The Reading Room Goes Virtual: Retooling First Year Experience Class Encounters with Archives and Primary Sources in the Wake of COVID-19

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Introduction

When Mississippi State University (MSU) made the decision to have students return to campus in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Fall of 2020, instructors of some face-to-face classes had to rethink parts of their course content in order to meet strict safety requirements. Librarians who taught archives-based First Year Experience (FYE) classes had to make significant changes — including the fact that their classes would no longer meet in the library itself.

In the "Cowbell Yell: Exploring MSU History and Traditions Through MSU Libraries' Historical Archives" class, taught by reference librarians Melody Dale and DeeDee Baldwin, past activities such as group games, visits to library departments, and a potluck had to be replaced with individual, in-class activities. Because the class was designed to make heavy use of materials from University Archives and Special Collections, the instructors focused on digital collections and additional items scanned by archival faculty and staff.

The "Game Changing: Exploring the African American Student Experience" class, in which University Archivist Jessica Perkins Smith teaches students about the history of Black student life and activism on campus from integration in 1965 through the present, makes heavy use of the archives as well. The class normally meets in the library, with students spending several class sessions in the Special Collections reading room, learning archival etiquette and how to do primary source research while exploring University Archives collections. The course also usually has regular guest speakers, another issue which had to be reevaluated during COVID.

As the authors will show through descriptions of the changes they incorporated and examples of primary source literacy activities they added to the syllabi, students in both classes spent more time with primary sources (albeit digitally) and encountered much more information about MSU history than they had in the past. Removing the fun parts of the classes and not having the students in the physical library and archives spaces, however, was not ideal, and the authors suggest a balance of both approaches in future courses of this type.

Literature Review

For years, academic librarians have been moving "toward a more comprehensive, course-integrated approach for library instruction" as opposed to one-shot sessions.[1] The information literacy skills, not to mention comfort and familiarity with the library, that new students can learn in First Year Experience courses have the potential for enormous impact on students' future success. As Bissett rightly points out, "students' library use patterns, very much related to both reading habits and study skills, are also developed during the first year of college"; reaching new students is "the time when librarians are most useful."[2] It is no surprise, then, that academic libraries worked quickly to involve themselves in FYE courses, encouraging faculty to include at least one session of library instruction in the classes they taught. Boff and Johnson conducted a

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[1] Colleen Boff and Kristin Johnson, "The Library and First Year Experience Courses: A Nationwide Study," *Reference Services Review* 30, no. 4 (2002): 277.

[2] Susan J. C. Bissett, "Situating the Library in the First Year Experience Course," *Community & Junior College Libraries* 12, no. 2 (2004): 12, 21.

broad study of librarians' participation in FYE classes in 2002,[3] and Baker offered an evidence-based case study of Abilene Christian University's retooling of its information literacy unit for first-year students from 1995-2003.[4]

Librarians not only participated in FYE courses but also began teaching library-centric and/or information literacy-based courses themselves. Sarah Blakeslee wrote about her experience teaching an information and computer literacy course in 1998 — when students were still being taught "how to get to an Internet Search Engine" — observing, "Even though I was somewhat daunted by the prospect of teaching the course, this seemed to be an instruction librarian's dream come true."[5]

If FYE classes can be so effective in teaching new students about information literacy, they can also bring these students into the archives. Most students enrolled in MSU's library-centric FYE classes are not history majors, and some may never encounter the university's archives again. But undergraduates from almost any major can benefit from engaging with primary sources. At Mississippi State, archivists Jennifer McGillan and Jessica Perkins Smith worked "to expand the reach of Special Collections beyond the History Department" by offering "Teaching with Primary Sources" workshops to faculty from multiple departments on campus.[6] As Fic contended, "For students to become competent researchers . . . they should learn about archival competencies alongside information literacy competencies."[7] Along with competencies, ensuring that new students feel comfortable in an area that might seem intimidating and too "serious" for them is important; Daniels and Yakel found that archivists can and should work "to shape student perceptions of the archives as friendly."[8]

