100 Years and Still Counting: Maple Hall Comes Alive Through Student-Faculty Collaborative Research

Erin Passehl-Stoddart, Western Oregon University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/erin_passehl/25/
How will Western Oregon University celebrate the 100th anniversary of Maple Hall, the first gymnasium on campus, this spring? Just ask the WOU Dance Department and Western Oregon University Archives, who are collaborating to re-create dances from the May Day celebrations that once graced this campus as early as 1902 and were considered one of the most anticipated events of the year.

As a dance major, Courtney Martin had to decide between choreographing for the annual Spring Dance Concert and completing a special project. After hearing about the opportunity to work with Sharon Oberst, dance professor, on the Maple Hall centennial dance project, Martin chose the special project and began research this past winter using WOU Archives, located inside Hamersly Library.

"I've always been a history geek, I love history," said Martin. Researching the history of physical education, modern dance influences on curriculum, and campus events such as May Day was the perfect match between Martin's love of dance and history.

Preparations to celebrate the first gymnasium's centennial have been underway since 2012. Erin Passehl-Stoddart, assistant professor and university archivist, began researching May Day and found that WOU was the first school in the state to host such an event and that the greater community played a large role. She published an article on Monmouth's May Day celebrations in Willamette Valley Voices in 2013, available to read at: works.bepress.com/erin_passehll23/.

Simultaneously, Oberst approached WOU Archives about researching Maple Hall and May Day in order to host a public recreation of the fete. Oberst researched timelines, dances, music, and costuming using photographs and descriptions from a bygone era. She also gathered first-hand accounts of former students who participated in May Day events on this campus from local speaking events, including a former May Queen. Using the knowledge gained from the archives, she moved forward with planning the event for 2014.

Martin began her research for her senior project with materials collected by Oberst, followed by research appointments with Passehl-Stoddart to access course catalogs with descriptions of physical education curriculum and instructors, yearbooks, historical photographs and faculty records.

Martin continued her secondary source research by ordering books through Hamersly Library and reading broadly about the history of May Day. She settled on a research topic of "The collaboration between the WOU Archives and the dance program has been even better than I had hoped. They have been there every step of the way, helping Courtney with her research and providing information needed to accurately re-create these historic dances."

Sharon Oberst, dance professor
There is nothing like working with a student and watching them become immersed in rich historical materials that completely changes the way they think about research. It makes history come alive and students see things in a new light.

Erin Passehl-Stoddart, assistant professor and archivist

In addition to the written thesis, Martin also used historical research to create the dances that will be performed this spring. Martin read about and watched videos of traditional German folk dances and waltzes that were used in May Day performances. She found a handful of German folk dances to have something historically accurate and added her own dance sequences to the Maypole waltz.

"Since college students will be performing these dances, I wanted to make them technically harder with more formation changes compared to the past, where children attending the training school would perform in the spring event. The way one dance can be historically accurate and the waltz can have some modern twists," Martin explained.

Martin's "toolbox" also included music selections, which she obtained from reading accounts of what music was used in the past, and then found music samples through the iTunes store. From reading accounts of what music selections, which she obtained from reading accounts of what music was used in the past, and then found music samples through the iTunes store.

Costuming was also part of her research; Martin remarked, "I love thinking about the changing roles of women in society, what they were allowed... are also going to think about what that meant in terms of public health; Jensen said. "We'll be able to dooral history interviews that can take to any workplace, graduate school, or profession to find and analyze information."

"One of the things I really hope for the students is to take a project like this from the bricks, if you will, from the individual sources and try to put together a life and have interpretation," Jensen said. "These are skills they can take with them into graduate school."

Jensen’s collaborative research projects, such as the Maple Hall centennial, offer students the flexibility to work on one-on-one interactions between student and faculty. Martin commented, "working with Erin throughout the process was extremely helpful and fun. Before I began I thought I would be digging through materials alone, just me and the

dust, but instead we worked together as a team to tackle my research question."

Through both Martin’s thesis and the dance performances, there is an opportunity to bring awareness to both the University Archives program and the types of historical materials available for research and scholarship to the campus and greater community.

I have worked with students in both their research and as an intern," said Passehl-Stoddart, "but this is the first time it has resulted in a creative performance. I am very proud of Courtney’s work and look forward to having her scholarship introduced to University Archives for future researchers."

There’s a lot to love about Western Oregon University: the small class sizes, breathtaking campus, rural location that’s still accessible to Oregon’s population centers, and research opportunities for undergraduates to work with outstanding faculty. The History Department is one area of campus where faculty make it a priority to incorporate student research.

Dr. Kim Jensen has made it a priority to provide her undergraduate students with research opportunities, something that is reserved for graduate students at most institutions. In spring 2014 she is teaching a class on women in Oregon history, which stemmed from her own research on public health activist Dr. Esther Lovejoy and Jensen’s collaborative work with people around that state for the woman suffrage movement of 1912.

Through that work Jensen learned of Dr. Laura Colby Price, a physician who served as Monmouth city health officer in the early 20th century. For part of the class, students will continue the research Jensen has begun on Price by using primary sources such as the Monmouth Herald newspaper.

Price graduated from a Chicago medical school and came to Monmouth in 1912. For part of the class, students will continue the research Jensen has begun on Price by using primary sources such as the Monmouth Herald newspaper. Price graduated from a Chicago medical school and came to Monmouth in 1912. Price in the process. She was among a number of women physicians who were early health officers in Oregon. "During the First World War there was a big influenza epidemic in the fall of 1918, so students are also going to think about what that meant it terms of public health," Jensen said. "We’ll share our research at the end of the term this June in an online exhibit and a brief documentary film at wowu.edu/oregonwomen."

In addition to researching Price as a group project, students in the class will have their own projects. "People are interested in local history and the history of our state. Oregon women have done really interesting and important things that were first, but also lots of diverse women have contributed to our history. It’s a great opportunity for us to uncover more of our history, so that student research piece is very important," Jensen said.

For their individual projects, students will be able to do oral history interviews and other research projects to uncover more about women. The class will be valuable because of the student research adding to what we know about Oregon women."