

LSTA Grant Project Evaluation Report

“Oregon Women’s Political History Collections Processing Project” Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries

June 24, 2013

Summary of Evaluation

The goal of the “Oregon Women’s Political History Collections Processing Project” was to increase the accessibility of 284 linear feet of correspondence, reports, photographs, financial papers, publications and other documents related to women’s political engagement in Oregon from the 1970s through the 1980s. Grouped together as the Oregon Women’s Political History Collections, these unique materials represent a pivotal period in the state’s history and are an essential resource for those studying political activism and social movements of the late 20th century on a regional level. However, prior to this project, these collections were largely unorganized and without description, making them difficult to share, find or navigate. The project’s approach to improved accessibility focused on two main activities, processing the collections to establish organizational control and increasing their visibility and discoverability through the creation of online finding aids and other online entries.

The project utilized trained student workers as collection processors under the supervision of two Special Collections archivists. The processing queue was prioritized by the archivists and the collections were opened as finding aids were completed. While the project proceeded generally as planned, it did require a time extension, primarily due to the departure of a staff member shortly into the grant period. The processing of some collections also proved more time-consuming than anticipated. Two objectives for access points were also unrealized but may be addressed in the future. Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the project, all fourteen collections had been processed with a total of 246 linear feet of archival material. Finding aids were completed for each collection and posted to the Northwest Digital Archives database; seven collection references were tied to corresponding Wikipedia entries; a study guide for the collections was launched on the University of

Oregon Libraries website; and a color brochure featuring an overview of the collections and their historical context was produced.

The unique materials within the Oregon Women's Political History Collections are an invaluable resource for understanding the role of women's activism and leadership in the social and political history of the late 20th century. The concerns raised in the original grant proposal—that, unprocessed, these important collections were virtually invisible—were well-founded. The immediate impact of the successful completion of this project can be demonstrated through a Google search. For each collection, a link to the completed NWDA finding aid, and if applicable, the corresponding Wikipedia entry, are now within the top five search results. A Google search remains the most common first step for many researchers, particularly students; these results alone speak greatly to an improvement in broad discoverability. As demonstrated by the successful "Women's Suffrage Centennial Symposium" in October 2012, the new visibility and availability of these resources has great potential for inspiring community collaborations and conversations

As an archives project, the "Oregon Women's Political History Collections Processing Project" is a good example of the efficacy and benefits of a targeted processing plan. By focusing on a group of subject-related collections, the project made available a rich comprehensive resource that could be used and promoted in an effective and focused manner.

Project Objectives

The goal of the “Oregon Women’s Political History Collections Processing Project” was to increase the accessibility of 284 linear feet of correspondence, reports, photographs, financial papers, publications and other documents related to women’s political engagement and activism in Oregon from the 1970s through the 1980s. Collections under this project include the organizational records of the Eugene Women’s Crisis Center, the Oregon chapter of NOW, and the Oregon Women’s Political Caucus, and the papers of eleven individual women including Jean Fuller Anderson, Eleanor Davis, Jeanne Dost, Nancy Dunn, Nancy Fadeley, Helen Frye, Margie Hendriksen, Gretchen Kafoury, Marian Milligan, Jane Novick, and Nancy Ryles. Grouped together as the Oregon Women’s Political History Collections, these unique materials represent a pivotal period in the state’s history and are an essential resource for those studying political activism and social movements of the late 20th century on a regional level. However, prior to this project, these collections were largely unorganized and without description, making them difficult to share, find or navigate. The project’s approach to improved accessibility focused on two main activities, gaining organizational control of the collections and increasing their visibility and discoverability. The original proposal outlined four objectives in support of its goal. The first was to process the collections and complete both finding aids, to be uploaded for access through the shared database of the Northwest Digital Archives (NWDA), and MARC records, to be added to the University of Oregon’s local library catalog and to internationally accessible OCLC’s WorldCat. The second objective was to rehouse materials into archival boxes and, as needed, archival folders, to create a stable environment for long-term preservation. The third objective was to raise the visibility of the resources via four approaches: entries on the collection creators in the online Oregon Encyclopedia, a Oregon Women’s Political History Collection subject guide on the UO Libraries’ Special Collections website, creation of or additions to Wikipedia entries for the organizations and individuals represented in the collections, and highlighting the collections as part of the year-long celebration of “A Century of Action: Oregon Women Vote, 1912-2012.” The fourth objective was to identify documents that would be suitable for scanning for online access.

