

Summer Research Report

During the Summer of 2015, Dr. Woody Register and I researched and constructed an exhibit entitled “Founded to Make Men: 150 Years of Sewanee Manhood.” This exhibit will be housed in the University Archives. I had been employed by the Archives during the school year, so luckily I was already familiar with the staff and space. The greatest aspect of my research this summer came from my relationship with Dr. Register. Rather than be a research assistant, Dr. Register made it clear that this project was as much mine as his. I was a teammate, not a lowly intern. I was in control of my responsibilities, writing, and research. Daily, I worked through boxes of letters, pictures, and more searching for poignant examples of gender on campus. I continuously wrote and reviewed my research. Bi-weekly, Dr. Register and I would meet to debrief.

During this time in the Archives, I was forced to be self motivated. Unlike previous jobs, I was not held to a schedule or specific set of tasks. The habit of following instructions was hard to break, but setting personal research goals became satisfying when achieved. While this was difficult, it also meant that I could call the finished product my own.

The highest points of my research often came after reconciling with my lowest points. The greatest example of this was during my research on Civil Rights at Sewanee. As we know, our country still has a long way to go in terms of race relations. This summer has been great evidence of this fact. I spent two weeks on this section of the exhibit. I had hit a wall. Pouring over antiquated and racist language published by your

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own University weighed me down. I could not just chalk it up to being a product of its time. At Sewanee, we are told in the words of Gardiner Leigh Tucker that “storms of life burst not nor cares intrude.” However, my investigations into our history revealed that the Sewanee is not “far from the world,” but instead susceptible to its worries. I found myself tired and depressed after hours of reading Purple articles about the segregation of the College and the Sewanee Inn. I met with DebbieLee Landi. I met with Dr. Register. Finally, I had a lunch meeting with Dr. Houston Roberson. Dr. Roberson specializes in African American History, teaching the Civil Rights class. He reassured me that researching race and gender would not leave you happy, but it could leave you fulfilled. I realized that what I was doing was not simply for academic nor entertainment value. History, while a study of the past, can reverberate into our presents. By examining difficult and unflattering periods of our own history, we can grow from our understanding. Studying history, then, can be a public service.

This episode turned out to be a bittersweet high point of my time at Sewanee. Yes the period was difficult to digest. However, shying away from tough aspects of our history removes the ability we have to grow from them. Sewanee is a wonderful place, because of its imperfections. If we can both recognize the past move forward from it, we can improve.

The research done in conjunction with Dr. Register again made me rethink my possible career trajectory. I realized that research, on a topic that I was invested in, was not really work at all. Last summer, I was a research assistant for a history professor at Pepperdine. Last summer, most of my duties were menial. The research was not my

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own. However, this summer's work meant intelligent and intellectual discussions with colleagues. It meant being proud of my own finished product.

This also allowed me to forge a closer professional relationship with professors and the Archives staff. With Dr. Register, I was able have meaningful conversations about pursuing a graduate degree in History or American Studies. I also was able to discuss potential opportunities in archives around the country with DebbieLee Landi. My strength, at this point, is that I now have tangible skills in history that go further than simply GPA and a transcript. These skills still do not have to simply be academic in nature, but can also be utilized in exhibit design, archives, and museums! Directly, as well, this summer has lead to a number of opportunities for me on our own campus. At the advice of Dr. Register and DebbieLee, I will be staying on campus to pursue these opportunities as well as apply for graduate school. Stay tuned!