In his thorough 2009 overview of the literature on using primary sources in education, Carini noted that "it was not until the mid-1980s that the use of primary source materials in undergraduate education became an issue that was discussed consistently in the literature."[9] Magia G. Krause conducted interviews with twelve archivists and special collections librarians in 2010 to learn more about how they viewed their role as educators of undergraduates. Just as Carini found that archivists increasingly see themselves as "guides who are uniquely qualified to teach those unfamiliar with primary sources how to use, judge, and evaluate these materials for themselves,"[10] Krause's subjects "reported that because of their training and experience they have a broader understanding of primary sources than professors or academic librarians."[11]

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[3] Boff and Johnson, "The Library and First Year Experience Courses," 280.

[4] Laura Baker, "Library Instruction in the Rearview Mirror: A Reflective Look at the Evolution of a First-Year Library Program Using Evidence-Based Practice," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 13, no. 2 (2006): 1-20.

[5] Sarah Blakeslee, "Librarian in a Strange Land: Teaching a Freshman Orientation Course," *Reference Services Review* 26, no. 2 (1998): 74, 77.

[6] Jessica Perkins Smith and Jennifer McGillan, "Towards a More Collaborative Experience: Connecting Library and Departmental Faculty to Improve and Expand Archival Instruction," *Journal of Map & Geography Libraries* 15, no. 2/3 (2019): 179.

[7] Christy Fic, "Working as an Embedded Archivist in an Undergraduate Course: Transforming Students into Scholars through an Archival Workshop Series," *The American Archivist* 81, no. 2 (2018): 292.

[8] Morgan Daniels and Elizabeth Yakel, "Uncovering Impact: The Influence of Archives on Student Learning," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 39, no. 5 (2013): 420.

[9] Peter Carini, "Archivists as Educators: Integrating Primary Sources into the Curriculum," *Journal of Archival Organization* 7, no. 1-2 (2009): 42.

[10] Carini, "Archivists as Educators," 49.

[11] Magia G. Krause, "'It Makes History Alive for Them': The Role of Archivists and Special Collections Librarians in Instructing Undergraduates," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 36, no. 5 (2010): 404.

The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) and the Society of American Archivists (SAA) *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy,* developed with ACRL's *Information Literacy Framework* in mind, set out core ideas and objectives for instructors, in order to enhance critical thinking skills and help students contextualize course content. "Developing primary source literacy is an ongoing process that deepens as users gain experience interacting with these types of sources," the *Guidelines* state.[12] That experience involves students learning to conceptualize and distinguish a primary source from a secondary source; to find and access primary sources; to read, understand, and summarize a primary source; to interpret, analyze, and evaluate that source; and finally, to use the source to "examine and synthesize a variety of sources in order to construct, support, or dispute a research argument."[13] It makes sense, then, for students to receive this instruction early on, in a low-stakes course like FYE.

Krause's subjects stressed the importance of conveying enthusiasm for the archives. One participant said, "I just want the students to work with something fun and come away with that sense of excitement."[14] Indeed, the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* acknowledge that those who teach primary source instruction "may be simultaneously concerned with conveying the excitement of research with primary sources, or giving students a memorable or transformative experience while using such sources."[15] Given the exploratory nature of an FYE course, MSU librarians teaching these courses hoped to be able to incorporate information literacy and teach students to be able to find and understand primary sources, while still holding student interest with fun or relatable topics.

In 1989, Greene advocated specifically for the use of *university* archives in the undergraduate classroom. One of the reasons he suggested for their relative lack of use at that time was the perception of university records as "stiflingly narrow, dry, and bureaucratic."[16] In the end, Greene found that the best way to incorporate university archives into undergraduate classes was to go beyond the traditional use of archival materials (extensive, in-depth research) and recognize that "[f]rom photographs being used as teaching aids to yearbooks being examined for examples of the psychology of prejudice, brief 'raids' into archival sources constitute legitimate use."[17] In FYE classes, these "brief raids" could include looking up students' parents in old yearbooks (an activity that "Cowbell Yell" students always enjoy) or looking at photographs of a funeral procession for one of the university's bulldog mascots. As Chute observed, sometimes archival education and outreach is simply "show[ing] how to get Dad a photograph of a famous football player."[18]

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[12] SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on the Development of Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy (JTF-PSL), "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy," accessed January 29, 2021. https://www2.archivists.org/standards/guidelines-for-primary-source-literacy.

