

Shared Service in the Archives: The Johns Hopkins University First-generation Students Oral History Project

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Introduction

Archivists, like librarians, often provide service to users that is defined by the mission and the institutional context of their employer. University archivists are tasked with documenting the history of their institution, and in doing so, have historically focused much of their attention on the records of institutional offices. This practice leaves out the stories of students and other communities affected by the institution. As immersed as university archivists are in academic libraries and the infrastructure of the academy, activist archivists can still challenge the status quo through intentional collecting of what is neither *de facto*, nor traditional. As archivists at the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) in Baltimore, Maryland, we recognized the lack of student representation in our university archives and set out to fill these gaps in our collection.

Through conversations with undergraduate students, we realized our strategy of documenting student life at Hopkins by collecting the records of student organizations was not generating a rich, inclusive historical record of student life. In response, we developed a project to conduct oral history interviews with first-generation college students at JHU. This work took the form of a symbiotic, shared service model between interviewer and student participant. While complicated by issues of power and

identity, this model nevertheless offers promise as a different way of looking at service in libraries and archives.

The First-generation Students Oral History Project was influenced by the work of scholars who identify the presence of white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity in the archives and advocate for archivists to actively combat social injustice.¹ In keeping with these ideas,² we envisioned the oral history project as a way to better fulfill our professional mission and to better serve our diverse student community. Oral history continues to gain traction as a tool for university archivists seeking to diversify collections that fail to adequately represent marginalized student communities.³ In this oral history project, we found ourselves in a service relationship with student participants that was far from a traditional archives service dynamic of patrons requesting information and archivists fielding those requests. We were not victims of “handmaiden syndrome,”⁴ the assumption that librarians and archivists are accessible and available at all times to meet the needs of patrons. Rather, in the oral history context, our role was to facilitate the students’ own service contributions as content creators sharing deeply personal reflections and experiences. This shared service model offered the students agency in determining how their story would be documented in the historical record, and allowed for representation of their intersectional identities in ways that collecting traditional institutional records might not. The students’ participation in the project was an empowering and vital service in filling some of the gaps in the university’s archival record.

Service in Archives

Although archivists work with a unique subset of materials within the information ecosystem, they share librarians’ strong ethos of service. The Society

1 See works by Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, Mario H. Ramirez, Ricardo Punzalan, Bergis Jules, and other archival theorists.

2 Archives Against Collective, “Archives Against History Repeating Itself,” accessed May 26, 2019, <http://www.archivistsagainst.org/>. This website includes recommended readings and examples of activities geared toward examining and dismantling power inequities in archives.

3 Recent examples focusing on first-generation students include the Student Voices oral and video histories at the University of Northern Colorado (<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/voices/>) and the 1st Gen Voices Oral History Project at Chico State University (<https://library.csuchico.edu/university-archives/OHP>).

4 Clare Beck, “Reference Services: A Handmaid’s Tale; We Haven’t Come a Long Way, Baby; Reference Services Are Still Shaped by Turn-of-the-Century Gender Roles,” *Library Journal* 116, no. 7 (April 1991): 32.

of American Archivists describes how archivists “identify the essential evidence of our society and ensure its availability for use by students, teachers, researchers, organization leaders, historians, and a wide range of individuals with information needs,” a crucial societal role, given that “archival records serve to strengthen collective memory and protect people’s rights, property, and identity.”⁵ In addition to the service dynamic inherent in meeting the immediate needs of archives users, archivists serve their communities by preserving and making accessible the records of our collective memory.

Since the 1970s, however, archivists have been asking tough questions of themselves about how well they are actually serving their communities. Historian Howard Zinn challenged archivists in 1970 to refocus their collecting efforts away from centers of wealth and power and toward documenting “the lives, desires, and needs of ordinary people.”⁶ SAA President F. Gerald Ham concurred, declaring in 1974 that “if we are not helping people understand the world they live in, and if this is not what archives is all about, then I do not know what it is that we are doing that is all that important.”⁷ This professional identity crisis continued to simmer quietly through subsequent decades, and archivists in many institutions widened the scope of their collection development with the intention of documenting a broader swath of society.

