

SPECIAL FOCUS

Scrutinizing History: Library Research Scholar Pursues Inclusive Inquiry



ARTICLE BY

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Hazel McClure

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How do we start to change the scholarly conversation to include more diverse perspectives?

This question, central to the daily work of the Grand Valley State University Libraries, encapsulates the theme of the partnership undergraduate student Ruth Ott made between Public Services & Community Engagement Archivist Leigh Rupinski and Liaison Librarian Emily Frigo as part of the Library Research Scholars Summer 2018 cohort.

The Library Research Scholars, a collaborative program between University Libraries and the Office for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship, provides a space for University Libraries’ faculty and undergrad-

uate students to grapple deeply with such questions. “These students come with their very unique perspective as students and as people who are exploring an academic discipline,” explained Liaison Librarian, Hazel McClure, the program lead for the Library Research Scholars.

The program’s research agenda is student-driven. It provides a research





opportunity that leverages the disciplinary interest and lived experience of students and matches it with librarian expertise. This collaboration results in a funded opportunity for students to conduct intensive research, experience a high-impact learning practice, and support the strategic work of the University Libraries.

“They come to us with really fantastic, out-of-the-box approaches,” added McClure.

Such a collaboration occurred when Ruth Ott, a double major in women, gender and sexuality studies and political science, was selected as one of four Library Research Scholars (see sidebar) for the summer of 2018. Ott’s original project idea was to create an exhibit using archival material about the history of the Michigan Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) experience. But she quickly hit a barrier.

“There wasn’t enough physical material there,” Ott explained. Under the mentor-

ship of Rupinski and Frigo, Ott persevered through this initial challenge, changed focus and began conducting original research.

“Ruth became an investigatory researcher and conducted interviews when she uncovered information gaps in the library archives and other traditional information resources like newspapers,” explained Frigo.

“A lot of the research I ended up doing was having conversations with people about their experiences with LGBT activism and communities,” Ott said.

These conversations identified problems minority voices experience with being represented in the scholarly record – lack of representation, unintentional bias, and misrepresentation.

“Archives have a long history – as do many other institutions – of being dominated by rich, white men,” explained Rupinski.

With this additional research, Ott was able to see that the barrier that originally

Rachel Britton, a photography major, collaborated with Liaison Librarian Gayle Schaub on the project, “Dysmorphia” to research dysmorphia as the foundation of an art project that will be featured in the Mary Idema Pew Library Learning and Information Commons’ exhibit space from November 20 - December 5, 2018.

Aaron Nelson, a geography major, collaborated with Health Science Librarian Barbara Harvey on his project, “The Mary Idema Pew Library: How Libraries Transform from an Architect’s Floor Plan to a Geographer’s Map.” Nelson created a storytelling map telling the history of Grand Valley State University Libraries.

Maureen Wood, a double major in psychology and economics, collaborated with Liaison Librarian Erica Millsbaugh on, “Help! It’s Due in Two Hours: Point-of-Need Research Services from a Student’s Perspective,” to create a research guide for students made by a student.

SPECIAL FOCUS CONTINUED

stymied her project could be turned into an opportunity for making change. Ott's project had a new focus.

"I wanted to create a space where people could learn to apply nuance and develop better research," Ott said. "I've developed my understanding of the factors that shape historical narratives and I want to use the skills that I developed in the Library

Scholars program to teach students how to challenge normative beliefs and develop more nuanced, complex research."

To that end, Ott has designed a workshop to offer her fellow undergraduate students during the Fall 2018 semester focused on questioning LGBT representation in the scholarly record and challenging its normative trend. Ott is creating program-

ming from which the University Libraries hope to learn.

Faculty mentor Emily Frigo notes the importance of the partnership.

"In the words of David Cooperider, 'we live in a world our questions create,'" Frigo noted, "We need projects like Ruth's that engage in inclusive inquiry in order to shape and better reflect our world."