[13] JTF-PSL, "Guidelines."

[14] Krause, "It Makes History Alive," 405.

[15] JTF-PSL, "Guidelines."

[16] Mark A. Greene, "Using College and University Archives as Instructional Materials: A Case Study and an Exhortation," *The Midwestern Archivist* 14, no. 1 (1989): 31.

[17] Greene, "Using College and University Archives," 35.

[18] Tamar G. Chute, "Selling the College and University Archives: Current Outreach Perspectives," *Archival Issues* 25, no. 1/2 (2000): 38.

When undergraduates learn to use and evaluate primary sources, they enter "a laboratory in critical thinking."[19] By encountering primary source literacy objectives like considering the source and context, questioning exclusions from the historical record, and putting source material together to create an argument, students learn critical thinking skills that will benefit them throughout their time in college. As Greene concluded, "[b]ringing the archives into the classroom is as legitimate an avenue of educational support as bringing students into the archives."[20] FYE courses can bring students and archives together as early as their first year.

Development and Format of "Cowbell Yell" and "Game Changing"

Mississippi State University's FYE classes were introduced in 1987 and designed to offer first-year students a fun and interactive hour of course credit while providing useful knowledge or skills. Librarians recognized these classes as a great opportunity to move beyond one-shot instruction sessions and show new students all the different aspects of their large - and perhaps intimidating - university library.

In 2017, MSU reference librarians developed the "Cowbell Yell" FYE course: "Our goals were to introduce Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, utilize library resources, and to also appeal to incoming freshmen," using MSU history as "the hook."[21] The course, first taught in the Fall of 2017 by Denise Wetzel and Melody Dale, incorporated information literacy activities that focused heavily on game-based learning in small groups.[22] Examples included a game of "Telephone," in which call numbers were passed (and distorted) from person to person, and relays to look up information on the library website. Students also wrote brief journal entries each week about their experiences during the first semester, responses to the university's Maroon Edition (a selected book given to every new student as a "First Year Reading Experience"), and reactions to aspects of MSU history. In the Fall of 2018, Dale began teaching the course with DeeDee Baldwin, and they gradually added more content about university history and activities with archival materials.

Over the course of the semester, the class visited several areas of Mitchell Memorial Library to familiarize students with various library resources, some of which included Special Collections and the Digital Media Center (DMC). In their introduction to Special Collections, students looked through old cookbooks from various local organizations, selected recipes that sounded particularly good or interesting, and library faculty and staff volunteered to prepare certain dishes. The class then enjoyed a potluck of these recipes the following week, and leftovers were offered to all library employees at the end of class. In the Digital Media Center, students learned how to design posters and make buttons and 3-D objects, as well as experience some of the library's virtual reality programs.

The students spent a large portion of the semester researching aspects of MSU history, such as the student strike for women on campus or the "Game of Change," when the MSU President

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[19] Marcus C. Robyns, "The Archivist as Educator: Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into Historical Research Methods Instruction," *The American Archivist* 64, no. 2 (2001): 373.

[20] Greene, "Using College and University Archives," 36.

[21] Denise A. Wetzel, Justin Kani, and Melody Dale, "Envisioning the Library-Centric First-Year Experience: A Case Study about Mississippi State University Libraries' Course Proposal Process," *Internet Reference Services Quarterly* 22, no. 2/3 (2017): 76.

[22] Melody Dale, Denise Wetzel, and Justin Kani, "Hitting it out of the Park with Game-Based Learning for FYEs and Libraries," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 26, no. 3 (2019): 205-220.

and basketball coach snuck the team out of state to play a racially integrated team at Loyola University Chicago in 1963 in the first round of the NCAA tournament. The semester culminated in capstone projects for which student groups composed a two-page paper using sources from Special Collections, incorporated a creative component from the Digital Media Center, and presented their projects on the last day of class. Groups in 2019 particularly enjoyed using the DMC's new button maker, creating buttons with vintage MSU logos or for historic past sports events and distributing buttons to each member of the class on presentation day. Some past groups used the 3-D printer to make cowbells or bulldogs, while others designed posters on topics like the history of MSU clothing.

