

# Imagined Spaces, Preserved Places: A Case Study of Historic Preservation through Applied Learning Environments and Service-Learning

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## ABSTRACT

Recently, there has been some discussion about how to get and keep students interested in history and historical preservation. To address this, the Walter Stiern Library at California State University, Bakersfield, collaborated with the History Department to integrate an archival service-learning program into the curriculum. Coinciding with this, the library redesigned its archival program to include an applied learning environment where students get hands-on experience. This case study traces the establishment of the program and provides initial findings about the benefits service-learning has for students and the community. It also considers the implications service-learning has for archivists and the archives.

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## KEY WORDS

Service-learning, Faculty collaboration, Community outreach, Student engagement

Ap<sup>A</sup> perception looms among some archivists, historians, and historic preservationists that younger generations are increasingly apathetic toward history. How do we keep younger generations interested in the care and custody of our community treasures? This question was considered during the keynote address at the 2016 California Conference for the Promotion of History annual meeting. Katie Rispoli Keatamai, executive director at We Are the Next, noted that students do not receive sustained exposure to historical and cultural resources. In California, for example, students get this exposure up to the fifth grade. By the time they get to college, they often develop other interests; she argued that it is not that they are apathetic, “it’s that we haven’t kept their attention.”<sup>1</sup> So how do we reenergize our next generation of leaders’ interest in history and historical projects? The answer lies in engaging youth in areas that interest them and providing them with practical experience through service-learning. This case study examines the establishment of a new service-learning program and initial findings after the first semester of implementation.

Recently, the Walter Stiern Library at California State University, Bakersfield, revived its archival program and changed its paradigm from being solely a collecting archives to a teaching archives.<sup>2</sup> The library went even further by designing a multidimensional program integrated into the curriculum. A key component was the inclusion of applied learning environments. In 2012, the dean of the library initiated this transformation by asking a series of questions:

- How much physical and digital space is needed to support service-learning for our students?<sup>3</sup>
- How can a program be designed in which students can obtain practical experience?
- How should younger generations be trained to take over the care and custody of community treasures?
- What collaborations are necessary to design and implement a new archives paradigm?

From these questions, plans emerged to create a new archives, a new curriculum, and new ways for archivists to engage students.

### Active Learning through Applied Learning Environments

Service-learning is a high-impact teaching practice that provides an environment where students can engage in active learning. The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan defined active learning as “a process whereby students engage in activities, such as reading, writing, discussion, or problem solving that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content.”<sup>4</sup> Other examples of active learning include peer review,

brainstorming, case studies, hands-on technology, and experiential learning. We utilize a variety of active learning activities in the archives. For example, students participate in research, construction, and installation of historical exhibits. This process requires students to contextualize and write interpretations on a variety of historical events. It allows students to learn to write concisely. Faculty and peers review their work before it is published in the exhibit. Students also learn project management and how to collaborate with local and regional archives and libraries. At the end of this process, students engage the public through the promotion of the finished exhibit and by serving as docents. Finally, students participate in group debriefings sharing their reflections about their experience.

Students also engage in active learning through processing archival collections and preparing finding aids. With guidance from the archivist, they are required to review a collection, determine the content, and develop historical context. The information gathered allows them to construct an archival finding aid complete with an abstract. As Megan Oakleaf noted, this type of experience is a “threshold concept”<sup>5</sup> and gets students to begin “thinking like” an archivist.<sup>6</sup> This process also benefits students who do not pursue careers in archives as it provides opportunities to become better acquainted with archival policies and procedures and improves research skills. Both active learning exercises prepare students for their service-learning projects in the community.

## Literature Review

An applied learning experience can be structured in a variety of ways. The most popular are internships and service-learning. To adopt the most appropriate experience, it is important to distinguish between the two. John David Gerlach and Tyler P. Reinagel explained that internships are focused more on immersing the student in the workplace. Students in internships often are required to put in more hours than those in a service-learning situation. With internships, they continued, students often gain their experience “solo,” whereas service-learning students work in group situations. By comparison, service-learning, which is usually a requirement of a specific course, gives students opportunities to share and learn from their experiences. Internships, Gerlach and Reinagel argued, often lack this benefit. Finally, they added, a service-learning experience is meant to develop civic responsibility and expose students “to a more diverse set of immersive learning opportunities and application scenarios.”<sup>7</sup> Celia Pechak and Mary Thompson reinforced this by noting that service-learning influences personal development and increases “cultural competence.”<sup>8</sup>

