

A Catholic College Newspaper in an Oral History Project

Author Note

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Abstract

A student produced and edited newspaper is necessarily a grassroots production, with an all-volunteer staff. Student produced newspapers can be a potential source of primary, historical information about student life on a college campus, providing useful insight and data about students' perspectives and experiences while attending college. However a central problem of the print copies and printed or microfilmed back-files of these types of collections is the limited means for discovering data, and devising the best means in which to describe the contents. Saint Leo University is a Catholic University in the Southern United States, originally founded by Benedictine monks in 1889. It became a two year college in 1965, and the student newspaper printed its first column in 1967. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of social change in America and in the Catholic Church, which did not leave this community of faith unmoved nor unchanged. The role which the newspaper played during this time was unique, providing a voice for the students, faculty, and other community members, which assisted in informing its audience of events and issues while nurturing a faith-based community. The recently digitized collection of this newspaper preserves and makes available an exceptional collection of voices and perspectives from an earlier time in this institution's history. This paper will discuss the digitized collection, its search features, and as it's potential as a historical research tool in an institutional oral history project, as well as the intersection of information and religious perspectives made available for examination.

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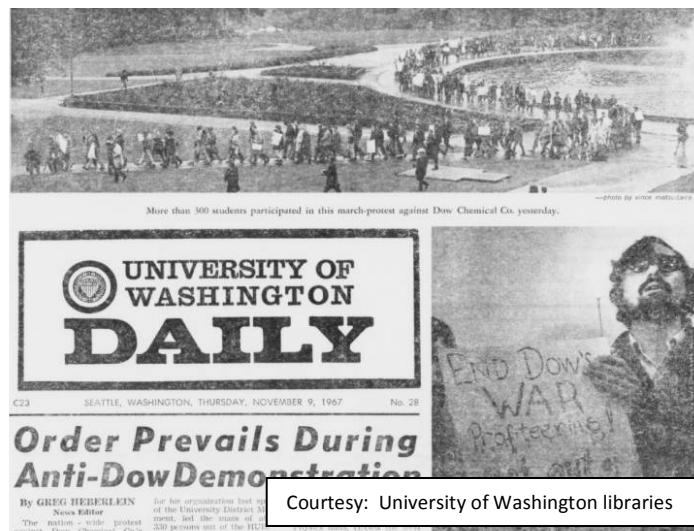
Research Question

Is a college newspaper capable of providing primary documentary evidence for the historical record of the university during a key time of transition?

A student-run campus newspaper can provide its readers with insight and perspective from the student's point of view. It is necessarily a grassroots production, with an all-volunteer staff. It can entertain, enlighten, and at times outrage the reader; its writers can be passive, and rewrite current news stories culled from local and national headlines, or they can tackle tough issues on campus and across the nation, revealing and at times deriding the "way things are". The 1960s and 1970s were a time of civil unrest in the United States; anti-war protests, sit-ins, and the Civil Rights Movement was in the headlines of many local and National newspapers, and college newspapers were no exception; many student-run news organizations were actively encouraging student protests, highlighting the tensions between many groups. Some may even have argued the student run college newspapers of this time period were at the height of their circulation and ability to influence their readers, as student activism peaked during this decade (Altbach, 1981).

During the Civil Rights era and the

Vietnam War, college newspapers had the power to increase participation in student protests, engaging readers in a way that more widely read mainstream newspapers were not. For example, the University of Washington Daily highlighted student activism during the Vietnam War, and kept the university community involved and informed of campus support for protest movements,



Courtesy: University of Washington Libraries

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while the Columbia Daily Spectator documented for all interested parties the occupation of campus buildings and other student protests on campus (Columbia Spectator, 2011).

Research on newspapers of this era has heretofore been tedious, difficult and painstakingly slow; most campus newspapers have never been indexed; and the majority of the archival materials have been available only in print, and only in person. However, initiatives to digitize the treasure trove of primary source information have been gaining momentum, with some projects discussed at national and state conferences from 2003 onward; grants, institutional projects, and grass-roots efforts are making a small portion of these repositories digitally available for research. Some of the more visible projects and organizations in this field are Google, Ohio College Library Center (OCLC), and the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITLE), but there are other companies and non-profits, as well as individual institutional efforts underway as well. For example, since 2009, ArcaSearch has digitized 1,100 newspapers (some of which are college newspapers) “to capture and present a community’s history in an easy and accessible web-based digital format” (ArcaSearch, 2012), while Lyrasis has provided grants for newspaper digitization projects. Costs for a digitization project can vary widely, depending on the number of pages that need to be scanned, the comprehensiveness of the indexing, and how much of the project is kept in house or outsourced to a vendor. As part of a larger institutional repository, digitizing and archiving the institution’s newspaper can add depth and interest, enhancing the reputation of the college. “Academic libraries actively seek opportunities to serve users by exploring their roles in information facilitation, dissemination, and creation. . . an institutional repository ‘increase[s] visibility and prestige’ ” (Prosser, 2003 as cited in Jin Xiu, 2009).

