Beyond Bow Ties
Charter and Project Proposal

Updated Thursday, May 8, 2014

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Beyond Bow Ties  
Project Proposal

Statement of Problem

The decision for Washington and Lee University to admit female students is a hallmark of the institution’s history and legacy. However, there is not a collective and easily accessible resource containing artifacts from the era of coeducation.

Motivation

Understanding the importance of coeducation to the university, our main motivation for this project is to compile a database that allows viewers to reflect on and learn from the coeducation decision. Realizing that an abundance of information on the transition to coeducation exists in various forms and places, we believe that creating a resource that is easily accessible is in the best interest of university stakeholders, which include trustees, faculty, alumni, students, and donors. Through teamwork and careful attention to our goals stated in our charter, we will create a resource that interested parties can expand upon in the future.

Related Work

Similar works that have been published online include a Rockbridge Report article celebrating twenty years of women attending Washington and Lee University. Further works include reports published by many of W&L’s peer institutions. These efforts generally do not qualify as digital humanities projects because they do not focus on the interpretation and curation of artifacts, but rather on summarizing a sequence of events.

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?
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).

Methodology

We will compile a sample of sources across various media that are made available to us by Washington and Lee University. We will work with the librarians in Special Collections to collect historical artifacts that relate to coeducation. These artifacts include letters, surveys, press releases, and meeting minutes of the Board of Trustees. We will contact known faculty and alumni who attended W&L during the implementation era for interviews, which will involve requesting access to relevant artifacts from the era. We will digitize sources that only exist in paper form in order to display them on our website. The Ring-Tum Phi (the primary student-run student newspaper) and the Calyx (the university’s yearbook) have already been digitized. We will search the 1984, 1985, and 1986 editions of these student-produced media to find valuable material relating to coeducation that we can publish on our website.

Of special note, the men and women of the first coeducation class are celebrating their twenty-fifth reunion. Considering that Alumni Weekend follows the second week of our project, we will attend a reception to interview these alumni on video. Furthermore, we will take advantage of the tools presented to us in class. Using the W&L mapping tool will reveal regional support and opposition for coeducation. Applying Tesseract will convert JPG files to text that can be used in digital tools, including MALLET and Voyant, to discover themes that were present in the coeducation argument.

Limitations

Considering that we have approximately one week of working time remaining, our focus is to create a digital humanities project model that can be scaled up in the future. Our overarching goal is to inspire others to use digital humanities projects to recover and disseminate knowledge.