Jennifer Bay stressed the importance of service-learning in building students’ confidence and acclimating them to an environment outside of academia.<sup>9</sup> She noted that the experience should be structured so that classroom

time allows students to discuss and reflect upon their experiences.<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Maddrell echoed Bay's call for structure. Based on interviews with students, faculty, and instructional designers, Maddrell offered four service-learning design considerations. Among these are setting realistic goals for both the student and the service organization and honest engagement in structuring the learning outcomes and project goals. Also important is project management that emphasizes clear student-learning outcomes, sets regular schedules and milestones, and ensures that all parties understand the desired project deliverables. Finally, students should be assessed on successfully completing the project outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

To assist in the implementation of service-learning programs, Amelia Jenkins and Patricia Sheehey offered a practical checklist. The list is divided into four stages. Stage 1 is "preparation," and Sheehey suggested tying objectives to the project. Other suggestions in stage 1 include noting the time required to complete projects, how student work will be evaluated, and how grades will be assigned. In stage 2, it is important to explain how *service-learning* is important to *student* learning. In stage 3, students and instructors reflect upon the experience and critique the course to make improvements. The final stage gives students and instructors the opportunity to share the experience with their peers.<sup>12</sup>

Service-learning can benefit graduate students as well. Kristina Bross described how she introduced her graduate students to a variety of community historical sources through service-learning. A goal of an applied experience, she argued, should be to move students from the "theoretical to the practical," where students evaluate the community collections they work with to determine "enduring value."<sup>13</sup> Students learn about the benefits and limitations of finding aids and that what is and is not located in the archives is subjective. In the culminating assignment, students demonstrate the move from theory to practice by "translating" their findings "for a nonacademic audience." Bross concluded by noting that her method of combining archival theory with community services is a "portable pedagogy," meaning that it can be used for a variety of courses to address a variety of community and student needs.<sup>14</sup>

Christine Celio, Joseph Durlak, and Allison Dymnicki examined the effectiveness of service-learning and pointed out the flaws of previous studies. Their study sought to show the connection between recommended service-learning practices and positive student outcomes. They concluded that service-learning has multiple benefits for "students' attitudes, social behavior, and academic performance" and stressed that to improve student learning outcomes, programs should integrate best practices, such as reflection.<sup>15</sup>

Catherine Bloomquist shared the value of reflection to her service-learning experience while a graduate student at St. Catherine University. Her

service-learning experience was at a community organization teaching computer literacy. She noted the experience allowed her to “transcend course concepts, serving to crystallize much of the theoretical concepts” she acquired during her studies. Furthermore, the experience allowed her to realize her “professional identity” and become an activist in issues related to access.<sup>16</sup> It is through this process of reflection that such ideas are realized.

In library studies, there is a variety of research about the value of service-learning. Lorie Roy’s study looks at the importance of service-learning in reference instruction.<sup>17</sup> Bonnie Brzozowski, Nicholas Homenda, and Lorie Roy stressed the benefits of service-learning for students pursuing careers in public libraries.<sup>18</sup> Likewise Sue Kimmel, Jody Howard, and Bree Ruzzi argued that service-learning is important in preparing school librarians.<sup>19</sup> A limited amount of literature in the archival field addresses service-learning. Bross’s study, described above, is one of the few related to archives. Other studies, such as that by Jeannette Bastian and Donna Webber, focus on managing internships.<sup>20</sup> Finally, a study by Sarah Shippy Copeland gives an example of how service-learning can benefit the creation and maintenance of digital archival content at community colleges.<sup>21</sup>

After reviewing the literature, it is clear service-learning can be used to build student confidence and civic responsibility. Jenkins and Sheehey’s checklist is a valuable first step to developing course content, matching student learning objectives with community projects, and creating assignments. Finally, Bay’s recommendation for integration of student reflection, reinforced by Bloomquist’s positive experience, convinced me of the importance of including this exercise.

## Building a New Curriculum

In 2016, California State University, Bakersfield, completed the transition from a quarter to a semester system. This was an opportunity for campus departments to reconsider their respective programs. The History Department added three courses in public history. Working closely with the History Department graduate coordinator, the archives team developed two courses for the new curriculum: an archives and manuscripts course and an oral history course.<sup>22</sup> These two courses joined an introductory course in public history developed by the History Department, thus establishing a new public history emphasis for the history degree. Goals of these courses include exposing students and developing their interest in public history and introducing them to the various uses of a history degree.

A key component in the program is a required service-learning class where students apply knowledge and research skills they learn in the classroom.

Through several partnerships with regional institutions, students participating in off-campus opportunities interact with archivists, thus offering different perspectives, broadening their knowledge, and increasing their professional networks.

