

Shared Notes: Welcome: Reflecting on the history of the program

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

9:00 - 10:00 am ET

<https://clirdlf.zoom.us/j/87576981881>

Welcome: Reflecting on the history of the program (hybrid live/pre-recorded session, not recorded)

- Welcome (Nicole Kang Ferraiolo)
- Conversation between Mark Dimunation and Abby Smith Rumsey (moderated by Stephanie Stillo)([pre-recorded](#))
- Open discussion (moderated by Ryan Kashanipour and Stephanie Stillo)
 1. What was it like to re-read your fellowship report? What is like to reflect back on your fellowship now?
 2. In what ways have you (as a scholar or otherwise) changed since your fellowship?
 3. How has research changed since your fellowship?

Session Notes:

- Welcome (Nicole Kang Ferraiolo) - Director of Global Strategic Initiatives and past administrator for the program
 - Research and scholarship - this was the dream to bring everyone together to share ideas
 - Coming to a close after 20 years, sending Fellows to every continent but Antarctica
 - Ask questions in chat
- Pre-recorded Conversation between Mark Dimunation (**MD**) (Library of Congress, involved in fellowship orientations, long time reviewer for the program) and Abby Smith Rumsey (**AR**) (first program officer for CLIR 20 years ago) (moderated by Stephanie Stillo (**SS**) (alum, Library of Congress, fellow mentor))([pre-recorded](#))
 - **SS** - Rosenwald [sp?] Curator, Rare Books + Special collections, LOC
 - AR + MD to talk about the inception of the Mellon Fellows program at CLIR

- **AR:** at the beginning of the program as a PO at CLIR (2000). A different universe. Will talk about how the program started and what it was trying to achieve
- **MD:** Chief Rare Books + Special Collections division at LOC. AR asked him to be involved in first round of application review and stayed for every cohort of fellows. Purpose of the program has now met a wonderful resolution “the catered food improved immensely”
- **SS:** to AR: CLIR has had a profound impact on hundreds of scholars. We’d like to hear about the initial impulse + aims for the program
 - **AR:** Imagined a world where scholarship was motivated by a theoretical approach and looking at primary sources. [Name], a Program manager at Mellon approached then CLIR president [Name] and looked at getting scholars to the materials. I was recently at the LOC and had a passion for special collections, both published + unpublished.
 - In 2000, faculty and scholars were not using JSTOR and were resistant to electronic scholarship all together. Not until scholars like Steve Nicols (?) were advocating e-scholarship. Needed to educate about how archives are built, how to use them, how they grow. Not well understood at the time.
 - Our agenda, our scholars didn’t know what they were missing and the archivists didn’t seem ready to help the scholars when they arrived. We wanted to offer training and the opportunity to report out so that we could inform both the archival and library community.
 - Clear from the beginning that there were many wonderful places where there were well-developed fellowship programs, but they were limited to those who were studying those specific subjects. We wanted to focus on those archives that didn’t have financial support for scholars to come
 - First year, we had someone who wanted to work in the New Orleans public library, and that was the perfect fit. Though, most applications really wanted to work in the larger repositories from well-funded organizations.

- Obstacles: No one had ever heard at CLIR outside the library world, so they didn't know where the money would be coming from. We were intentional to title it the "Mellon Fellowship" to help increase the credibility. Partnered with MD and the division at LOC, and that really helped set up the success of the program
- **SS:** Those initial goals were felt by the original fellows, saw those themes comes across. For MD, you've been around since the beginning and have had endless conversations with fellows. How has the program evolved? How have the cohorts changed? How has the research changed?
 - **MD:** Tremendous change in approach and subject matter has happened over the 17 years.
 - Started by asking people to apply to work with original materials. We were busy promoting, ahead of the scholars, the book + archives as the material object. There was something to be gained by working with the physical materials.
 - Started seeing people use traditional materials in non-traditional ways. And non-traditional materials to answer traditional questions. Sound and architecture - just such a vast range of materials to answer questions that couldn't have been asked previously.
 - This brought in a greater sense of interdisciplinary discussion and "great fluidity of interpretation of materials"
 - Same problem and lack of experience in 2002 seen in 2017 - never set foot in an archive, didn't know how to behave. Just, the world had changed tremendously.
 - The nature of back up of research moved from making photocopies and mailing to yourself to backing up to the cloud
 - Rise of technology. Involvement of technology in historical research. Asking different types of questions.
 - Different type of cohort since you don't need to be a US citizen to apply, so that brought a broader range of applicants + topics "fueled the sense of adventure". Get out there and see what there is to see.

- Leper colonies, digging out moldy records, bar-joints in Nevada. Records being salvaged
- Created a whole generation of scholars that understand they are part of the work to make sure these records survive
- **SS:** Love “sense of adventure” When you’re in the circle hearing about everyone's projects, that’s the feeling that exists. For both, originally designed to address key gaps in the field, encouraging field work in libraries + archives, opportunities for “intimate engagement with primary sources”. Are these goals still relevant, is that still what we’re trying to instill in our grad students?
 - **AR:** There has been a major ship. Can we take full credit for this, perhaps? :-) There was a sense among librarians that digitization would render the work of librarians pointless, but Mark saw that this work would finally make the ‘golden age’ of special collections by making them more accessible
 - The program has not been able to achieve - has not leveled the playing field among all grad students in all schools. We always has more applications from the “really good grad schools” who are likely better prepared to do the work. They had faculty who wrote really good letters of recommendation. Disappointing to see that great proposals didn’t hit the mark because of a failure of the faculty mentor to make their student the most competitive.
 - The selection committees were mostly faculty at the beginning, looking at the grad students who would be promising to have in future study. They reflected on what they wished they had seen
 - Greater sense of responsibility for the faculty to promote this program back on campus.
 - Technologies: we still have not supported those archives in under-resourced cities and universities to take advantage of what a program like this could do.
 - We’ve come out with recommendations to make the infrastructure stronger, not just the scholars and students. We aspire to do this work, but there is always more to do.

