#RESIST: Building an online exhibit

Culminating Internship

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Introduction

For my culminating internship, I was able to work under the guidance of Special Collections Curator, Kate Crowe, to build an online exhibit to complement a physical exhibit centered on student activism at DU. #RESIST was the idea of an undergraduate activist who wanted to chronicle events of present as well as look into instances of student activism in DU’s past.

My overarching goal in this practicum was to understand how this particular archive preserves DU’s institutional memory. I was particularly interested in working with Kate because of her involvement on-campus outside of the library. Kate is an engaged faculty member, showing up at events advocating for accountability and better treatment and protection of minority students (e.g. Free Speech Wall demonstrations, faculty senate meetings, Diversity Summit). In line with my research, I want to work under Kate’s supervision to see how activism can be infused into the daily job of an academic archivist.

Goals and objectives

1. Gain experience in an academic library/archive setting.
   a. Attend department meetings
   b. Learn workflow of Special Collections
2. Learn the backend of Omeka in order to create an exhibit to complement #RESIST.
   a. Use DU’s Special Collections as a template for another exhibit
   b. Create exhibit template, uploading metadata from #RESIST objects
3. Create a digital exhibit based on the physical “#RESIST” protest to engage students in a different way. The goal of this exhibit will be to complement the physical exhibit, but also offer more ways for students to engage with present day student activism than the physical exhibit allows.
   a. Edit existing exhibit captions to fit digital format
   b. Create links in caption text to social media tags
      i. #BlacklivesDUmatter
      ii. #OneDU
   c. Upload photos into #RESIST exhibit
4. Coordinate an in-person student object collection event
   a. Put call out to students for objects about student life – photos, documents, etc.
   b. Create collection process
   c. Advertise collection event
   d. Host collection event
   e. Develop permission agreements for donors to sign
   f. Staff collection event

Work plan

In order to achieve the goals and objectives outlined above, I adhered to the following plan:

1. Meet with Kate to determine project scope
   a. Relates to goals: 1a & 1b
2. Acquire access to online systems
   a. Relates to goals: 1b, 2a & 2b
3. Determine which objects to include in online exhibit
   a. Relates to goals: 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 3c
4. Write text for exhibit introductions
The first action was to determine the project scope, what objects to include, access to DU’s Omeka site, and text to be included in the exhibit. Kate and I met weekly, especially at the beginning to address technical problems I had with Omeka as well as any other questions I had. Otherwise I worked mostly remotely. Kate was always accessible to me via email, or through my trips to her office.

Creating a plan for our own student record drive became secondary to building the online exhibit. Unfortunately, then, by the end of the internship we had not developed a student record collection plan.

**Applying theory to practice**

Considering I have taken no archives classes, this experience has been a crash course in learning and applying theory into practice. In regards to collecting student records, this is a perfect example of more product, less process. That is to say that archivists who are collecting student records of particular groups are interested in collecting many records, more so than providing detailed records of few items. Unfortunately, collecting these student records has proved trickier than perhaps expected. It is hard to convey the importance of collecting student records to student groups who may or may not have an existing relationship with the library. In this way, I think it demonstrates the importance of incorporating librarian and archivists into student life, maybe even by integrating information professionals into areas like CME to develop trusting relationships with student groups.

Another theory into practice demonstrated by my internship is controlled vocabulary vs. semantic vocabulary. In the online exhibit I am building, I am incorporating hashtags that students created and used on social media. Obviously, these hashtags are not Library of Congress Subject Headings and not subjects listed in the archival record, but are nonetheless valid ways for users to search for objects.

**Strengths and challenges**

During this internship I have realized that I am good at adapting to changing timelines and circumstances. While building the online exhibit I have run into roadblocks which have prevented me from making as much progress as I wanted to. In these moments I have reached out to Kate to get the information I needed. I am able to work independently and try to troubleshoot and research possible solutions to problems before reaching out to my supervisor for advice.

On the other hand, I could work on being more assertive when I am really stuck. I have found myself worried that I would bother Kate by reaching out to ask her a question or to request certain permissions in Omeka. While I know that Kate is more than happy to help and, in fact, is
there to do just that as my supervisor I have been hesitant to be as assertive as I should be sometimes. I have learned that I just need to speak what I need or else I will become even more behind. I want to work on this during the rest of this internship as well as in jobs to come, especially when it comes to training. I think I am afraid that it will seem like I am not picking things up quickly enough, but it is most beneficial for all parties for me to be trained sufficiently and for me to be confident enough to work independently and correctly.

**My contributions**

Through this internship I was able to contribute an electronic version of a physical exhibit that the archives was already installing. This exhibit served to engage students and also encourage them to donate their records to the archives. I was also able to help install the physical exhibit on the Driscoll bridge.

I was happy to help with the installation of the exhibit by way of mounting and trimming objects to size as well as by helping Rebecca design and finalize the placement of the objects on the bridge. In addition to the practical help I was able to provide, the physical and online exhibit is furthering the mission of the archives to engage students. The hope, through this exhibit, is that students will begin to see representations of student life as preserved by the archives. This is a step in building rapport between the archives and students.

**My professional goals**

My hope is that in the next 5-10 years I will stay involved with professional organizations and keep writing. I am not sure what avenue my career will take and I’m comfortable with that. I am confident that I will remain engaged with diversity and inclusion work in some capacity, whether it be in a library or more technology-focused setting. In this internship setting I was fortunate enough to be mentored by Kate who is engaging in diversity and inclusion from her position as an archivist and I hope to engage in the same way in whatever positions I hold in the future.

**Conclusion**

At the end of this internship, I have produced an exhibit that I am really proud of and I have a far greater understanding of the intricacies of creating such an exhibit. Working with Kate and all of the folks in DU’s Archives and Special Collections was a pleasure. Since this exhibit aligned with the research I have spent this year on, creating #RESIST felt like the most appropriate way to round out my library degree.