Campus newspapers and other special collections and archived materials can be a potential source of primary, historical information about student life on a college campus,

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providing insight about students' perspectives and experiences while attending college. Quite a number of college newspapers from this era also formed a student news organization aimed at sharing and reprinting news of interest to college students about student activities from colleges across the United States, providing an alternate source of information than that which might have been provided by the more mainstream press (Barringer, 1999).

However, a central problem of the print copies and the printed or microfilmed back-files of these types of collections is the limited means for determining their relevance to one's research from anywhere except within the owning institution, and the painstakingly slowness of manual searching. Many newspapers collections are also incomplete, or in poor condition, as newspaper are usually printed on acid paper. Discovering the images, data, accessing the information and materials, and devising the best means in which to describe the contents can be difficult; current archival finding aids are limited in their usefulness, and only provide the most basic of information (See Figure 1).

The role which a campus-based newspaper played before the Internet was widely available was unique. It provided a voice and a

resource for the community, which assisted in informing its audience of current events and issues; a prime example of this is the Saint Leo College *Monarch*. It covered events from on and off campus at a time when options for locating news from other parts of the state, country or world were much more limited than today's 24/7 RSS feed, tweeted, cable-newscast culture. It highlighted the lives and times of the key characters on the campus stage, illuminating pieces of

Daily Princetonian Photographs Collection, 1967-2004: Preliminary Finding Aid	
Summary Information	
Call number:	AC286
Location:	Princeton University Library. Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library. Princeton University Archives. 65 Olden Street Princeton, New Jersey 08540 USA
Size:	32.0 linear feet (32 boxes 12.6 gigabytes 24,856 electronic files)

Figure 1

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the institution's history, while obscuring others. The *Monarch* began with Issue 1, volume 1 on September 1, 1967. It began as an 11x17 two sided broadsheet, and grew into a newspaper over the course of time. By September 27, 1967, it was reporting news from other parts of the world, rather than strictly campus events and news. It became *The Lion* and the *Lion's Tale* in 1968, and then roared into 1975 as the *Independent Monarch* before becoming the *Lion's Pride* in 2001.

Recent initiatives by institutions across the United States to digitize collections of local and college newspapers preserves and makes available an exceptional collection of voices and perspectives from earlier times. "The digitization of archival collections is indisputably one of the most significant late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century archival developments" (Roff, 2010). One such initiative was undertaken by Saint Leo University's University Archivist, who obtained a grant to digitize the college newspaper, *The Monarch* in 2010; the scanning and digitization was completed by Lyrasis; the collection was the first major digitization project undertaken by the archives.

During the 2010-2011 academic year, an oral history project was also begun, to collect memories, reminisces, and other stories about life during the early days of the college as part of an institutional memory project. Oral History is an ideal addition to an archival collection, which can be used as a qualitative research tool to supplement traditional archival materials, providing a glimpse into the perspectives and lives of the people who lived the history. Supported by primary and secondary resources, it provides the audience with individuals' perspectives, looking through personalized lenses at the past. Gathering up community oral histories, ones bounded by time and/or place, can capture the intimacy of the times, the shared griefs, and the common experience. A community oral history project typically refers to "one defined by locale, to a group of interviews with people who live in some geographically bounded place" (Shopes, 2002).

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Saint Leo University is a leading Catholic University, originally founded by Benedictine monks; it is located in the eastern part of Pasco County, Florida. The University's roots come from the Catholic community from which it sprang, in nearby San Antonio, Florida. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of social change in America and in the Catholic Church, which did not leave this community unchanged. When listening to "old timers" reminisce about what the university was like when it was a two year junior college, or even earlier, when the college had been two separate preparatory boarding schools, one gains a sense of a place, one whose purpose reflected the sensibilities of the religious men and women whose Benedictine values infused the community.

The college admitted its first African American student in 1889 (Horgan, 1991); in 1967, there was one African-American student on the basketball team; and in 1968, there were three minority players. According to one interviewee, the day the Saint Leo college baseball team played Morehouse College, in Atlanta Georgia, the



Courtesy: *Golden Legend*

white construction workers who had been laboring nearby stopped working and watched the game from a walkway or parapet at the end of the field, observing the white boys playing ball with the black boys. The baseball team had their bats stolen from their bus (which did not lock) while they slept in an old barracks, and the team had to take the bus to the nearest store to replace them. The person did not remember who won the game; he remembered the observers, and how the game generated so much attention, simply because the teams were of different colors. While I could not locate any reference of this particular game in the university's archive of the newspaper, I did locate a picture of the basketball team, in the 1967 & 1968 yearbooks, verifying the information about the integration of the team at this period in history.