Applied history students focus on three student learning outcomes:

1. Students will gain an awareness of the community. Students will become familiar with community issues, needs, strengths, problems, and resources as related to historic preservation;
2. Students will learn to value personal involvement in the community for socially constructive purposes; and
3. Students will demonstrate the relevance of community experience to course content.

Enrolled students learn archival skills and engage in community service-learning opportunities. For example, at the beginning of the semester, students learn record appraisal and acquisition, arrangement and description, preservation strategies, proper handling of materials, and how to effectively use archives for research. Once students have this background knowledge, we schedule visits with various regional archives, libraries, and museums to assist with projects.

## The Student Experience

In one semester, students had three notable community experiences. The first was at a local county museum where the curator introduced them to a wide variety of historical materials in the collection. The curator shared experiences and difficulties in managing large collections with limited staff and budget. She also compared the similarities and differences in preservation issues between museums and universities. For example, the curator shared her experience in removing layers of wallpaper and developing historical context while restoring a local historic home. After the museum orientation, students engaged in an archival processing project related to a school with a hundred-year history.

The next experience took students to a regional public library's local history room. They were given a tour of the library by the special collections librarian, who covered a variety of aspects of managing the collection. Her talk also included staffing and budget issues. The tour ended with an exercise using local reference sources to track a local historic home of students' choosing, from construction to occupancy.

The final experience was a community archiving project where students assisted in the intake and scanning of photos and other materials that document the area's African American community. Each student was given a specific job such as gathering metadata or digitizing materials. The students completed

fifty-four scans contributed by ten families. This was the first time the archives had attempted this type of community project, an event significantly enhanced by student participation. During a post-event debrief, students provided valuable logistical information and feedback that will be standardized and used for follow-up events. Prior to the event, one student noticed a lack of archival materials related to the community's African American population. This event, he noted, gave him a sense of civic connection and direct connection to the donors. In speaking with donors, he better understood the historical context of the items he was digitizing.

### Critique of Program

A primary concern was the amount of time required to run the course. The class met twice a week for a total of two hours and thirty minutes. This did not include class preparation time (at least an hour for each session), the time to set up community projects, and travel time to service-learning sites. The commitment to planning and implementing the program reduced the time the archivist devoted to working on archival projects. We anticipate that, as the program matures, efficiencies will increase and time dedicated outside of class will decrease.

We also learned a variety of other lessons throughout the process. First, securing the physical space in the library was a strategic first step in establishing an applied learning environment. This provided the infrastructure required to accomplish projects. Partnering with the History Department was also necessary because it reinforced to students the importance historians place on archives. More important, because course credit is not offered through the archives, having the service-learning program in the history curriculum gave us the means to deliver the course.

As the semester progressed, the importance of establishing an efficient workflow process for the students to follow became apparent. Because of a sudden influx of students into the program, the workflow process was gradually developed and documented. While not an ideal situation, it did allow documentation of the processes used in developing finding aids and digital collections.

Another lesson learned is that it is critical to supervise student work closely throughout the process. Initially, students worked through projects from start to finish; we reviewed their work only after they completed the project. However, we found that regular supervision could turn mistakes into meaningful teaching moments. Questions about processing, preservation issues, or historical context were addressed on the spot. This allowed better interaction with students and increased student efficiency in processing collections.



We also lost time in trying to cover too much material related to archival concepts. Our instinct was to train all students to be archivists. This was contrary to the purposes of the class, which was to explore ways students can interact with the community through history, raise their sense of civic awareness, and expose them to other uses of a history degree.

Allowing students to reflect upon the experience, both orally and in writing, was invaluable to both students and instructor. The students made genuine connections between theory and practice, and the instructor gained valuable insights into improving the experience. The parameters for reflection, however, need improvement. We asked students to “reflect upon” their experiences without specific guidance. In the future, it will be helpful to provide students with more structure about their reflections such as adding specific questions related to the day’s activity.

While we did not focus on the implications the program had on the archives, we noted some benefits. Students’ work helped to move collection processing forward in our archives and at the museum. Their work also allowed the establishment of a collection of materials from an underrepresented group. And the program was useful for identifying volunteer resources; three students came back as volunteers.

## Next Steps

Looking ahead, we have a variety of next steps to consider. First, we must prioritize the concepts taught to maximize time and exposure students have with community projects by adhering to student learning objectives. Also, during the planning process, the History Department and the archives collaborated closely. After the course began, communication went stagnant. In future classes, it will be necessary to maintain closer communication with history faculty by encouraging them to participate in community projects and to assist in program assessment.

