Beyond Bow Ties
Preliminary Implementation and Analysis

Saturday, May 10, 2014

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Preliminary Implementation

Current Research Questions

1) How did the coeducation decision affect social and academic environments in the years preceding and following implementation on the Washington and Lee University campus?
2) How can our research, collaborative ideas, and use of technology reveal an important aspect of Washington and Lee's history that can be used to better address difficulties in the future?

Data Collected

We gathered an assortment of letters, articles, and other items from the controversy surrounding the coeducation decision. Letters include those from alumni written to President John D. Wilson in response to his 1983 letter on coeducation and subsequent responses that followed. In particular, we studied how the response from one alumnus generated further responses by President Wilson and the Board of Trustees.

We also examined surveys that were administered to stakeholders of the university. For example, Professor David R. Novack, Ph.D. informed us of a survey that he administered to students in 1980. Although we have not found the original survey, we analyzed a summary of the survey held in Washington and Lee University Special Collections. Furthermore, we studied a report of the Board of Trustees administered in 1975 that discusses the climate of coeducation from the perspective of then-students, alumni, faculty, peer institutions, and other friends and benefactors of the university.

Newspaper articles from the *Ring-tum Phi* (the predominant student-run newspaper on campus) and regional newspapers have additionally provided insight into the sentiment of the coeducation decision. The Calyx (the university's yearbook) from the years prior to, during, and after the coeducation decision provide a detailed look at how individuals responded to the conversation on coeducation. Moreover, photographs and quotations in the Calyx have given us in-depth looks at individual perceptions on coeducation that surveys and reports miss.

Finally, we interviewed two women from the first coeducational freshman class on the weekend of their 15-year reunion. Their responses provided an even more poignant insight into how individual perceptions can vary broadly.

Tools Implemented

We used Tesseract, an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) engine, to convert scanned documents into text that is readable by digital tools. One such tool is MALLET, which we used to topic model select letters and *Ring-tum Phi* articles. Another tool is Cirrus (one of many tools in the suite of Voyant Tools), which we used to analyze the frequency of words/ideas in select letters and *Ring-tum Phi* articles.

We used W&L Forms Builder to implement two tools on our website. The first is a mapping tool (e.g. known in the digital humanities community as a *mapplication*) in which we mapped 1983 alumni letters that were written in support of or in opposition to the coeducation decision in order to find geographic trends of support. The second is a form that we placed on our website to allow visitors to submit opinions, digital artifacts, and recommendations.

The backbone of our project rests on the Wordpress, a blogging tool that we retrofitted as an artifact database. We used Facebook and Twitter to communicate with fellow digital humanists who have visited our group and to announce additions to our project that will attract viewers. We used Preview and Adobe Photoshop to make edits to photographs and PDFs. Finally, we used Adobe Premiere Pro to edit the alumni interview and we used YouTube to host the video because we were able to readily embed the video on our website.

Preliminary Results

The W&L Forms mapping tool reveals that alumni from the "South" opposed the decision to make Washington and Lee University coeducational by a ratio of approximately 2 to 1. Nationwide, alumni opposed the coeducation decision by a ratio of approximately 1.5 to 1. Review of related media reveals that faculty supported the coeducation decision by a ratio of approximately 4 to 1.

Cirrus applied to the *Ring-Tum Phi* during the years of 1985-1986 and 1985-1986 reveals that the word *coeducation* ranked second only to *honor*. Data from the 1975 Board of Trustees report on coeducation reveals that students ranked coeducation on the bottom of a list of attractiveness characteristics. Residential freshmen revealed that the lack of Washington and Lee University being a coeducational institution was last on the list of attractive characteristics and first on the list of negative characteristics from respondents. Report excerpt:

> Freshmen were asked to indicate in essay form their views as to Washington and Lee's most and least attractive characteristics. The following is an attempt to summarize as accurately as possible their responses.

       <u>Attractive</u> <u>Characteristics</u>:

       Academic Programs Reputation (180) [*last digit of text unclear*]
       Size (110) [*last digit of text unclear*]
       …
       All-Male School (4)

       <u>Negative</u> <u>Characteristics</u>:

       Non-Coed (103)
       None (53)
       …
       Rooms in Old Dorms (14)

Across a period of 1965-1983, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)[1] scores dropped between 1965 and 1975 and increased only nominally between 1975 and 1983. The average verbal/math scores were 608/643 in 1965, 537/587 (-71/-56 *difference from 1965*) in 1975, and 546/591 (+9/+4 *difference from 1975*) in 1983. Admitting women to Washington and Lee University correlates to an increase in the academic quality of students as measured by the SAT of incoming undergraduate students. The coeducation decision also led to an increase in the number of spots given to applicants and an increase in the overall number of applications to the university.

