

Faculty Information Literacy Stipend Final Report

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Course: EPL 7380 – History of Higher Education

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Introduction: I have had my history of higher education students visit the University Archives to help them better understand primary documents/sources and to begin thinking about what types of things are kept in archives and what might be missing. This is a starting point for the historical research projects that I have had them do. Still, I have wanted to deepen their interaction with the archives, so when Joan asked if I would be interested in working on a project like this I jumped at the opportunity. This new project allowed students to dive deeper into the archives, ask more questions, and be more hands on with the archives, all of which further the goals of the course particularly the following two:

- Learn about the resources available within the University Archives for the study of the history of American Colleges and Universities
- Explore the history of Colleges and Universities in the United States through critical examination of sources including both primary and secondary sources.

Description of the information literacy assignment or activities:

In small groups students evaluated sources from the archives at SMU pertaining to different historical events that happened on campus

They sought to understand the event from multiple perspectives contained within the archival materials

They revisited the archives to search for additional materials that they felt would paint a fuller picture of the events.

Students determined potentially missing perspectives and considered why those perspectives might be missing and what they would add to the overall understanding of the event.

Method of assessment:

Students put together a overview to introduce their peers to the event by addressing the following questions: *About the materials:* What resources are missing that would be helpful? Who is not represented within the materials? What might be informing the perspectives of those found in the materials? *About the historical context:* How does this event fit into the larger landscape of higher education? Were there similar events happening at other institutions? How was SMU handling the situation in relation to others? *About the contemporary context:* How might we see the impact of this event on campus today? Were there lasting consequences? Lessons learned?

Each group then lead a 45 minute class facilitation about the event.

Finally, each group identified potential archival sources that they wish they could have had access to that could create a more full picture of the event.

Combined these products made up 35% of the students overall grade (15% for the overview, 15% for the Class Facilitation, and 5% for the recommendations for additional sources).

Results and impact on student learning:

I was able to invite Joan to the facilitations. We were both very impressed with the work that the students produced. All students received high marks on their final products. I believe that this group project also improved the quality of the individual research briefs that they completed about different historical events in higher education which they completed separate from this project.

Summary and next steps:

I was really excited about this project, but nervous that the execution wouldn't work out as smoothly as I imagined. However, it exceeded my expectations. The students had multiple points of contact with the university archives, asked important questions about the contents, and provided thoughtful perspectives of what they couldn't find in the archives and why that might be. They were also able to situate this in-depth look at their event at SMU within the broader historical context of higher education at the same point in time. This achieved the goals I had set for the project. I am excited to continue to work with Joan to think about how this project might also work during the renovations. I am also curious about if there could be next steps and we could possibly use a future history class to continue to build out the archives around these events. I love finding ways that my courses can have a direct impact on the institution.

Appendix:

Assignment as written up in the syllabus.

SMU Archives Group Project (35%) – Students will work collaboratively to research a specific event in the history of SMU. The SMU Archivist, Joan Gosnell, has gathered archival materials from three different events in SMU's history. Beginning with these materials students will construct an overview of what happened and work to answer the following questions: *About the materials:* What resources are missing that would be helpful? Who is not represented within the materials? What might be informing the perspectives of those found in the materials? *About the historical context:* How does this event fit into the larger landscape of higher education? Were there similar events happening at other institutions? How was SMU handling the situation in relation to others? *About the contemporary context:* How might we see the impact of this event on campus today? Were there lasting consequences? Lessons learned?

Based on their research each group will produce:

Research Summary (15%) – This should be a **3-4 page** overview of the findings from their research. This will be submitted to a discussion board for the class by **Nov. 29th**.

Class Facilitation (15%) – Each group will lead a **45 minute** class facilitation connected to their research of the event. These facilitations will take place during the **5th Class Weekend**.

Future Research (5%) – Each group will submit a short plan for how the archives could continue to build on the materials currently held for their event. This could be one-half to a full page. **Due Dec. 1st**

Example of Student Overview:

The Event

In the spring of 1983, the Gay & Lesbian Student Support Organization (GLSSO) filed for recognition as a Southern Methodist University (SMU) student organization (GLSSO, 1983), which would allow GLSSO to use SMU's name, funds, and meeting spaces. Despite a unanimous endorsement from the Student Senate Organizations Committee (1983), the larger senate rejected GLSSO three times: on April 19, October 4, and February 14 the following year (McDermott, 1983; Ritz, 1984b; Stoltze, 1983). The SMU Faculty Senate then researched the "goals, purposes, philosophy and religious heritage" of SMU and put forth a resolution in support of GLSSO on April 4 (1984, para. 1). Following their lead, the Student Senate approved GLSSO registration later that month (Ritz, 1984a), which would give GLSSO the right to use campus meeting space but not SMU's name or funds. However, following a letter from the Chair of the SMU Board of Governors expressing reservations about GLSSO (Clements, 1984), SMU President Shields suspended the decision pending a Board of Governors review (Ritz, 1984a).