In the 2010s, some archivists and scholars began to expose the ways in which archives fall short of this intention and to suggest and create a variety of potential solutions. Michelle Caswell’s work notably identifies the systems and power structures within archives that perpetuate racial injustice and a lack of balance in the archival record.⁸ Her efforts to shine a light on white privilege in archival work and suggest actions that archivists can and should take to combat it have been influential; her work co-founding the South Asian American Digital Archive offers a compelling example of how a participatory community archives can offer a sense of “representational belonging” to community members.⁹ In a similar vein, members of

5 “What Are Archives?” Society of American Archivists, accessed January 10, 2019, www2.archivists.org/about-archives.

6 Howard Zinn, “The Archivist and Radical Reform,” unpublished manuscript, quoted in F. Gerald Ham, “The Archival Edge,” *The American Archivist* 38, no. 1 (1975): 5.

7 Ham, “The Archival Edge,” 13.

8 Michelle Caswell, “Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives,” *Library Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (July 2017): 222–35.

9 Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez “To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives,” *The American Archivist* 79, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 57.

the “Documenting the Now” project team have worked for several years to both draw attention to the archival record being created by marginalized communities on social media platforms and to create tools that empower archivists to capture it.¹⁰ These examples represent a few of the many ways in which archivists are beginning to reconceptualize the notion of service within the profession through the lens of social justice.

Service in Oral History

In creating the First-generation Students Oral History Project at Johns Hopkins University, we employed oral history as a tool for providing more effective service to those underrepresented in the university archives. Oral history as a practice has its own evolutionary history. Columbia University established the first formal archives to collect and preserve oral histories in 1948, with UCLA, Berkeley, and other universities following suit in the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹ While these early US programs began with “a ‘top down’ focus on political, economic, and cultural elites,” a more “bottom up” focus on local communities, race, class, and gender developed in the 1970s and gained recognition through the best-selling oral histories published by Studs Terkel.¹² Oral history gained currency as a research technique for historians, anthropologists, and other scholars, who began to apply the same theoretical and philosophical frameworks shaping their scholarship to the practice of oral history. In the 1980s, scholars recording oral histories with women developed feminist methodologies for their work, including “interview techniques that asked women to ascribe their own meanings—their own feelings—to their lives,”¹³ rather than focusing on their roles and status in a patriarchal society. Beginning in the late 1980s, oral historians applied postmodern and postcolonial theory to their work, challenging the notion of objectivity in oral history interviewing and

10 Bergis Jules, Ed Summers, and Dr. Vernon Mitchell, Jr., “Ethical Considerations for Archiving Social Media Content Generated by Contemporary Social Movements: Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations,” Documenting the Now, April 2018, <https://www.docnow.io/docs/docnow-whitepaper-2018.pdf>.

11 Donald A. Ritchie, “Introduction: The Evolution of Oral History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–4.

12 Ritchie, 4–5.

13 Sue Armitage, “The Stages of Women’s Oral History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 173.

closely examining both the interviewer-interviewee relationship and the representation of intersectional identities.¹⁴

In his influential work *A Shared Authority*, oral historian Michael Frisch argues that “what is most compelling about oral and public history is a capacity to redefine and redistribute intellectual authority, so that this might be shared more broadly in historical research and communication rather than continuing to serve as an instrument of power and hierarchy.”¹⁵ The degree to which a power imbalance exists in an oral history interview can significantly alter the results. In the 1930s, out-of-work writers were employed to interview former slaves as part of the 1930s Federal Writers’ Project. One African American woman was interviewed twice, once by a white woman and once by an African American man. She gave very different accounts of her life to the interviewers, accounts likely shaped by the different power dynamics with each interviewer.¹⁶ Frisch’s conceptualization of oral history interviewers and participants as co-creators sharing the power and authority generated by their work can also be applied to what is, in a sense, the inverse of power: service. “Power” as a concept connotes control or command over others, authority, and dominance. In contrast, “service” implies a selfless, assistive role, performing useful labor in support of and for the benefit of others. Just as power and authority can be shared between oral history interviewer and participant, so too can the burden of service. A one-sided service model ignores the effort required from both parties to produce an oral history. If oral history interviewers perceive themselves as the main providers of service in a project, they devalue the service their subjects offer in sharing their own highly personal memories and reflections for posterity. However, the work of oral history interviewers to prepare, record, transcribe, and preserve interviews is labor-intensive, and plays a significant role in shaping the final product of the collaboration. Shared service, like shared power, acknowledges the contributions of both parties in creating oral histories. Oral history provides a flexible, dynamic space where both interviewer and interviewee can hold authority and give of themselves, making it an essential tool in achieving our goal of capturing a more diverse, nuanced record of student life at JHU.