There were eight students in the first service-learning class. Because this course is a requirement for the history degree, we expect enrollment to increase. With increase in enrollment, we need to maximize the number of community partnerships to offer a variety of opportunities and experiences. Finally, with program growth, we will develop a more thorough method of assessment to measure the student experience and impacts on student success. The assessment will include student interviews, reflection assignment analysis, and community partnership questionnaires.



## Conclusion

Critiquing the program enabled us to make improvements. Overall, we believe the program has been successful. Students' interest in historical preservation was nurtured, and community and faculty partnerships were strengthened. While implementing a service-learning program is a worthwhile endeavor, it is a time-intensive process. With that in mind, it is an effective way to expose students and build their interest in historical preservation.

Looking ahead, further research is needed specific to assessment of student learning outcomes in archives. Such studies might look at how service-learning affects student grades and college success. Studies that measure the benefits of service-learning programs for community partners should also be considered. Finally, additional case studies documenting how archives implement service-learning programs will be useful in establishing best practice guides for the profession.

Service-learning has multiple benefits for a variety of stakeholders. It provides students with a deeper understanding of archival practices and research, it promotes firmer connections to the community, and it improves networking and leadership skills. Service-learning advances archival practice by giving archivists a role in the university curriculum, allowing them to shape student learning. It also provides opportunities to engage the community and to keep current on issues of community importance. Finally, service-learning benefits the community by preparing students for the workforce and, most important, making students aware of the issues and challenges of historic preservation in their community.

## Appendix A

### Master Course Outline

#### HIST 4XXX: Archives and Special Collections, Lecture/Discussion

#### Course Description

This survey course will introduce students to the history, theory, principles, and management of archives and special collections. Topics presented will provide an overview of the profession and include selection and appraisal, arranging and describing materials, preservation/conservation, disaster planning, content management, digitization, and archival management.

The instructional unit presented here will include subject matter and research activities for students enrolled in this course. This course requires classroom attendance, applied labs, various assignments, a mid-term and final exam, and an essay.

#### Student Learning Outcomes

1. Describe the nature and history of archives including basic principles and practices.
2. Understand the importance of archival selection and appraisal and be able to identify the variety of issues archivists face during this process.
3. Arrange and describe archival materials and express the organization in paper and online finding aids.
4. Identify the potential risks archival materials face and be able to draft an emergency disaster contingency plan.
5. Describe the basic concepts related to gathering metadata and the digitization of records.
6. Describe how to access and conduct research in an archive.

#### Procedures to Evaluate SLOs

1. Written exams on lectures and reading assignments.
2. Participation in class discussion, small group discussion, and other classroom activities.
3. Term paper that makes use of a variety of primary and secondary sources.
4. Exercise related to collecting metadata and writing a paper finding aid.

#### Topical Outline

1. History of Archives.
2. Selecting, Appraising, and Accessioning.
3. Arranging and Describing Archival Collections.
4. Descriptive Standards and Best Practices.

5. Preservation and Conservation.
6. Disaster Planning and Recovery.
7. Digitization and Metadata.
8. Interpretation of Historical Collections for the Public.
9. Copyright Issues in Archives.
10. Research in the Archives.

## Appendix B

### Master Course Outline

#### HIST 4XXX: Oral History Lecture/Discussion

##### Course Description

This course introduces students to the process and best practices of conducting an oral history from start to finish. The skills that will be stressed in this course will include identifying interviewees, interview techniques, ethical and legal considerations, methods of preservation, digitization of materials, transcription, and public presentation of the finished product. This course will appeal to students interested in public history and/or archives as well as to those who are curious about the oral history process. Students taking this course will gain practical experience in project management and understanding of the issues related to documenting community history faced by public historians currently in the workforce.

##### Student Learning Outcomes

Students who take this course will:

1. Understand the research value of community history projects.
2. Understand the basic concepts of metadata.
3. Understand the research value of oral history.
4. Understand the ethical and legal considerations (including institutional review) of conducting an oral history.
5. Understand the process of transcribing oral histories.
6. Understand the challenges of preserving oral histories.

##### Procedures to Evaluate SLOs

Students who take this course will:

1. Participate in screening potential interviewees.
2. Attain approval by the Institutional Review Board.
3. Conduct one interview (this will require **1–2 hours of participation** outside of regular class time and possibly some travel to locations in Kern County).
4. Written exams on lectures and reading assignments.
5. Prepare the interview for digital storage.
6. Write a reflection essay about their experience.

