Exploring the Present with the Past: 
Incorporating Archival Exploration in Teaching Disease Prevention

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Project Outcomes

Sustainable partnerships creating interdisciplinary learning environments.
Current events focus on the COVID-19 Pandemic and linking ISU University Archival materials.
Awareness for the project, Public Health, and University Archives on social media.

Background

Providing opportunities for students to explore historical artifacts adds texture and context to material they are currently learning. Working with archival material has a multitude of benefits for everyone including an appreciation of historical artifacts, awareness of campus resources, creative partnerships among university programs, enhancing skills related to research, and in developing projects, presentations, and publications. Collaboration efforts between university archives and academic programs are well documented among the Arts, Communications, Media, and Humanities (Hinchliffe & Prom, 2018; Bartlett, Gadelha, & Noltiger, 2020), but not as likely within the realm of Applied Science programs. Exploring public health history is essential to identify strategies and lessons learned in addressing health issues. At ISU, in the HSC 292: Community Public Health course, students learn about topics related to disease prevention and health promotion within communities by exploring specific topics related to social determinants of health, health disparities, epidemiology, health systems, and communicable disease. Forming a partnership in spring 2019, the HSC 292 course and Jo Ann Rayfield Archives developed projects aimed at incorporating archival material in linking past to future health issues and events and implement the projects every spring semester with a different theme.

Objectives of the Project

For the Spring 2021 semester, HSC 292 archives projects explored "Vaccination Awareness and Advocacy" for National Public Health Week. The purpose of the project was multifaceted and included the following objectives: 1. Increase students’ knowledge and awareness for vaccinations 2. Students’ appreciation for public health initiatives and successes 3. Develop students’ skills in creating health communication materials 4. Enhance students’ cultural humility when developing projects 5. Enhance students’ skills in accessing credible websites and research materials 6. Cultivate an appreciation for archival material 7. Incorporate an interdisciplinary project that is presented in a ‘real-world’ setting

Project Methodology

Participants: students in the HSC 292: Community Public Health (n=18) participated in the project. Students are usually sophomores – juniors when they take the course.

Project Specifics: Working with the Rayfield Archives, students utilized historical artifacts and created virtual displays for a social media post to link to the importance of vaccination. Specifically, students were charged with identifying an artifact from the digital collections or physical holdings, including pamphlets, photos, etc. to show awareness and advocacy for the importance of vaccination. This idea was developed from the University Archives Instagram post in December 2020 which created anticipation of the COVID-19 Vaccinations (Figure 1). After planning for the class project in January 2021, during the 5th week of the semester, University Archivist, April Anderson-Zorn, met with the class virtually to discuss the project and demonstrate how to access the ISU Archives materials. Students had three associated activities with the project including 1) idea/artifact draft (due week 6), 2) final project draft (due week 11), 3) final project draft (due week 11). The Rayfield Archives chose the top three displays and highlighted them on their social media platforms during National Public Health Week in the first week of April. IRB approval was received to measure students’ awareness gains for working with the archival material and how this worked impacted their knowledge of public health and vaccines importance.

Data Analysis: Projects were graded with a rubric measuring scientific accuracy, visual appeal and writing mechanics. To measure student knowledge and awareness gains, one week after the projects were due, students had access to a 14-item survey (Figure 2) featuring three 5-point Likert Scales (strongly agree to strongly disagree) focused on awareness about vaccinations, research skills and professionalism, and archives awareness.

Results

- 15 student projects, 3 selected as winners for display
- 3 student posts, 6 total for project
- Project Posts: 46 likes, 6 shares, 1,254 accounts reached
- Total Posts: 98 likes, 10 shares, 1,710 accounts reached
- 1 completed survey

Project Implications and Lessons Learned

For future projects that include research, project design and presentation implementation, and working with archives, the following implications are recommended:

Research with Students
- Explain the project at the beginning of the semester and at multiple times to convey links to course project and importance.
- Type of survey (online vs. paper copy) is important to consider when collecting data.
- Incorporate pre/post surveys and/or reflection as part of data analysis.

Project Design
- Provide more than one opportunity to research archival material in class
- Incorporate peer review into all aspects of appropriate
- Ensure delivering project objectives is included in the project timeline to analyze the ‘so what?’

Partnering with Archives
- When possible, take students to Milner Library and/or University Archives and the materials and collections
- Incorporate ‘hands-on’ sessions with materials so students are comfortable working/researching with them
- Dedicate session time to identifying primary/secondary source materials

References