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As of 2011, many faculty, staff, nun and monks from the 1960s and 1970s have already left the University, retiring or moving to other locations; collecting their memories about what life and the institutions were like during this pivotal time in history grows ever more urgent; their voices and perspectives will be critical components to a new volume of history about the college. Interviewing alumni at alumni events is also a goal of the project.

The process by which a text-based narrative such as the student newspaper reflects the culture of a specific community or a specific time period depends in part on the support or lack thereof from the community for the people who write about and for the community. A well-run student newspaper can illustrate a community's history, reflecting not only its values, but also its commerce, its people, and its inner struggles, offering glimpses into the thoughts and emotions of the times. Placing oral history accounts within the context of the time and place adds depth and a greater understanding than either one source or the other would be able to accomplish alone. Currently, there are very few oral histories concerning the institution, or the surrounding community, although there are interview notes collected by James Horgan, Ph.D., a noted local historian, who did interviews with people in the community about Saint Leo, the Abbey, and the Holy Name Monastery, and there are several interviews with key people from the institution compiled by this researcher. Additionally, there is a local historical society, and at least two other independent researchers working on local history projects and interviewing people of the community.

In order to understand how to best utilize the primary source materials available within the newspaper collection to support an oral history project, and how external forces such as Vatican II, and the Vietnam War impacted the people who lived, studied and worked at this institution, some investigation of the college newspaper was needed. A first attempt included a physical examination of the newspapers before they were digitized; it became clear very quickly

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that this methodology would be very time consuming, and might lead to errors of omission, overlooked articles, and labor intensive coding. The second attempt was undertaken after the digitized collection was placed online; while the search interface can at times be frustrating, and the results list can develop “error on page” problems, it was still considered to be a more robust and comprehensive method of approaching the project.

An initial list of possible words, and possible articles related to the time period were generated for content analysis. The first area of investigation focused on how the community was different when the institution was closely affiliated with the Diocese of Saint Petersburg, before the university separated itself from the ownership of the Abbey monks. Prior to this time, the nuns and the monks of Saint Leo had put enormous energy and resources into the college. At one point, the nuns had actually mortgaged their property in order to build a women’s dorm for the college, about the time the college became coeducational (Horgan, 1991). The first set of keyword search terms included: “Benedictine”, “Father”, “Sister”, and “Mass”, as well as “Vietnam War”. A limiter for the dates was set to 1967-1977, 1977 being selected for two reasons: 1.) It provided a ten year range of information; 2.) by 1977, the college had been formally separated from the diocese of Saint Petersburg, Florida for several years, and fewer monks or nuns were directly employed with the college as faculty, or with student services.

In order to accomplish the searches, the popup blocker had to be disabled to make the scripting on the website work properly. Search results indicated that the search term “father” returned 182 results, of which fifty (50) were related to spiritual or church matters; “sister” returned 163 files, of which only a handful were religious announcements; the difference in quantity of women’s to men’s religious events can be primarily attributed to the Catholic church hierarchy, and to the divergent roles the men and women religious communities played in this community. Of the 163 files returned for the keyword search “sisters”, forty-six (46) of the first

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100 files discussed a particular sister, usually in the context of student affairs or food services. The keyword search term “Mass” produced 119 results, of which 60% were religious in nature, usually either noting that a Mass had been celebrated by a particular priest for a specific event, or occasion, or inviting people to attend mass at one of several locations around the campus. The term “Mass” also produced some results relating to mass transit systems, or lack thereof. The search phrase “Vietnam war” produced 149 files returned, with the oldest reference to the Vietnam War occurring on September 22, 1967; however, if the search was conducted to require both terms to be present and in that order, the list was reduced to forty-seven files, directly referencing the Vietnam War in some way, and many of the remaining results discussed politics and other news referring to the country of Vietnam or the Vietnam War, including some protests.

After completing the initial search of the digitized *Monarch*, approaching whom to interview first was fairly straightforward; one person was approached because she had been employed by the University since the mid 1960s “Interviewee One”. The second person “Interviewee Two” was chosen based on the same criteria, he was thought to be the second longest-serving faculty member on campus, having started at the University as a four-year college student in 1967. Each person was interviewed three times, with additional interviews expected to be completed in 2012.

