

GREAT LAKES COLLEGES ASSOCIATION
ORAL HISTORY IN THE LIBERAL ARTS

Undergraduate Fellowship Proposal

Funding Proposal: Undergraduate Fieldwork Fellow & Faculty Mentor

Tentative Project Title: "Uncovering Archaeologists in their Field"

Faculty Mentor: Rahul Nair, Assistant Professor of World History

Student: Emma Metty, she/her/hers or they/them/theirs, Class of 2019

Host Institution: Antioch College

Background

The development of oral history over the last 100 years has changed and melded to fit new forms of learning. From originally only attempting to have audio clear enough to be transcribed once, shifted to prizing clean and clear audio that can be accessible to the masses. Within this shifting timeframe major technological advances have expanded what is available to the interviewer and interviewee. No longer do interviews have to be recorded in person or over the phone, they can be recorded remotely through video chats. Audio can be recorded cleaner with directional mics and spaces with the reduction of background noise. The biggest change is the blooming of the internet, which opened up a wide range of possibilities to those looking to create or listen to oral histories. These advancements led me to OHLA and began my curiosity in the method.

Oral history can be harnessed effectively into disciplines such as archaeology, to provide a more detailed picture when used in conjunction with techniques specific to the discipline.

Archaeologists using oral histories can expand their knowledge of a place by cross referencing stories or interviews with local people, with the physical remains of an area. This raises an interesting question, if oral history can help us paint a fuller picture beyond that of remains at an archaeological site, what can it tell us about the people who are behind the projects? Often, in archaeology it seems that the focus on the site overshadows the people behind its excavation, as if the act of excavation was independent of the actors undertaking it. Yet, the decisions about where to undertake an archeological dig, what to excavate and the areas to focus on are not self-evident but are very much linked to the persons undertaking the project. Excavation notes and diaries maintained during the course of an archeological dig can provide some answers to some of the technical questions but oral history allows us to fill in the lacuna about the actual excavators themselves. It allows us to seek answers to questions such as: Who are these archaeologist/excavators? What is it like to work on these projects? What feelings and emotions do these archaeologists experience?

An additional area of enquiry regarding archaeology that oral history can help uncover regards the profession, its practitioners and its practices. What draws people to the field? Why did they start on the career path they did? How do their own personal interactions with the remains affect them? How do they feel towards those who left these remains behind? These are the questions that animate this project to explore what it is like to work out in the field. My intention at the end of this project is to provide insight into what it is like to work at a project site and dive into the emotions plus experiences archaeologists have as a way to reconnect the archaeological site with the archaeologist.

Community Partnerships

This project is being proposed to work in conjunction with the new Antioch calendar system and my Senior Capstone Project at Antioch College. Summer 2018 was my final cooperative education quarter and the quarter I started reaching out and working on the idea of my Senior project that will be completed by June 2019. Most of this project will be completed from September-December 2018. During this time frame I plan to reach out, organize, and complete interviews with my interviewees. These interviewees would be identified and organized through connections with the Ohio Archaeological Council, through current faculty connections at Antioch, and by reaching out to employees at museums as suggested by Brad Lepper at the Ohio Historical Society. All interviews will take place on a voluntary basis. Initial contact will establish what the project is, how much of their time it would take to interview, and where/how the interviews will be used in the future. I will be working alongside both my advisor Rahul Nair in the humanities division, my employer Brooke Bryan, and Jennifer Grubbs the new anthropology faculty member.

Pedagogical Considerations

Antioch College established its Cooperative Education program in 1921, offering to students a unique opportunity to dive into participatory learning in the form of internships, research, language/skill building, and studies abroad. Every Antioch student must complete four of these quarters in order to earn their diploma. In total about one-third of the undergrad experience is spent off campus and out in the field. By having this experience students are able to explore their passions and interests more in depth. Having worked frequently with the OHLA since January 2017 when I became the digital archivist for my second co-op, my interest in oral history has deepened and prompted me to craft my own project that can be hosted on the OHLA website alongside the ones I assisted with. Alongside the co-op program Antioch has implemented a new calendar system. This calendar shift allows for an optional block study time from the end of November into the end of December. By having this extra time away from classes I plan to use it as a full time research term for my project. During this project I will pulling in qualitative research methods to create an interesting and engaging narrative of what it is like to work as an archaeologist.

Qualifications of the Applicants

Emma Metty is a rising 4th year student at Antioch College with a self-designed major titled: Culture as a Historical Process. Emma has completed all four of her full time co-op job terms with Antioch College and is currently looking to use the optional block quarter this winter to proceed with her OHLA project. Her first co-op job was working as an intern at The Quarry Farm in Pandora, OH. Emma's duties included animals care, documenting wildlife with photographs, and invasive plant removal. For her second, third, and fourth co-op's Emma has worked with OHLA as the digital archivist, organizing projects, creating pages plus blog posts on the OHLA website, managing communications between OHLA funded projects, and other small things here and there that needed updated. In July of 2018 Emma attended the Oral History in the Liberal Arts Institute alongside of Brooke from July 5th-7th, where she both elaborated on her experiences with OHLA and listened to other presenters.

Rahul Nair is an Assistant Professor of World History at Antioch College where he has been teaching world history and non US history related courses since 2013. He received his doctoral degree in History with a specialization on South Asia, from the University of Pennsylvania in 2006, after graduating with an M.A. in Modern Indian History from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India. His areas of specialization include South Asia, imperialism, and world history. His research focuses on ideas about population in India and the connections between population control and development.

Project Outcomes and Deliverables

At the current time this project will be completed through voluntary outreach to archaeologists. To keep this project focused I plan to reach out to archaeologists who have worked or trained in Ohio. I will reach out to potential correspondents through connections from the Ohio Archaeological Council, through current faculty connections at Antioch, and through reaching out to employees at museums as suggested by Brad Lepper at the Ohio Historical Society. In the end I hope to have 5 interviews, time permitting maybe even more. Using the new Antioch calendar, I plan to schedule and complete the interviews during Fall Quarter 2018 and the optional winter block. By the middle of November my goal is to have completed all of the interviews. The time from the end of November to end of December will be devoted to listening through the audio, editing, and taking notes. These files will be put up on OHMS by the end of January 2019. Indexing and potential transcribing of the interviews will take place during this same time frame from December 2018-February 2019. My goal is to have the completed project up and running on OHLA by the end of March 2019. In the end these interviews will contribute to my senior project and help inspire a larger written portion of my senior paper.

Summary and Conclusions

Oral histories are special in many ways. They open up the lives of people who would otherwise be forgotten to time. They turn a statistic into a real human, someone that is personable and relatable to the listener. Oral histories connect those in academia, to those not in academia, to those thousands of miles away all because of the commonality of the ability to listen to or read the transcripts of these interviews. Out of the different types of histories oral history has the exceptional ability to meld, blend and mix with many different methodologies.

Taking my knowledge from working with OHLA and Brooke I hope to craft intriguing and easy to listen to interviews, with detailed indexing that lets the listener navigate the interview with ease. All of the interviews will start out following a general framework of five questions that tie them together. My hope is that by keeping the interviews on a more informal basis to create a friendship with my interviewees. With having the interviews voluntary another hope of mine is to have a range of stories that each tell a unique journey. My end goal with this project is to learn how to effectively record people's stories using oral history methods, shed light on what it is like to work in the profession of archaeology, and to reconnect the archaeologists to the sites they work on.