Following the introduction and success of "Cowbell Yell," University Archivist Perkins Smith, who had been researching African Americans at Mississippi State with the goal of expanding and promoting related collections of Black history, decided to propose a new FYE course, "Game Changing: Exploring the African American Student Experience at Mississippi State University." The course was accepted and began in the fall of 2019.

The first couple of weeks focused on early MSU history, with an emphasis on the stories of African Americans who worked on campus prior to integration in 1965. Retired Dean of the College of Education Dr. Roy Ruby, an MSU alumnus, spoke to the class about the high points of MSU history in the 20th century, including the introduction of a Dean of women (who was a woman) in the 1960s and integration, and expanding to show students the growth over time of an agricultural college into the diverse research institution that it is today. Additional guest speakers during the semester included University of Mississippi History and African American Studies Professor Dr. Charles K. Ross, who spoke to the class about integration in NCAA athletics, and representatives from the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center, who shared a film about the history of diversity at MSU.

Throughout the course, the students, fourteen in total, were introduced to information literacy through learning to search the library catalog and digital collections, with a focus on searching for materials and collections related to Black history at MSU. Each week students wrote a one- to two-page journal response related to course content. These low-stakes writing assignments encouraged critical thinking and creativity.

For the remainder of the semester, students learned about integration at MSU, the first Black student organization, and student activism throughout the 1960s to the 1980s, and they were introduced to archival research in Special Collections. Through three visits to the reading room, students learned how to make an appointment, follow reading room rules, search finding aids online, and request materials. Students were also able to get hands-on experience exploring the collections related to African American history at MSU, which included photographs, newsletters, correspondence, ephemera, and student organization records. The class had a chance to select topics which interested them, pair up, and research their topics during class time, culminating in creative capstone projects which they presented in the last two class sessions of the semester.

Less Fun, More Robust: "Cowbell Yell" in 2020

The Fall 2020 "Cowbell Yell" class had twelve students enrolled, versus fifteen in previous years. In addition to the university's COVID mask requirement, students sat at least three feet apart. Instructors and building custodians cleaned surfaces between classes. On the first day of class, the instructors used an online survey to poll students to see if they wanted to have their class meetings online. By an overwhelming majority, the students wanted to continue having

class face-to-face. With that in mind, the class did continue in-person with the option to attend virtually.

Though most of the students met in-person, the instructors had to make significant adjustments to the syllabus in order to accommodate safety restrictions. Perhaps most unfortunately, a class that was designed to introduce new students to their library never once visited the library itself. Information literacy games, which had been played in groups, had to be done individually, which removed much of the gameplay aspect. The library scavenger hunt, which had involved visiting every area of the library and interacting in various ways (such as taking pictures with certain objects), was transformed into an online scavenger hunt that had students searching for information on the library's website. The recipe potluck and visits to Special Collections and the Digital Media Center had to be cut, leaving several empty class meetings to fill with new course content. The uncertainty of whether face-to-face class meetings would last the whole semester added another element of unpredictability to planning the syllabus.

The instructors gave each of the empty class meetings a theme, such as "Civil Rights at MSU" and "MSU Symbols and Traditions." They then developed research activities to allow students to explore each of these themes while engaging in the following objectives from the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy*:

- 3.B. "Identify and communicate information found in primary sources, including summarizing the content of the source and identifying and reporting key components such as how it was created, by whom, when, and what it is."
- 4.B. "Critically evaluate the perspective of the creator(s) of a primary source, including tone, subjectivity, and biases, and consider how these relate to the original purpose(s) and audience(s) of the source."
- 4.C. "Situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection."
- 4.F. "Demonstrate historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical sources and historical actors."[23]

For the first of these activities, "Exploring the *Reveille*" (the MSU yearbook), students used the *Reveille* Digital Archive to access the complete collection of yearbooks from 1898 to 2007. They searched for answers to questions that ranged from basic facts to higher-level engagement with the primary sources. Examples included:

- #62 in the alumni list in 1898 *Reveille* is a woman. What was her name and occupation?
- Who was the 1994 Alumnus of the Year?
- Look at the club pages in the old yearbooks. In what years do you notice the clubs begin to be racially integrated? Are there types of groups (sports, academic, Greek, etc.) that took longer to integrate?