14 Armitage, 174.

15 Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xx.

16 Mary Kay Quinlan, “The Dynamics of Interviewing,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32.

Project Origins: “Where am I in the archives?”

The Johns Hopkins University’s Ferdinand Hamburger University Archives aims to collect, preserve, provide access to, and promote the history of Johns Hopkins University in its many forms.¹⁷ This includes documenting the administrative, academic, and cultural life of the university. Documenting the student experience is an important part of this work, and one that has been acknowledged as challenging by archivists working in college and university settings.¹⁸ The First-generation Students Oral History Project’s origins lie in a conversation between archivists and an undergraduate student that revealed the archives’ shortcomings in fulfilling its stated mission.

In spring 2017, archivists Jordon Steele and Jennifer Kinniff worked with an undergraduate course in JHU’s Museums and Society program, where students explored and critically evaluated collections documenting the experiences of black Americans in JHU’s museums, special collections, and university archives. We visited the class to discuss existing university archives collections, and the gaps and “archival silences”¹⁹ in those collections. We described a new strategy to improve documentation of the diverse student experience by approaching a wide range of student groups to raise awareness of the archives and encourage transfers of records. A student in the class let us know that she, a first-generation student, a mother, and a commuter who had no time to participate in student organizations, would not be represented in the materials we planned to gather. “Where am I in the archives?” she asked. “Where is my experience documented?”

This insightful question motivated us to reevaluate our plans for documenting the student community. We realized that our intended focus on collecting organizational records gave short shrift to important concepts identified by scholars of critical race theory and participatory action research: namely, that “individuals have multiple, overlapping, potentially

17 “University Archives.” Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.library.jhu.edu/library-departments/special-collections/university-archives/>.

18 See, for example, Jessica Wagner, “The Student As Subaltern: Reconsidering the Role of Student Life Material Collections at North American Universities,” *Archival Issues* 35, no. 1 (2013), and Michele Christian, “Documenting Student Life: the Use of Oral Histories in University Archives,” *Archival Issues* 27, no. 2 (2002).

19 The term “archival silence” refers to the phenomenon where “the powerful can introduce silences into the archives by denying marginal groups their voice and the opportunity to participate in the archives.” Rodney G.S. Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence,” *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 217.

conflicting, identities, loyalties, and allegiances”²⁰ and that research which complicates identity categories has the potential to expand our understanding of one another beyond prescribed identities. This encounter led us to adopt an additional method for documenting student life: an oral history project of first-generation students at JHU. This project would help balance the archives’ previous emphasis on organizational records by bringing full, complex, personal recountings of the student experience into the archives from students whose stories were underrepresented in the existing collection.

In late 2017, we put out a call for first-generation college student participants in an oral history project, working with the Office of the Registrar to identify and contact all first-generation graduating seniors by email. Five students responded and were interviewed in winter and early spring of 2018 by Processing Archivist Annie Tang (a first-generation college graduate) and Jennifer Kinniff. We chose to protect the identity of the students by anonymizing them in any publicly accessible documentation, transcripts, and the oral history recordings themselves. We hoped that by doing so, the students would feel more comfortable sharing difficult truths and stories. The resultant work was described in an ArchivesSpace finding aid and hosted online in JScholarship, JHU’s institutional repository.²¹

The Interviewees: “I feel like I differ probably from a lot of Hopkins students”

We were pleased that a culturally, socioeconomically, and geographically diverse group of interviewees responded to the call for participants. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the interviewees shared some things in common, such as the geographical and cultural distance between their homes and JHU. One participant, known by their initials “TK” for anonymity, hailed from Taiwan, almost 8,000 miles away from Baltimore. Of their family, they spoke simply: “I definitely miss them a lot.”²² All five

20 María Torre, “Participatory Action Research and Critical Race Theory: Fueling Spaces for Nos-otras to Research,” *Urban Review* 41, no. 1 (March 2009): 112.

21 “Ferdinand Hamburger University Archives First-generation Students Oral History Project oral histories,” Johns Hopkins Libraries, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://archivesspace.library.jhu.edu/repositories/3/>.

