Women in STEM: A Digital Oral History Project

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Project Title

Women in STEM: A Digital Oral History Project

Faculty Information

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I. Project Description

While women comprise the majority of college age students nationwide, at UAH and within many STEM disciplines they account for a minority of the population. One method of encouraging STEM participation in this group is to provide relevant role models. Likewise, the archival documentation of the experiences of women in STEM fields is also underrepresented. This project will document the lives of six women who are successful professionals in the STEM field by conducting video oral history interviews with each individual. After conducting the interviews, the student will create a digital project which describes the project and makes these interviews available to the public. The end goal of this project is to create a digital oral history project with these six women which is freely accessible on the world wide web and provides insight into how these women became professionals in the STEM field. Hopefully, this project will provide information for women interested in STEM as a career and encourage them to follow this career pathway.

The student selected for this project will be assigned workspace in the Digital Initiatives Lab in the Salmon Library, which offers oral history recording capability and preservation software. Students will receive guidance in how to prepare for, conduct and preserve oral histories. The faculty mentors for this project, Reagan Grimsley, Head of Special Collections and Archives, and Drew Adan, Archivist have extensive experience with both conducting and preserving oral histories.

II. Student Duties, Contributions, and Outcomes

a. Specific Student Duties

The student will work with faculty mentors to identify six women in the STEM field to interview for this project. The student will then create a list of questions for the oral history interview, and will schedule a time to interview each woman. The student will learn oral history interview techniques and learn how to operate the oral history video equipment in the Digital Initiatives Lab, located in the Salmon Library. Each woman will be interviewed separately, and after the interview each placed in the OMEKA content management system, used by the library to create access to oral history materials. The student will develop a web portal using OMEKA labeled Women In STEM: A Digital Oral History Project, and upload the interviews. This will complete the process and make the interviews available for upload.

b. Tangible Contributions by the Student to the Project (10% of Review)

It is important to recognize that women are less likely than men to engage in STEM careers and to enroll in degree programs. The student has prior training in diversity, equity and inclusion which will allow them to effectively engage with the project to produce interviews which hopefully reveal how these six women became interested in and became successful professionals in their particular STEM field. The student will contribute to and enhance the documentation of
women in STEM at UAH and in the local community through the creation of these oral history interviews.

c. Specific Outcomes Provided by the Project to the Student (30% of Review)

The primary outcome of this project will be the research and communication skills learned by the student as they work through the various stages of the project. The student will examine the literature of women participation in STEM, and craft research questions. Students will also learn how to apply their research to the field of oral history and digital scholarship as they create a digital research project. By the end of the project, the student should have a through understanding of the factors which impact the gender disparity in the STEM field and have documented specific local examples of women who have navigated those issues to become STEM professionals.

III. Student Selection Criteria

There were no specific student selection criteria for this RCEU.

IV. Project Mentorship (30% of Review)

Since both of the mentors (Reagan Grimsley and Drew Adan) are 12 month faculty, the student will have access to one of the faculty mentors each week day during the ten week period as UAH Special Collections is open 9 to 4 Monday through Friday. A weekly team meeting will be held to report on progress, provide feedback and provide a time for open discussion. The student will receive the support needed to develop the project from both a theoretical and practical perspective. UAH Special Collections will provide the equipment and software needed to create the digital project in the Digital Initiatives Lab. Grimsley will provide an overview of the literature on women in STEM and an introduction on how to conduct oral histories. Adjunct Mentor Drew Adan will train the student on the needed digital tools, such as the digital exhibit module in Omeka and how to conduct digital oral histories. Both mentors will be available to answer questions and provide guidance throughout the 10 week period. Both will assist with selecting and scheduling the individuals selected for interviews. Both of the mentors have extensive experience in the field of oral history.

The student will learn and practice a variety of both theoretical and practical skills, including: academic writing, digital exhibit design, oral history best practices, and scholarly research. The mentors will work with the student to assist them in finding a venue to share the research with the public in addition to creating the RCEU poster. Possible venues for their work may include the Society of Alabama Archivists Annual Meeting or the Alabama Historical Association Annual Meeting.