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[1] Today, the test is known solely as the SAT. The acronym SAT no longer represents a title of any kind.

Beyond Bow Ties
Preliminary Analysis

Preliminary Answers to Research Questions

1) How did the coeducation decision affect social and academic environments in the years preceding and following implementation on the Washington and Lee University campus?

The coeducation decision incited discussion among students, faculty, staff, and alumni on the introduction of women to a historically male campus. In fact, the discussion of coeducation competed *vis-à-vis* prominence with discussions of honor as exhibited in our analysis of the *Ring-tum Phi* during the years surrounding the coeducation decision. Even though discussion of coeducation dates back to as early as 1888, discussion began picking up in the early 1970s through formal university inquiries by the Board of Trustees, surveys administered by various parties, and many documents written by students and faculty.

University President John D. Wilson served as the final springboard for implementing coeducation. His rhetoric of change caused unrest among the student body and was inferred to be undermining the culture and tradition of the university. The most vocal of students were those in opposition. They expressed their dissent through banners and bumper stickers that said, "No Marthas" and "Better Dead Than Coed." Additionally, they were t-shirts that said, "Women At W&L: The Beginning Of An Error" and "The Last Class With Balls."

The academic environment of the university improved both in raw intelligence of admitted students and in classroom discussions across campus. The average class grade point averages improved after women were admitted to the university. In the classrooms, professors cited the different perspectives that women brought to the classroom and noted more humanistic discussions as one of the greatest benefits to the university.

2) How can our research, collaborative ideas, and use of technology reveal an important aspect of Washington and Lee's history that can be used to better address difficulties in the future?

The implementation of a digital humanities project provides the scope that is necessary but difficult to obtain when examining dozens, hundreds, or thousands of artifacts. Using the digital ("distant reading") tools that we discuss in our preliminary implementation, we are able to analyze artifacts in numerous ways that would take many times to analyze if we had used "close reading" alone. Preliminary analysis of our results reveal that a digital humanities project can fulfill the

university's need to preserve, analyze, interpret large amounts of information. Most importantly, the permanence and accessibility of our project allows any person (e.g. a student, faculty member, or trustee in some current or future situation) to readily flag potentially fatal decision-making (e.g. not being completely transparent throughout the discussion and implementation of coeducation) in future decisions.[2]

Review of Hypotheses

> **[H1]** Even though alumni reside throughout the country, most dissent from coeducation was from alumni residing in the Southern states. *Sample Tools: W&L Forms Mapping.*
> **[H2]** Survey data will reveal that support for coeducation was substantial, despite outspoken dissent in published media. *Sample Tools: OCR, Cirrus in Voyant (Word Cloud).*
> **[H3]** Text analysis of the *Ring-tum Phi* will show that coeducation was the leading issue during the years 1984, 1985, and 1986. *Sample Tools: Cirrus in Voyant (Word Cloud).*

From the four days that have passed since our submission of our most up-to-date project proposal, our hypotheses remain constant. [H1] accurately describes our desire to understand whether there is a Southern bias toward maintaining the tradition of a male-only institution. [H2] asks how the various stakeholders – particularly those less-vocal on coeducation – viewed the idea of coeducation. [H3] Realizing that the *Ring-tum Phi* was the most visible collective student voice of the era, articles from the years surrounding the coeducation decision provide an accurate analysis of to what degree coeducation stood as a campus priority.

Next Steps

A select number of our letters need to be uploaded, OCRed, analyzed. Further interpretation using MALLET, Voyant, and our mapping tools remains necessary for a comprehensive report on their meanings. On the dissemination side of our project, we need to review our current category organization (ensuring that all posts have a category and that no category is unused), link from the home page our most attractive artifacts, and create a disclaimer page.

Questions

1) How does MALLET decide on the topic models it produces from its analysis of a certain text?
2) Is Cirrus the best tool to display the data obtained from letters and *Ring-tum Phi* articles?
3) How can we assure the continuance of our project and the idea of a digital humanities project as a medium of historical preservation and humanistic analysis for the university?

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[2] For example, if Lee Chapel had a similar digital humanities project that included a readily accessible history of the Confederate flags displayed, then the public appeal by students to remove those flags could have been averted.