22 “TK,” interviewed by Annie Tang (19 February 2018), Johns Hopkins University Oral History Collection, MS.0404, 4, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://archivesspace.library.jhu.edu/repositories/3/>.

participants described being raised in working-class or lower-middle-class environments. “JC” noted of their rural New Hampshire town: “About half the kids didn’t end up going to college. They went straight into the workforce or dropped out.”²³

Another common thread was a sense of difference from many of their more affluent peers at JHU. “PS,” a community college transfer student from California by way of Iran, compared her experience to those of wealthier undergraduates: “We have people from really, really different backgrounds than what I come with and sometimes when you’re struggling with a class or something, you’re like, well, at least you don’t have to worry about working, and I have to work.”²⁴

Most of the students identified as persons-of-color (PoC) with immigrant parents or were initially immigrants to the US themselves. The Fresno-born child of Mexican immigrants, “PG” noted the disparity in their collegiate life and their life back home: during the academic year they were a respected pre-med student conducting research in labs, while in the summer, they physically labored in their father’s landscaping business. “PG” wonders “if my dad’s clients ever think oh, his son is working for him, and when would a Hopkins student ever do manual labor like this...”²⁵

While the interviewees shared characteristics common for first-generation college students, they were also unique individuals. Ecuador-born “SB” attended military school prior to JHU and liked the military’s rules, neatness, and punctuality,²⁶ while PG participated in dance and activist groups on campus.²⁷ The students expressed interest in pursuing fashion design and graduate programs in psychology, environmental science, and

23 “JC,” interviewed by Annie Tang (20 February 2018), Johns Hopkins University Oral History Collection, MS.0404, 3–7, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://archivesspace.library.jhu.edu/repositories/3/>.

24 “PS,” interviewed by Jenny Kinniff (23 February 2018), Johns Hopkins University Oral History Collection, MS.0404, 17, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://archivesspace.library.jhu.edu/repositories/3/>.

25 “PG,” interviewed by Annie Tang (20 April 2018), Johns Hopkins University Oral History Collection, MS.0404, 6, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://archivesspace.library.jhu.edu/repositories/3/>.

26 “SB,” interviewed by Jenny Kinniff (26 February 2018), Johns Hopkins University Oral History Collection, MS.0404, 10, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://archivesspace.library.jhu.edu/repositories/3/>.

27 “PG,” Johns Hopkins University Oral History Collection, 16.

biomedical engineering after graduation. TK alone shared their strong faith in Christianity and the acknowledgment of their “lifelong process” of using faith to understand their place in society.²⁸

Identity, Representation, and Power in Oral History

While conducting the interviews, we both grappled with the ways in which our own professional and cultural identities shaped our service. I (Annie) could not help but feel a connection to the interviewees through my own background and identity. Once a minority, first-generation college student myself, I grew up in an area dominated by blue-collar immigrant families like one interviewee, and struggled throughout high school as another did. I felt the most cultural kinship with TK, whose Taiwanese traditions and language were similar to my Chinese American identity. The feeling of kinship was strong enough that I could not help but break with my role as an “objective” interviewer, and include my part of the narrative in TK’s oral history.²⁹ TK was describing her family’s linguistic practices when I added, “That was the same with me, with my siblings, we all spoke English perfectly, and then our parents would also get mad at us, too, because we were not speaking Cantonese. I understand what you’re talking about.”³⁰ What compelled me to speak up? Solidarity, assuredly. A chance for representation, implicitly.

Archivists who come from marginalized groups, keenly feeling the archival gaps and “symbolic annihilation”³¹ of their own communities in history-telling, may actively seek to participate in projects that shed light on marginalized communities, including those they claim as part of their

28 “TK,” Johns Hopkins University Oral History Collection, 25.

29 Traditional oral history training dictates that interviewers should keep their feedback neutral during the course of the interview, neither in agreement or disagreement with the participants. See oral history training resources by the Baylor University Institute for Oral History: <https://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/>. However, while interviewees are indeed the main focus of oral histories, recent oral historians also acknowledge it is almost impossible to be wholly neutral to the experiences of interviewees. Oral history interviews are sometimes seen as subjective dialogue. See works by oral historian Sean Field.

30 “TK,” 7.