About the Archival Materials

We noticed significant gaps in SMU's archival materials related to GLSSO's fight for recognition. Documents mentioned alumni who contacted Shields, either asking him to oppose (Miller, 1983) or encouraging him to support GLSSO (SMU Alumni, 1984), but the names of those alumni were absent. We also found no records of any action taken regarding a harassment incident in Smith (Roberts, 1983). Gay and lesbian students wrote few of the articles in campus publications, and the GLSSO membership roster was missing. We hypothesize these omissions were due to fear of discrimination; many saw LGBT people as diseased sinners because of the AIDS epidemic (Beauchamp, W., 1983). Apart from SMU faculty, there was a surprising absence of letters in support of GLSSO from external constituents, although it seems unlikely there would be none given the national coverage of the issue on Phil Donahue's talk show

(Hecht, 1983).

We found it telling that the results of the SMU Board of Governor's review of GLSSO (Clements, 1984) were missing. Given the board's position that GLSSO should not be a recognized student organization (Clements, 1984), we suspect they hoped the issue would go away if they took it out of the spotlight. They were successful, as recognition of GLSSO did not come until 1991 (Campus Life, 1991). Events such as a university sponsored dinner at which a "strongly anti-gay speaker spoke against recognition" of GLSSO (Moxley, 1983, para. 1) indicate the university leadership were either anti-LGBTQ or scared of backlash from alumni and donors.

Historical Context

Overall, SMU's failure to recognize the GLSSO showed how behind the university was in supporting LGBTQ students. The modern fight for queer equality began in the late 1960s, most famously at Compton's Café in San Francisco and the Stonewall Inn in New York City (Blumenfeld, 2022). Soon after, LGBTQ student groups began forming at institutions like Columbia, Cornell, MIT, and Stanford. While many universities like the University of Texas at Austin refused to recognize these organizations at first, these incidents occurred about 10 years before the GLSSO's push for recognition at SMU (Blumenfeld, 2022; Trevino, 2016).

By 1980, universities across the country already had officially recognized LGBTQ student organizations, including those affiliated with the United Methodist Church (UMC) like SMU (Finnin, 1982). At that time, the UMC's position on same-gender relationships called for respecting LGBTQ people's basic human rights and ministering to them the same as anyone else (Furnish, 1983). In a letter to SMU Dean of Student Life James E. Caswell in November 1982, University Chaplain William Finnin described how other UMC affiliated institutions like Duke, Syracuse, Emory, and Boston University had recognized LGBTQ student organizations that received student government funding to reinforce civil liberties (Finnin, 1982). However, given SMU's hostile anti-LGBTQ climate, GLSSO Faculty Advisor Dr. Campbell Read argued SMU's GLSSO members faced harsher backlash compared to students at their sister organizations (Read, 1984).

Additionally, the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s played a significant role in GLSSO's rejection at SMU. With so little known about the disease at the time, AIDS fueled anti-gay

bigotry across the nation and at SMU (Beauchamp, W., 1983). Pointing to the AIDS crisis, one SMU student senator in the first vote for GLSSO recognition argued that supporting the organization would jeopardize the health of the entire campus community (Beauchamp, B., 1983). Indeed, at the time of Senate debates on the GLSSO, members of the Texas Legislature in Austin were debating “a bill to protect Texans from the spread of AIDS” by jailing people for “homosexual acts” (Beauchamp, B., 1983, para. 5). Though the bill never passed, it highlights how the fear of AIDS ignited anti-gay sentiment, especially at SMU.

Contemporary Context

Though the GLSSO no longer exists under that name, SMU currently has several organizations and resources to support LGBTQ+ undergraduates. The Women & LGBT Center of Student Affairs (Southern Methodist University, 2023b) is home to Spectrum, “SMU's only LGBTQ+ org for undergraduates” (SMU Spectrum, n.d.). Spectrum’s Instagram page posts about events such as drag bingo, prom, movie nights, and discussion series on pronouns and sexual health (SMU Spectrum, n.d.). The group also posts educational content, including explanations of queer flags and LGBTQ+ book recommendations representing various identities within the queer community. The Women and LGBT Center runs an annual LGBTQ Symposium, a mentorship program, ally training, and a peer leadership program called Lavender Leaders (Southern Methodist University, 2023a). In 2023, SMU staff members established The Hilltop Pride to advocate for respect and equality for community members in the areas of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (The Hilltop Pride, 2023).

Queer students have not forgotten the battle for GLSSO recognition at SMU. The Student Senate now maintains Spectrum’s status as a student organization, and it has a queer senator special interest seat (SMU Student Senate, 2023). In August of 2021, Queer Senator Bri Tollie of the 108th SMU Student Senate founded the PRIDE Project, an interdisciplinary research venture led by students in collaboration with several SMU offices (Hannum, 2022). The PRIDE team of leaders held the inaugural Queer State of the University Address, in which they discussed events and resources for students as well as concerns and policy recommendations for administrators. As part of their research, the group interviewed fourteen members of the SMU queer community, including alumni, to collect information on the history of queer students at SMU. A short film entitled PRIDE@SMU and an exhibition named “In Search of Belonging” highlighted the results

of their efforts. Tollie also spearheaded SMU's first annual Pride Visibility Day to welcome queer students and allies, educate the community, and celebrate the fact that queer people belong at SMU (Southern Methodist University, 2022).

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