

Reflective Essay

I tell stories. Sometimes those stories are breaking news and sometimes those stories span thousands of years, but the stories are always about people in communities. My own community has been the University of Maryland for the past three years. The College Park Scholars program shrunk that community into a personal network of friends, classmates, and mentors that has continuously given me the confidence, ability, and desire to tell the stories of others. Last year, I was given the chance to help tell the story of College Park Scholars through the History of Scholars colloquium. My research into the Maryland Room Archives and personal collections allowed me to tell the story of a program that, over twenty years, grew into a community and has affected me personally.

The colloquium's purpose was simple: create a timeline documenting and celebrating the twenty years of College Park Scholars. Out of sixteen students, three of us became the Researchers Group and laid the foundation for the timeline using primary documents from the Archives and personal collections. I chose to be in the Researchers Group because I wanted to answer a personal question: How did we get here? I had been in Scholars for two years, yet knew little about the program's history. I learned that Scholars started as a discussion about increasing on-campus residents and offering an alternative program to Honors. As I researched, I kept this question in mind: How does a small, private discussion grow into a community?

Dr. Katherine McAdams, the colloquium's instructor, knew about collections of Scholars memorabilia and reports in the Archives. I emailed and met with University of Maryland Archivist Anne Turkos, who gave me a list of all the College

Park Scholars boxes in the catalog. Meeting with her allowed me to get an idea of what could be in the cardboard boxes haphazardly marked "Scholars" in Sharpie. Most of the boxes had not been opened in years except to add the College Park Scholars Annual Report. I spent my afternoons in the Maryland Room of Hornbake Library, going through the heavy, dusty boxes and pulling out everything from golf balls to the First Annual Report. We borrowed another large, dusty cardboard box from Scholars Administrative Assistant Nancy Matrenas. Matrenas' box was overflowing the photographs: Polaroids, film reels, and floppy disks.

When condensing the overwhelming amount of reports, statistics, and pamphlets, we looked for documents and items we ourselves would want to see. Finding photographs with a younger Dr. McAdams, sifting through one of the first College Park Scholars pamphlets, and reading what the first Scholars program directors had to say made us realize just how far Scholars has come. I truly do not believe that the founders of College Park Scholars had any idea that twenty years later, current Scholars would be digging through thousands of photos to help celebrate an internationally renowned program's anniversary. We ended up focusing on the Annual Reports, the timelines produced for the 15th Anniversary, photographs, and promotional materials.

As I stated above, we wanted sources that we personally found interesting or entertaining. We knew that past, present, and future scholars would be looking at the timeline and wanted informational as well as interesting slides. I was particularly interested in keeping with our theme, Growing a Community, which is why the timeline we developed for class shows the metamorphosis of programs

over the years. In photographs, we looked for people we recognized from other documents, events such as the annual charity softball game and Service Day, and interesting glimpses into the lives of past Scholars. Promotional materials like orientation pamphlets and early program guides helped build an image of the early days of Scholars. The Annual Reports and timeline were a goldmine of significant happenings over the years. We looked for and tried to stick to materials that were dated and, for photos, had captions with names.

Our research process was cut short by the semester's end. However, within those four months of hanging out in the Maryland Room or organizing photos with my group mate and roommate Marissa in our dorm room, I learned the importance of using primary documents and about managing a research team. In my journalism and anthropology classes, I am taught to get direct quotes and use the artifacts to tell stories. Primary documents are no different. Having the 15th anniversary timeline was a great resource in knowing what to look for, but being able to dig through physical pictures and flipping through pages in a report gave me the ability to see and read what past Scholars saw and read. I have already begun using more primary documents in my research papers. I also became the team leader of the Research Group; as such, I organized our materials, time, and information to complete and effectively communicate our research to the class.

If given more time, I would have delved deeper into each program's changes throughout the years. The wealth of information at our disposal was almost overwhelming and I wish we had more time to read through and organize it all. The largest problem we had was time. The Maryland Room is only open for a few hours

during the week and some Sundays, during which I usually had class. I would have been able to utilize the archives more had I been able to go on a Saturday or at night. The Scholars boxes were unmarked except for their catalog number. I had to spend time going through the boxes and seeing what was inside so I could easily get to what I needed when I needed it. However, I am proud of the research my group completed and how that research aided in the History of Scholars Timeline.