31 Michelle Caswell et al., “‘To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise’: Community Archives and the Importance of Representation,” *Archives and Records-The Journal of the Archives and Records Association* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 16.

identity. Described as the “impact of absence or misrepresentation”³² by Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor, symbolic annihilation is a concept in media and archival studies that names what underrepresented persons experience when they see the lack of their cultures, histories, or selves represented in media or the archival record. In a profession which is profoundly white and heteronormative, and which perpetuates the inclusion of white majority culture, archivists who do not fit the profession’s cultural profile often embrace the opportunity to create a sort of archival social justice through the work they do.³³

On both sides of the interviewer-interviewee relationship, participants recognized the significance of their project to the university archives and the power of the service they offered. Outside of the recorded interview, some interviewees acknowledged to the archivists the legacies they wanted to leave behind, and the value of their stories being preserved for posterity. Though the students lacked any significant prior experience with archives, they viewed the archives with a sort of awe. They saw the “symbolic value” of their interviews, a recognition of the value of one’s personal identities in the historical record.³⁴ From our perspective, we were aware of how our traditionally acquired records replicate the bureaucratic power structures and historical whiteness of the university. For example, researchers exploring the African-American student experience at JHU have a very small set of materials to explore. The records of the Black Student Union, an organization founded in 1968, fill one small document box. Yearbooks and student newspapers are another potential source. Other collections, such as the records of the Office of the President and the Board of Trustees, contain relevant records, but the events they document are presented from the perspective of the administration rather than the students. The archival silences around JHU African-American students’ experiences are profound. When one considers the complex, multi-faceted personal identities of these students beyond just their race, their representation in the archives narrows even more. Working together with students to create records documenting the everyday life of our modern, diverse student population is an example of symbolic value combatting symbolic annihilation.

32 Caswell, et al., ““To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise,”” 12.

33 See projects by archivists such as Dominique Luster’s Tedx Talk regarding marginalized voices and Thuy Vo Dang’s Vietnamese Oral History Project at the University of California, Irvine.

34 Michelle Caswell, et al., “Imagining Transformative Spaces: The Personal–Political Sites of Community Archives,” *Archival Science* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 80.

As oral history theorist Lynn Abrams has noted, “the very fact that we arrive at an interview armed with recording equipment and research questions gives us legitimacy and thus power.”³⁵ In my role as the oral history program manager, I (Jennifer) was acutely conscious of the power dynamics at play in my interactions with the student participants. Students maintained agency throughout the project in a number of ways: they volunteered to participate, had time and wide latitude to tell their story during the interview, were given the opportunity to review audio and transcripts and offer revisions, and selected the degree to which their interview would be made publicly accessible. Even with our attempts to give the students agency in the interview process, a power discrepancy was present. Interviews were conducted at the library, our place of employment. We were older; compensated for our time on the project as part of our regular job duties; created the list of topics to be discussed; and as managers of the process, we were ultimately responsible for ensuring that words were transcribed, stories were posted online, voices were heard by the world. As interviewers, we experienced little of the vulnerability felt by students sharing intensely personal stories for public consumption.

Some methods to explore in subsequent years of this project in order to bring balance to the interviewer-interviewee relationship could include selecting a more neutral location for interviews, compensating participants for their time, or hiring and training first-generation students to interview their peers. We were able to publish all but one of the unrestricted transcripts, and all the audio files online. (One student requested their transcripts not be available online.) As Abrams notes, the ability to post interviews online offers another way to “shift the balance of power from researcher to respondent...through democratisation of the output of a project.”³⁶ By making stories publicly available in their entirety, we are able to eliminate barriers to access that come with the necessity of visiting an archive, and avoid issues of control over another person’s story that come from interpretation and recontextualization by historians. Every step of the interview process, from initial contact to publishing, offers an opportunity to evaluate the service dynamic at work, and to make conscious choices to subvert the existing power dynamic and empower and elevate interviewee voices.

35 Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 163.

36 Abrams, 173.

The Emotional Toll of Shared Service in Oral History

In the shared service of oral history, our students' deeply personal reflections exacted an emotional toll from them and, to a lesser extent, from us. The first-generation undergraduates discussed difficult topics including experiencing a lack of educational support from extended family; facing racism from their peers throughout their childhood; exploring their LGBTQIA identity; and, for one of the students, the undocumented immigration status of their relatives. These were not easy moments for the participants. They imparted "psychological truths," as noted by oral historian Sean Field, not precise recordings of memories, but indelible impressions of emotionally-charged ones.³⁷

As interviewers we felt a degree of emotional fallout from such topics, ranging from empathy, to indignation, to discomfort with opinions expressed that ran contrary to our own. We also at times saw our own experiences reflected in the students' stories, which made it difficult to listen to their struggles. Annie particularly connected with TK's journey of cultural identity, while also identifying with the ambitious PG, who grew up in an ethnically diverse, working-class town much like her own. We acknowledged the students' remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, but a part of us could not help but wish the circumstances of their lives had been less difficult.