The following week's activity focused on the "Game of Change." Students were asked to visit the University Archives digital collections and read letters of approval and disapproval that had been sent to MSU's president, Dean Colvard, from politicians, business leaders, alumni, and others. After reading a number of letters from each side, students responded to the following questions, again engaging with the primary sources at a fairly high level:

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[23] JTF-PSL, "Guidelines."

- Read the statement by Dean Colvard. What is your reaction to his willingness to risk his career for his belief in the "spirit of fair play" to "transcend...prejudice"?
- Read three of the letters approving Dean Colvard's decision. Who wrote the three letters you chose (include their position if provided), and what were your impressions?
- Read one of the letters disapproving Dean Colvard's decision, and please be aware that some of these contain offensive racist language. Who wrote the letter you chose (include their position if provided), and what were your impressions?
- Imagine that you are the President of MSU and having to deal with a situation like this. It could be athletes kneeling during the national anthem, players going on strike to protest, etc. You can choose whatever you like. What position would you take, and what kinds of approval and disapproval letters do you think you would get?

During the next class meeting, students looked through the *Reveille* Digital Archive again. They searched for mentions of MSU symbols and traditions, such as the bulldog and the cowbell, trying to find the earliest mention they could. At the end of class, the student who had found the earliest reference to each item was awarded bonus points; fortunately, a different student "won" each reference.

The final primary source activity focused on using the University Archives digital collections and the library's virtual exhibits to learn about campus life and the Old Main dormitory, a famous campus building which burned in 1959. Questions included:

- Access the University Archives Digital Collection and search for photos of the Old Main Dormitory. How does it compare to current MSU dorms? Do you see any similarities between the Old Main Dormitory and Old Main Academic Center?
- When did Old Main burn down, and who died in the fire?
- Skim pages 21-31 of the Old Main Brief History in the files. Name at least 2 pranks discussed on those pages.
- Take a look at the online exhibit "Mississippi State University: The A&M Years." How do you think campus life differed compared to the way it is now? What differences do you see in the fashions from then to now?

The next class meeting, which focused on MSU's civil rights history, featured a virtual talk with Colonel Robert Barnes, who was among the first African American students at the university and the first to graduate from the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). This arrangement was made possible by MSU's Holmes Cultural Diversity Center, which put the class instructors in contact with Barnes. Over a Webex session with the class, Barnes told students about his experiences, both positive and negative, and answered their questions about campus life during the years he attended. His talk was one of the highlights of the 2020 class and exposed the students to a form of oral history.

Because safety restrictions prevented group work in the 2020 class, the instructors changed the course's capstone project from a two-page paper with a creative component into a one-page paper. If students chose a topic that wasn't already well-documented in the digital collections, the university archivist scanned additional items for them. The project required students to cite at least three primary sources from University Archives in their papers, incorporating more of the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* learning objectives:

- 5.A. "Examine and synthesize a variety of sources in order to construct, support, or dispute a research argument."

- 5.C. "Cite primary sources in accordance with appropriate citation style guidelines or according to repository practice and preferences (when possible)."[24]

In the past, the last two or three class sessions were devoted to group work; for the 2020 class, the instructors canceled the last two in-person class meetings to give students time to work on their projects individually. Instructors were available virtually during the class time in case students wanted to sign in and ask questions. Students presented their finished research, some in-person and some virtually, on the last day of class.

