Documenting a Pandemic: COVID-19 Community History Project

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Background

• Minnesota State University, Mankato
  • Public, comprehensive university
  • Located in southern Minnesota
  • More than 14,000 students, including more than 1,170 international students from 89 countries
  • Over 130 undergraduate programs and 85 graduate programs, including several doctoral programs.*

• University Archives and Southern Minnesota Historical Center
  • https://library.mnsu.edu/archives
  • Digital Collections
    • ARCH - https://arch.lib.mnsu.edu/
    • Cornerstone - https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/

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
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
Project Summary
Project Contributors

• Total Students: 124
  • 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

- Oral Histories (recorded and written) - 396
- Recorded self-interviews – 395
- Drawings/Paintings – 141
- Other creative projects – 251

- Total contributions: 1183

“Closed Restaurants” by Steven Orvaiti
Creative Projects - Artwork

Joshua Lazarus

Jacqueline Asplund

We Can Beat This - Together
Portion of an oral history interview conducted in Spanish and translated into English

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.
Next Steps
Processing the Collection

• 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
Survey of Contributors

• Students – 22 Responses
  • How this project impacted them
  • What they learned
  • What was the most helpful
  • What would they recommend changing
COVID-19 Community History Project

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
• Global collection of COVID-19 projects experiences.
Reuse Project Framework

Examples of new projects

• #No Justice, No Peace Community History Project

• Mankato Kiwanis 100th Anniversary Oral History Project

Elements reused

• Website structure (LibGuides)

• Training resources

• Submission forms (pdfs)

• Online submissions (web form)

• Web based tools for interviews

• FAQ
Wrap Up

University Archives and Southern Minnesota Historical Center

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Today’s Presentation: https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/lib_services_fac_pubs/184/

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