

• Overall ease of use in a team environment
• 1 TB of storage for each team
• Ability to bring a specific document to a person (or groups) attention
• Chat saved lots of time
Project Summary
Project Contributors

• Total Student Employees: 122
  • Student Workers from campus departments
  • International Students

• Total Student Supervisors: 18

• Students added to project throughout the spring semester and summer.

• Level of engagement varied throughout the project. (June & July participation was high.)
Contributions by Type (As of August 18, 2020)

- Oral Histories (recorded and written) - 396
- Recorded self-interviews – 393
- Drawings/Paintings – 141
- Other creative projects – 251

- Total contributions: 1181

“Closed Restaurants” by Steven Orvaiti
Project Highlights:

• Early submissions reflected fear and anxiousness of the unknown. Over time they have started to reflect hope and an acceptance of new normal.

• Creativity of student submissions

• Students reflected on social justice movement worldwide

• Interviews with people from around the United States and the world

• Many languages used to conduct interviews

• Students working from all over the world

• Valuable collaborations across campus made this project possible
Creative Projects - Artwork

Joshua Lazarus

Jacqueline Asplund

We Can Beat This - Together
Estrevistador: Y ahora ¿Cómo haces para pasar el tiempo?

Interviewer: Tell us about how you are passing the time.

Entrevistado: Bueno, he aprendido diferentes cosas como dije antes, organizó mejor mi tiempo. Pues, al organizar mejor mi tiempo estoy aprendiendo a tocar el ukulele, cocino, hago ejercicio y leo.

Interviewee: As I said earlier, I have been learning new things since I improved my time management. I am learning to play the ukulele. I cook, exercise, and read.

Portion of an oral history interview conducted in Spanish and translated into English
Next Steps
Sharing the Collection

• Examples of contributions
  • Library Social Media channels
  • University Archives website
    • [https://library.mnsu.edu/archives/covid-19-project-stories/](https://library.mnsu.edu/archives/covid-19-project-stories/)

• Archives Collections
  • Physical Collection in Archives
  • ARCH: University Archives Digital Collections – In development
  • Access dates are TBD

• Collection Restrictions
  • Restricted for 10 years - 186
  • Anonymous - 606
  • Physical collection only - 151

Photograph by Anonymous student of Ostrander Student Memorial Bell Tower
Survey Participants

• Students – 22 Responses
  • How this project impacted them
  • What they learned
  • What was the most helpful
  • What would they recommend changing

• Supervisors and other campus collaborators – 5 responses
  • What was most helpful
  • What would they recommend changing
What was the most positive aspect of your participation in the project? (Students)

• Helped me express myself and cope with this stressful time
• Oral history response. Learned lots of difficulties peoples had to face during covid19.
• Participating in this project has helped me unearth many of my talents. For example, this project has made me realize that I can write poems, journals and draw very well and I'm happy to unravel my talents through this project.
• The most positive aspect is the interaction with interviewees from different backgrounds and how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected them.
What was the most positive aspect of your participation in the project? (Supervisors)

• Having the opportunity to keep my students working throughout the summer was the biggest positive. They were all very appreciative to have a chance to get some hours while our office was closed. It was also neat, and at times humbling, to read and listen to some of the interviews my students did.
Final Thoughts

Complications

• Paying students to be contributors was challenging
• Technology provided both innovation and struggles for this type of project

Successes

• Use this project as a framework for future collaborations to strengthen University Archives and Southern Minnesota Historical Center collections
• Unique, global collection that will stand out amongst other COVID-19 projects done around the country
Questions? Contact the Archives Team

University Archives and Southern Minnesota Historical Center

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Today’s Presentation:
https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/lib_services_fac_pubs/181/

Project Website:  https://libguides.mnsu.edu/covid19historyproject