



# *Archive Expansion Through Oral Histories*

Completed by: Anna Lewis, MLIS  
Sponsored by: Sarah Nguyen, Alene Moris  
Women's Center

# *Introduction to the Team: Anna*

My name is Anna Lewis (they/them). I am interested in the creation and access of information in library and archival settings. Since I already work at a library through the University of Washington, I wanted to use my Capstone as an opportunity to get more hands on experience working with an archive. I got connected with the Women's Center project through an event the iSchool held where sponsors and students could partner up. I was drawn to the oral history project because I love asking questions and getting to learn about transcription and information creation was interesting to me.



# *Introduction to the Team: Sarah*

Sarah Nguyen (she/they) is my sponsor for this project. She is an iSchool Phd student and the Assistant Director of Leadership and Programs at the Alene Moris Women's Center. We met biweekly to talk through issues that would arise, next steps, and best practices. They provided guidance on project goals, resources, access to stakeholders, access to space at the Women's Center, and guidance on archival spaces and methods.



# *Introduction to the Team: Sherese*

Though they were not formally my sponsor, Sherese Card (they/she) was invaluable to this project. She is a fellow MLIS student who collaborated with me in organizing archival materials, and provided guidance on archival spaces and methods.



# Context: Place

I worked with the University of Washington's Alene Morris Women's Center, housed in Cunningham Hall. The Hall has incredible historic and contemporary value. It was the first building built for Women in Washington State in 1909, and was a popular spot for suffragettes to meet. Nowadays, it welcomes people of all genders and identities to learn from and explore their programs and services, including violence prevention and gender equity and anti-human trafficking research and policy development.



(Photo by Susan Boyle)

# Context: Opportunity

Sarah Nguyen currently works at the Women's Center and saw opportunities to expand and organize the archive. Sherese Card was hired on to work with the archival materials and inventoried the collection. Once that was done, we worked together to begin creating a finding aid for the collection. Sarah has lots of experience conducting oral histories, and saw the Women's Center as the perfect place to record stories for anyone interested in learning more about the Center's significance and impact.

This year I completed a Directed Field Work placement at King County Archives where I learned about the importance of having the proper metadata and descriptions for materials so they are findable and usable. I was excited to conduct the oral histories, because they are opportunities for people to share their experiences directly with future generations.

I hope this project will help benefit students, researchers, and community members who are interested in gender equity in Washington State. My goal is to help preserve some of this valuable history and increase its accessibility.

# Project Objectives

This project is intended to impact students, researchers, and community members of the University of Washington through the following means:

- Have access to gender equity history and artifacts for research
- Foster community interest in organizing around gender equity
- Stories will be recorded and stored in WC archives and will illustrate the networks and connections made towards gender equity in Washington state and internationally

# Deliverables

I created and implemented a consent form for my participant to outline their rights as it related to copyright and to clearly communicate exactly what they were agreeing to.

I completed two oral history interviews with the current director of the Women's Center and uploaded the audio files.

I created two transcripts for the interviews to make them more accessible.

Lastly, I helped start the finding aid.



# Key Steps: Set Up

First, I needed to do a lot of research around copyright, UW Special Collections best practices, and proper techniques for oral history creation. I needed to research the people I was hoping to interview and learn more about the Center. I met with colleagues who had experience with oral histories in the past. I also met with the director of the Women's Center to talk about her expectations and explain what an oral history was and why they are valuable.

# Key Steps: Question Creation

After talking with her and my sponsor, I got a sense for what type of questions to ask. I focused on breaking up questions into three segments. First, people's experiences before coming to the Center: what life choices brought them to the center? Second, their impact while at the Center: what challenges and successes did they face? Third, their hopes for the future of the Center.

# Key Steps: Interviews and Transcription

I conducted two interviews with the current director. Originally, we were hoping to have at least one more person interview but due to scheduling conflicts it was unable to work out. Once the interviews were complete, I used oTranscribe software to create the transcriptions. I then sent them off to my interviewee and sponsor for approval and feedback. This was the longest part of the project, as I hand typed the transcriptions.

# Key Steps: Finding Aid

I met with Sherese to look over the archival materials and divided up which sections we were both going to focus on. We identified box numbers, description of item, date, and material. I focused on their publications from the 1990's-2010's and materials from their leadership institute.

# Impact

Through these oral histories, future generations will be able to understand personal perspectives about the Center and the people who shaped it. The finding aid will make it much easier for researchers to navigate the collection and find what they are looking for.

# Solutions and Surprises

During the second interview I forgot to put the memory card back into the recorder! I tested the recorder before officially beginning and it appeared to record, but it has a limited residual memory that only lasts for short periods of time. Thankfully, I had my backup phone recorder going as well and didn't miss a sentence.

I learned that Special Collections does not have a standard formatting practice for transcriptions, but they were very helpful in pointing me toward helpful resources.

# Project Experience Takeaways: Oral History Specific

- Always always always have a back up recorder on your phone!
- Be adaptable to the communication needs of those you are working with
- Know the standards of the institution!
- Practice being okay with the silence
- Make sure you have agreements in writing when it comes to those you are interviewing

# Next Steps:

## Expansion-

More former Women's Center leaders can be interviewed to add to the Alene Moris Women's Center archive collection.

The finding aid will need to be added to as more materials gather.

## Standardization of Transcription Practices-

The UW Special Collections does not have one unified source for standardizing transcriptions for audio. This could be something to collaborate with Special Collections in a future Capstone project.



# Thanks!

Special thanks go to Sarah Nguyen, my lead sponsor for meeting biweekly, letting me borrow the tape recorder, and offering constructive feedback. Thank you to Sherese Card for your leadership with the finding aid and guidance with navigating archive materials. Thank you to Sutapa Basu for sharing your time and knowledge. Thank you to the staff at the Alene Moris Women's Center for your warm welcome. Thank you to Elaine Speer and John Bolcer at Special Collections for helping with formatting the transcripts. Thank you to Ishita Chordia and Ana Bennett for answering my questions and meeting to discuss my project. To my fellow classmates, thank you for lending your ears to talk through challenges along the way. We made it!

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