

ARCHIVES A RESOURCE BEYOND HISTORY

The University of Wisconsin–Green Bay Archives and Area Research Center serves as the northeastern Wisconsin regional repository for the Wisconsin Historical Society. With 11 counties in its region and more than a mile of collections, the Green Bay campus houses one of the largest Area Research Centers in the Area Research Center network.

The Green Bay Archives recently collaborated with UW–Green Bay undergraduate courses to provide a new and unique opportunity to use archival collections in nonhistory courses.

In the fall of 2016, UW–Green Bay introduced a new cross-disciplinary humanities course, Humanistic Studies 100 — “Living the Humanities: Everybody Dies.” The class was team-taught by humanities, history, and English professors. One hundred first-year students grappled with one of humanity’s constants — the fact that everybody dies. The students considered concepts of death and dying by exploring archival collections of original records, which provided them with an array of rich and personal experiences. With limited seating in the Archives and a class of 100 students, the Archives staff had to become innovative with a motto of “have archives, will travel.” The result was the creation of a mobile archives where the original materials were temporarily located in the University Union.

Utilizing the unique archival loan partnership with the Society, 40 archival collections were gathered for the students’ research. The collections included political cartoons, diaries, journalists’ accounts pertaining to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, sympathy cards, obituaries, funeral sermons and official records such

as coroners’ reports. “The students seemed in awe to be holding an actual Civil War diary describing the assassination of Lincoln and how the news of Lincoln’s assassination compared to the news of Kennedy’s assassination,” says Deb Anderson, coordinator of the Archives and Area Research Center. “It is very gratifying to see students learning about humanities from the voices of the past preserved in the archival records.” As a final group project, students used the original materials to curate an entry in Omeka (online content management system) or as inspiration for creative writing pieces such as poems, stories, or songs. Two subsequent versions of the class have been taught, with themes of “Everybody Travels” and “Prison Voices.” In the last academic year, 300 freshman students have learned about the humanities from firsthand accounts and experiences provided through the archival collections.

In addition to working with humanities courses, the Archives collaborated with an upper-level political science class, “American Political Thought.” The students considered political commentaries created by local cartoonist Lyle Lahey. The collection, consisting of thousands of Lahey cartoons, was given to the Society by the illustrator and his family. Spanning from the 1970s to 2011, the collection is rich fodder for political thought on the local, state, national and international stages. Students selected cartoons to highlight key concepts they were considering in their coursework. As their final project, the students created an exhibit for the campus art gallery. The students selected cartoons, curated the exhibit, “An Age in Ink,” and hosted the opening reception. The learning experience was valuable for students who do not usually find themselves enmeshed in historical resources.



Photos courtesy of UW–Green Bay Marketing and Communications Department