Interviews were conducted at Saint Leo University between January, 2011 and December 2011. Each person was interviewed three times, with additional interviews currently in the planning stages. Interviews are currently being transcribed and fact-checked as needed. Permission to conduct the interviews was provided before any interview was undertaken. Interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder, and then transferred to a computer. Portions of interviews were digitally copied and added to a LibGuide to use as needed. Each interview was a minimum of 45 minutes in length, with some interviews lasting ninety (90)

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minutes. Each interviewee became increasingly more comfortable with the process, as the interviews progressed.

The first interview was with Interviewee One, and focused on how she became a nun, her family background, and how her path led to a faculty position at Saint Leo University.

Interviewee One started at the University in the mid 1960s, taking a sabbatical and several other shorter leaves in order to complete a doctorate. The other interviewee was an alumnus, and a faculty member. He served with the athletic and education departments and as the assistant baseball coach for the then college in 1969. Both interviewees were native to Florida. Initially, it was assumed that the Vietnam War and Vatican II would be a prominent part of the interviews early on; interestingly enough, neither interviewee felt the need to dwell very much on Vietnam; Interviewee Two stated he was exempt from the draft at the time, because he was enrolled in a doctoral program at another institution in the South, and while Vatican II did have an effect on his family, it was mentioned as almost an aside. On the other hand, the conversations with Interviewee One did (at times) focus on how Vatican II affected her particular order, and nuns' personal preferences with regards to the wearing of the habit and veil, as well as other topics related to Vatican II.

After the first set of interviews, the second set of search terms was determined based on conversations, and on items from the conversations, which piqued this researcher's interest and curiosity. For example, search terms included a Boolean search using three terms: "basketball"

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Figure 2

AND “segregation” OR integration”, and then two separate searches for the keyword search terms “integration”, followed by “segregation” as a result of my interviews with Interviewee Two, and his recollection that Saint Leo was more integrated than the surrounding community, or than many other colleges in the Southeast at the time. A limiter for the dates was again set to 1967-1977, and the search logic was set narrowly fuzz off, and stem off to avoid too large of a return, with too little applicability. If the stem were left on, any word containing a portion of the search terms would be returned. If the fuzz were left on, the search algorithm would be expanded to include similar words; for example, segregated would also return “segregationist”, “segregated”, and “separation”. There were thirty (30) results for “segregation”, and nineteen (19) results returned for the search term “integration” (See Figure 2).

Results for all searches had display issues at times, with the preview function of the online software less than optimum. The search interface performed as expected, but the full view and preview functions froze at times, and occasionally the preview would cause the computer to send an error message, and shut down Adobe Acrobat, which was the software used for downloading the files for full viewing, or otherwise did not operate as expected. Occasionally new ideas for search terms and topics were created by some of the results listed and previews

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returned, as the University's history flashed across the screen in bits and bytes, illuminating events and people the way sheet lightning illuminates the Florida landscape on a hot summer's night. The perspectives of the people who lived and learned within the confines of this community are narrated by the digitized campus newspaper, capturing the main actors on this stage of life, lighting up the imagination with the fresh and still vivid voices of students, the faculty, and the men and women religious of this community. The community is brought to fresh and vibrant life by the people who experienced this time period first-hand, captured within this collection and given added depth by the oral history interviews.

As digitization projects accelerate and become more ubiquitous, new forms of research and data mining techniques will develop to take advantage of the breadth and depth of materials now more readily accessible to the researcher. These and many other types of archival and special collections materials will become treasure troves for the researcher. Internet search algorithms will direct researchers to collections whose existence might once have been recorded in print journals and archival catalogs; previously inaccessible materials will be liberated from their physical constraints, made available in bits and bytes, and reformatted for access, as well as long-term preservation. Long term preservation techniques will develop to accommodate both the needs of the materials for conservation and preservation, and the need of the research community for access. Prior to the popularity of the Internet as a research tool, there was little need or interest in large-scale scanning projects, even though the technology had been available for many years. Scanning projects can be cost prohibitive, as not only do the items need to be scanned and reformatted in a way that makes sense for the collection, but they must also be exhaustively indexed as well. Copyright can also be a major concern; printed collections, especially ones with multiple authors not sponsored by the college or university, can pose a challenge to the owning institution.

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Without primary sources one can gain little historical insight into a particular community and the people who were involved in the life of that community. Primary resources reinforce and provide support for public history and institutional memory projects. Combining individual stories with a primary sources such as a campus newspaper, which reflects its community, can support public history projects, and allow one to glimpse times and lives of the people who talked – and wrote – about it.

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Biographical Sketch

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