##### Topical Outline

1. Developing Historical Context.
2. Use of Questionnaires.
3. Oral History Planning.

4. Interview Techniques.
5. Editing, Transcribing, and Annotating.
6. Metadata and Processing the Interview.
7. Preservation Standards.
8. Access.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Katie Rispoli Keaotamai, "How to Compete with the Future . . . and Win: Encouraging the Next Generation of History Advocates and Professionals," presentation at the Annual Meeting of the California Conference for the Promotion of History, Sacramento, Calif., October 21–22, 2016, We Are the Next, September 1, 2017, <http://www.wearthenext.org/blog/2016/11/11/engagingthenext>.
- <sup>2</sup> Our definition of "teaching archives" includes instructing students about archival organization and practices, research methods, and community outreach. The definition of "teaching archives" is in contrast to how we define a "collecting archives," where records are deposited and provided to researchers.
- <sup>3</sup> The original space allocated for the archives was approximately 600 square feet. After library staff realignment and the repurposing of space, an additional 2,000 square feet of space was acquired. We temporarily solved our digital storage needs by utilizing space allocated by the California State University Chancellor's Office, realizing that digital space will always be an issue.
- <sup>4</sup> University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, "Active Learning," <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tsal>.
- <sup>5</sup> Megan Oakleaf noted that threshold concepts are those required to think professionally, that is, the ideas and knowledge that make archivists, etc. "think like" archivists, etc. These concepts are built upon over time and contribute to a change in the way students see their major.
- <sup>6</sup> Megan Oakleaf, "A Roadmap for Assessing Student Learning Using the New Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 40, no. 5 (2014): 510, doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2014.08.001.
- <sup>7</sup> John David Gerlach and Tyler P. Reinagel, "Experiential Learning in MPA Programs: A Case for Complementarity between Internship and Service Learning Requirements," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49, no. 1 (2016): 132, doi:10.1017/S1049096515001158.
- <sup>8</sup> Celia Pechak and Mary Thompson, "International Service-Learning and Other International Volunteer Service in Physical Therapist Education Programs in the United States and Canada: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Physical Therapy Education* 23, no. 1 (2009): 77.
- <sup>9</sup> Jennifer Bay, "Preparing Undergraduates for Careers: An Argument for the Internship Practicum," *College English* 69, no. 2 (2006): 139.
- <sup>10</sup> Bay, "Preparing Undergraduates for Careers," 136.
- <sup>11</sup> Jennifer Maddrell, "Service-Learning Instructional Design Considerations," *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* 26, no. 3 (2014): 213–26.
- <sup>12</sup> Amelia Jenkins and Patricia Sheehy, "A Checklist for Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education," *Journal of Community Engagement & Scholarship* 4, no. 2 (2011): 54–58.
- <sup>13</sup> Kristina Bross, "Portable Pedagogy: Neighborhood Archives through Graduate Service Learning," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 398, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/622094>.
- <sup>14</sup> Bross, "Portable Pedagogy," 399.
- <sup>15</sup> Christine I. Celio, Joseph Durlak, and Allison Dymnicki, "A Meta-analysis of the Impact of Service-Learning on Students," *Journal of Experiential Education* 34, no. 2 (2011): 178, doi:10.5193/JEE34.2.164.
- <sup>16</sup> Catherine Bloomquist, "Reflecting on Reflection as a Critical Component in Service Learning," *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science* 56, no. 2 (2015): 171, doi:10.12783/jissn.2328-2967/56/2/1.
- <sup>17</sup> Loriene Roy, "The Place of Service Learning in Reference Education," *Reference Librarian* 55, no. 2 (2014): 168–71, doi:10.1080/02763877.2014.879031.
- <sup>18</sup> Bonnie Brzozowski, Nicholas Homenda, and Loriene Roy, "The Value of Service Learning Projects in Preparing LIS Students for Public Services Careers in Public Libraries," *Reference Librarian* 53, no. 1 (2012): 24–40, doi:10.1080/02763877.2011.591690.
- <sup>19</sup> Sue C. Kimmel, Jody K. Howard, and Bree Ruzzi, "Educating School Library Leaders for Radical Change through Community Service," *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science* 57, no. 2 (2016): 174–86, doi:10.12783/jissn.2328-2967/57/2/9.

<sup>20</sup> Jeannette A. Bastian and Donna Webber, *Archival Internships: A Guide for Faculty, Supervisors, and Students* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2008), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Shippy Copeland, "The History Laboratory: Service-Learning at Cleveland State Community College Library," *Tennessee Libraries* 61, no. 4 (2011), <http://www.tnla.org/?468>.

<sup>22</sup> Please see the "Master Course Outlines" in Appendixes A and B for a description of both courses.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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