Expanding the Scope: "Game Changing" in 2020

Much like Dale and Baldwin's "Cowbell Yell" course, the structure and strategies that worked well for "Game Changing" in 2019 had to be reevaluated in 2020 due to COVID restrictions. The collaborative nature of the course and the class visits to Special Collections had to be altered, replaced with more emphasis on individual student interests and more time teaching students how to find and explore the library's digital collections. This meant that the hands-on portion of the course, where students got to touch the archival "stuff," which constituted a major portion of time in the first year, shifted towards teaching students to analyze digital objects — a photograph, a newspaper article, a yearbook — as primary sources. In addition, due to the research the 2019 class conducted in Special Collections, the course scope was expanded to include additional topics of interest to students, such as Black alumni involvement at MSU and the viewpoint of President Dean Colvard.

Similarly to "Cowbell Yell," the "Game Changing" course had to accommodate the unpredictability of COVID. In fact, by the second week of class, one student had to quarantine at home. Due to the classroom technology upgrades put in place by the university IT department, the classroom had the capability of streaming the class via Webex, which gave students who had to quarantine the ability to participate and not have to miss class. This would especially come in handy a few weeks into the semester, when half of the class's twelve students had to quarantine. For a couple of sessions when several students were quarantined, the entire class met virtually, as it was more seamless and made discussion and the instructor's presentations easier when everyone was online.

Each week, the instructor presented a topic, sharing information, images, and sometimes audio and video, and gave the class time for discussion at the end. A weekly assignment, often a one-page journal response, was due at the end of the week. For example, after week one, in which students were introduced to the topic and each other, students were asked to write about why they chose this particular FYE course and what they hoped to get out of it. In 2019, when asked this question, all fourteen of the students responded that they chose the course because they were African American and wanted to learn more about the history of Black students who came before them. In 2020, it turned out that only one student chose the course for that reason, with most students explaining that their advisors chose the class for them. The instructor discovered that the FYE courses were listed differently in the online course catalog in 2020, and the descriptions of each course were missing. While this was concerning at first, with the instructor worried that students took the course only because they had to, students had a good attitude about the class and showed genuine interest.

Week two gave students the opportunity to learn about MSU history from the early, segregated years when the campus was known as Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College.

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[24] JTF-PSL, "Guidelines."

Students learned about early African American employees of the college, including two in particular: Elder George, who helped build the college in the late 19th century and was actually long known as a "mascot" for the college's athletic teams, and Walter Kilborn, who had the nickname "Uncle Remus." Students also saw many more images of now unidentified African American service workers on campus, such as cooks, custodial staff, and groundskeepers, who kept the campus running but remain nameless today; these workers were unable to earn an education at their place of employment due to the Jim Crow laws governing the segregated South. For their week two assignment, students read a portion of MSU Professor and Director of FYE Programs Tom Carskadon's "Insider's Guide to Mississippi State University" booklet and discussed what they felt were the most important accomplishments of Mississippi A&M/MSU in the first century of the college's history. Since the "Insider's Guide" discusses integration and women on campus, all topics the class touched on in the first two weeks, it was a good fit and reinforced core background ideas to keep the class focused.

Week three introduced students to searching the library's digital collections through looking at materials related to the "Game of Change." Students learned how to search and browse the digital collection and to be able to identify subject headings and descriptive metadata about digital objects, including photos, athletic programs, and correspondence. The collection is all related to President Colvard's decision to defy an unwritten Southeastern Conference athletics rule that banned SEC schools from playing integrated teams, along with an order from segregationist Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett that the team not play Loyola Chicago, who had several Black players. Students had the opportunity to read letters from MSU alumni and community members supporting Colvard's decision. At the time that this digital collection was created years ago, the decision was made not to include letters disapproving of Colvard's decision. In order for students to get the full picture, the instructor scanned many of these opposition letters and made them available to students in the class files on Canvas, the university's learning management system. The assignment for this week consisted of a digital scavenger hunt, an assignment that in other years would occur in the library itself. All answers had to be found on the library website, and included questions about digital items, library services, how to find an electronic thesis or dissertation, and where specific departments are located.