The emotional toll of oral history on interviewers is an acknowledged, if not deeply explored, one in oral history. One oral historian who spent eight years interviewing the LGBT Chicano/Latino community in San Francisco, a community with which he identified, recalled that "I was overwhelmed; some nights I could not fall asleep, feeling the pressures of history I carried with me."³⁸ Another oral historian has posed the question, "What about aftercare for the bruised one who has heard histories that were buried for good reason, who wants to help their interviewee cope with the uncovered hurt and who wants to cope with their own despair or rage about the injustice they have heard?"³⁹ She suggests including people

37 Sean Field, "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 34.

38 Horacio N. Roque Ramirez and Teresa Barnett, "Recording a Queer Community: An Interview with Horacio N. Roque Ramirez," in *Oral History and Communities of Color*, ed. Teresa Barnett and Chon A. Noriega (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2013), 144.

39 Jo Stanley, "Letters," *Oral History* 24, no. 2 (1996): 25.

with counseling expertise on a project team. Making these services available to both interviewers and interviewees would offer support to both participants in the interview. Most oral history projects managed by universities, archives and libraries lack the resources to include counseling staff, however. For those working in university environments, reaching out to colleagues working in the fields of psychology and counseling about partnership might be a productive avenue. Another approach could be to make participants aware of any free counseling resources that are available to them through an Employee Assistance Program, campus counseling center, or other local services. The question of how to mitigate the emotional toll of interviewing and sharing one's story calls for more attention from the oral history community.

The discussion of emotional fallout in oral history parallels discussions of “whole-self” librarianship and “vocational awe” in libraries and archives. Even when they feel personally and professionally compelled to undertake it, anti-oppression work like the First-generation Students Oral History Project has the potential to take a toll on archivists and librarians, to the extent that their own well-being begins to suffer. Fobazi Ettarh describes the expectation that librarians make personal sacrifices in the name of their library's important work as “whole-self” librarianship. Librarians engage in “whole-self” librarianship out of a sense of “vocational awe”—the reverence for one's professional mission that prevents a librarian from prioritizing their own well-being. This can result in burnout, a common end to many an information professional's career.⁴⁰ “Whole-self” librarianship particularly affects those advocating for diversity and inclusion. In addition to their regular job duties, they may feel compelled (by internal or external forces) to assume even more responsibilities in the interest of advocating for marginalized communities. While it is imperative that archivists and librarians continue to combat social injustice through their work, in doing so they must remain mindful of their own mental and physical welfare.

Conclusion

Records documenting the student experience remain a common gap in college and university archives. Larger still is the gap where records that

40 Fobazi Ettarh, “Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves,” *In the Library With the Lead Pipe*, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/>.

convey the full, complex, intersectional identities of students should exist. We initially viewed the First-generation Students Oral History Project as a way of better meeting our service mission to document the full scope of the university community. The project also spoke to a broader professional service philosophy, influenced by recent discourse on racial injustice and white supremacy in the archives, of collecting and maintaining a diverse archival record. We discovered, though, that the service role in the project belonged neither to us, nor to the student participants, but to both parties in equal measure. Each participant offered their own service within a context of power, identity, and sense of purpose that resulted in the finished interviews. The emotional burden of service on both interviewers and students in these interviews was not insignificant, and should be monitored carefully and evaluated going forward to ensure that the cost of contributing to such a project does not become too high for any participant.

Engaging students and archivists in an active, creative relationship to better document the university community through oral history offers an example of how archives can reinvigorate the traditional archival service dynamic. Rather than assessing the gaps and weaknesses of collections in our care by ourselves and deciding how to remedy them, in what other ways can we invite our communities to evaluate their own representation in the archives and participate in making it more robust? Archivists have a strong sense of service in their work, but they need not assume the entire burden of fulfilling it. Input from our communities will allow us to fulfill our mission more effectively. Archives that are truly representative of our society will require the participation of our entire society, something archivists should embrace and facilitate as part of our own service ethos.

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