Project Method

The project plan as detailed in the original grant proposal outlined a rolling approach, with the processing of a collection immediately followed by the creation and upload of its finding aid and MARC record. The strength of this approach allows each collection to be made available to the

public as soon as completed rather than delaying access until the conclusion of the full project. The first quarter was to include the hiring and training of two student processors and Wikipedia and Oregon Encyclopedia entries were to be underway by the third quarter.

The project generally followed the proposed plan with some modifications. A new student processor was hired and trained within the first quarter. The second processing position was filled by existing or returning student workers as available who had previous processing training and experience. As noted below, the plan to publish entries in the Oregon Encyclopedia could not be realized in practice. The project did ultimately require an extension for completion, primarily due to the departure of the supervising archivist for processing shortly into the grant period. This required shifts in workload and responsibilities but was fairly straightforward to resolve internally. The identification and consolidation of organizational records originally interfiled within the papers of individuals also took more time to complete than anticipated.

Project Results

At the time of the site visit on May 17, 2012, fourteen collections had been processed resulting in a total of 246 linear feet of described archival material. A shelf scan confirmed that collection materials had been rehoused in stable archival boxes with re-foldering into acid-free enclosures completed on an as needed basis. Collections were easily located by staff and are stored onsite in a secure and stable environment within Special Collections. Each collection has a searchable finding aid included in the Northwest Digital Archives database (<http://nwda.orbiscascade.org/index.shtml>). A study guide with annotated listings for each collection and links to corresponding finding aids is available on the University of Oregon Libraries website (<http://library.uoregon.edu/node/3532>). Seven of the collections have also been tied to corresponding Wikipedia entries with direct links to the relevant finding aids. The project lead also created an attractive color brochure for distribution that provides an overview of the collections and their historical context.

Two planned objective components were not realized. The first, creation and upload of MARC records to the UO local library catalog, a step that presumably involves additional units within the library, is still in progress. The second, the inclusion of entries in the Oregon Encyclopedia (OE), was not realized due to the policies of the OE that did not allow for the submission and publication

of the entries as envisioned by the original grant proposal. This is unfortunate but may be remedied for at least some of the collections in the future if article topics are approved by the OE editor and interested authors can be secured. In the meantime, the addition of finding aids to NWDA and the Wikipedia entries serve as effective online access points. The completion of the MARC records is encouraged. Their inclusion in the shared OCLC catalog will greatly increase the discoverability of the collections worldwide.

Project Impact

These historically important records, which reflect both a regional specificity and a larger national movement, will serve a broad range of researchers and students, including those interested in public policy, social and political history, grassroots activism and women's history. The concerns raised in the original grant proposal—that, unprocessed, these important collections were virtually invisible—were well-founded. The immediate impact of the successful completion of this project can be demonstrated through a basic Google search. For each collection, the completed NWDA finding aid, and if applicable, the corresponding Wikipedia entry, were within the top five search results. A Google search remains the most common first step for many researchers, particularly students; these results alone speak greatly to the improvement in broad discoverability. The archival rehousing that accompanied processing has also helped physically stabilize the collections, ensuring their long-term preservation.

The true full extent of this project's impact will be revealed over the long-term as the results of newly facilitated research access begin to manifest in publications and educational tools. However, accessible and visible archival collections can also serve as a basis for other fruitful engagement that has far reaching benefits to the public good. This was effectively demonstrated by the October 25, 2012 event, "Women's Suffrage Centennial Symposium," organized by the project lead, that brought together speakers with backgrounds in political science, history, journalism and law as well as the current Mayor of Eugene to discuss the roles and influences of women in politics. The Oregon Women's Political History Collections should continue to offer opportunities for similar community collaborations and conversations.

As a model for an archives project, the "Oregon Women's Political History Collections Processing Project" provides a good example of the efficacy and benefits of a targeted processing plan. By

focusing on a group of subject-related collections, the project made available a rich comprehensive resource that could be used and promoted in an effective and focused manner.

Considerations

-In this case, Special Collections at the University of Oregon Libraries had a long-standing practice of training and utilizing student workers for processing collections and thus a strong pool of potential experienced project workers. Other institutions without such an established student worker program may wish to consider a dedicated processing archivist for such an undertaking.

-The project team is encouraged to continue regular outreach and promotion for the Oregon Women's Political History Collections to build awareness of this important resource. Possibilities range from written announcements in relevant academic journals to sharing interesting links and images via social media.

Report submitted by

Cristine Paschild
Head of Special Collections & University Archivist
Portland State University Library

Site visit: May 17, 2012