In weeks four and five, students learned about two very different integration stories: one of violence and mass resistance at the University of Mississippi in 1962, and the more subdued, later integration of Mississippi State in the summer of 1965 by Starkville native Richard Holmes. Students explored various digital collections related to the school's integration, all available on the University of Mississippi's institutional repository, eGrove. In order to be able to compare and contrast the two integration experiences, the instructor uploaded a variety of newspaper articles and images, along with Holmes' and Colvard's own writings, all digitized from University Archives and shared on Canvas. To tie the collections and class discussions together, students read Colvard's diary entries for the dates leading up to and encompassing Holmes' enrollment at MSU and completed a documentary analysis assignment. The assignment is one that has been used for several years, in various forms, by MSU archivists and librarians teaching archival research skills to undergraduates. Students selected two sections of Colvard's diary and answered the following questions:

- Briefly describe your source. What is it about? Who do you think is the intended audience? How is it intended to be used and by whom?
- How would you use this source to construct an argument? What story does it allow you to tell, or what themes does it allow you to explore? How does it relate to specific themes or topics that you have discussed in class?

- How would this source provide context or conflict for another source on the same topic?

The assignment allowed students to engage many of the previously mentioned objectives in the *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy,* giving them a deeper understanding of the context of the time period they were studying.

During week six, Tyrell Jernigan, the Coordinator of the MSU Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, joined the class to talk about the history of the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center (named for Richard Holmes), recent diversity initiatives at MSU, and the successful 2016 effort by a group of Black students to urge the university to take down the state flag, which, until June 2020, still contained the Confederate flag. In order to further contextualize current MSU diversity efforts, for their week six assignment, students selected two interviews from the "Starkville Civil Rights: A Shaky Truce" digital collection, a recent digital humanities collaboration between the MSU History department and several MSU librarians. The interviewees include Starkville and MSU teachers, alumni, and community members who had been involved in civil rights work in Starkville or on campus in some way. This assignment gave students the opportunity to examine a different kind of primary source: oral histories.

Weeks seven and eight introduced students to the first Black student organization on campus, Afro-American Plus, which was founded in 1968, just a few years after Richard Holmes integrated the university. The group gave Black students a social outlet, invited speakers like Fannie Lou Hamer and Aaron Henry to campus, and actively pushed the administration to make life better for Black students on campus through recruitment of African American students and faculty. They also advocated for more Black student representation in campus-wide organizations. The assignments for these weeks had students examine scanned articles from the campus newspaper, the *Reflector,* and Afro-American Plus' own newsletter, the *Afro Times,* along with reading through the goals the group laid out in their Constitution. These documents and discussions led to the final weeks of the semester, in which the class learned about Black student groups and activism since the 1960s and discussed the legacy of integration on campus by looking at recent statistics about MSU's place in terms of diversity and percentage of African American students.

During the last weeks of class, students worked on their capstone projects based on MSU library's digital collections, scanned items from Special Collections, and other digital humanities sites used over the course of the semester. This year, instead of working in groups and presenting to the class in-person, students worked individually, selecting five to seven digital images and answering the following questions:

- What does your particular topic tell us about African American student life at Mississippi State?
- What do the primary sources show us/tell us? What are the items you've selected evidence of? What do they tell us about life on campus during the time period?
- How has your topic changed over time? For example, if you choose athletics, how did the integration of college athletics change and what changes do you see today? Why? Any outside influences?

Most students used PowerPoint or Prezi, with about half the class narrating their presentations and even using music while the other half used text and images. All students utilized images provided by Special Collections.

Conclusion

Library-based First Year Experience classes are a wonderful way to introduce new students to information literacy, research skills, and library resources in a way that is ongoing and more fun than a traditional one-shot session about catalogs and databases. Though some of the more interactive class sessions of the MSU Libraries' "Cowbell Yell" course had to be replaced in order to comply with COVID safety restrictions, students had a more robust experience with primary source engagement. If the class were to be offered again, the instructor(s) could bring back the information literacy games and activities like the potluck while also incorporating more of the in-class research activities. Returning the class to the library itself would also be vital to its objectives. While getting back into the library, especially into Special Collections, would be beneficial to "Game Changing," this year proved that the instructor can do a lot more with digitization and the virtual classroom and still offer students a well-rounded FYE course. In the end, COVID challenges led to stronger content and increased exploration of primary sources in both classes.

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