- **MD:** CLIR issued a survey report a few years back of the program up to about 2017 with interesting discoveries. With all this advancement, we were still discovering that students were unprepared to step into the archives, manage their time and materials, etc. They became more adept at asking questions, but the day to day work of investigating the collections was still at ground level. A weakness of NA graduate education
- Glimmers along the way: if you are working in an archive that is underfunded, understaffed, and you do a lot of documentary work, you give the work back to the organization. If you're reading the whole collection, offer to do a rough sort. "Participate in keeping the archive moving."
- Used to send reports back to the archive, positive and negative, about the student experience in the archive.
- Notion of giving back did seem to catch on, especially capture of materials in a digital fashion. Sometimes went home and wrote grants to continue the work. The sense of the responsibility to the material objects was very encouraging.
- I remember the surprise after the end of review panels (read blind for review). When we got down to the top 10, there were always those 5 familiar institutions in the selection. There was not an even playing ground. If there is an extension, that should be evaluated.
- We might tailor the archives - certain types of settings, certain kinds of materials. Guiding research to areas that are less explored.
- Always amazing creativity in where they were finding resources and where they were going - way beyond me. So deep in the nature of the subject at hand.
- Another change along the way, the program got better at maintaining the community of scholarship among the fellows. We kind of hoped they would keep in contact after the program, but no real plan. CLIR had to address some scary encounters in international travel. Scholars were expressing the loneliness, so

we started to look at the community building. Seeing that all were doing the same kind of work, creating the opportunities to share that with each other. Addition of listservs and discussion boards

- “Generation of historians that are more mindful of the real object” and the need to support those orgs that are doing the work to save the heritage of people around the world
- **AR:** intense loneliness. Women that were exposed to cultures that were extremely antagonistic to women and saw the exclusion even in the archives. These were things that couldn't be designed in. How other cultures view and try to control information. Important to see this and bring back to the US. Many people were not prepared to see this in some cases (Italy, France, Jordan). Saw the cultural shaping of archives and what that means. Hoping to see that motivate a better way to curate and archive information and provide access
- **SS:** For many grads in mid-career, they hadn't thought of these types of questions: what is your responsibility to archives, collections, library? Changed my career trajectory, saw a new mandate for myself. Perhaps the most powerful thing - that sense of responsibility
- MD: energized a large number of special collections librarians in the country. “All the boats floated”. They had been working hard to bring this scholarship to the classroom, and this program brought the scholars to them, the need for access to collections with specialized support
- **SS:** What is your favorite moment from the program?
 - **AR:** The first session at the training, Mark mentioned a change in the postal code in the 1950s that had to do with the laws about pornography. This was a time that people didn't really talk about porn as much as today, but no one had really thought about how postal codes could have possibly shaped archives. They couldn't understand this modern day, US application. “The penny really dropped”. Mark teased them a bit. Electric ah-ha moment

- **MD:** Scholar studying country music + found himself going from one empire to the next. Had so many photo copies that he lost track of what came from where and spent 6-months sorting it all out again. Came back with this charming conversion to country music.
 - Lively scholar, energized with many creative ideas, studying legalized prostitution in Nevada, first one having a book publication. This program is working. She came back with a story about attending a pole dancing conference. I saw that people were pushing to a new sense of documentation and research, not reporting. Applied to the current day as much as the long past.
 - Few marriages out of the program. Coincidental encounters. Always plan ahead and make sure the collection you plan to visit is still open
 - Saw this sense of adventure of being on the road, doing work with real materials, and doing the research in such a way that will impact
 - Working with our team - CLIR.
 - **AR:** never could have done this program without Mark. We were serious, but Mark introduced the idea that we were entering this magical time - don't hold back or be surprised (but be organized). There was so much joy and pleasure in this process that was then impressed on everyone involved in the program.
- **SS:** thank you both, for this time and for all you did to change our lives as dissertation fellows.
- Open discussion (moderated by Ryan Kashanipour (**RK**) and Stephanie Stillo (**SS**)) (20 min)
 - **RK:** hello and welcome. Glad to be here. Framing this as a group conversation to talk to all of you. So glad to hear the recorded conversation once again, with Mark and Abby reflecting on the program. Thanks to Amy and Nikki who have helped the program through all these years. Amy joined after Abby and then Nikki. They have been essential to the program, trying to stay behind the scenes.

Their work was essential for making the program happen, the research happen, all the details.

- I come from being a fellow and know many of you while working as a mentor. The program was fully formed by 2017 when I joined. Saw the plan Abby had - encourage grad students to work with original sources but also think about archives + spaces. The holes still exist, students not fully prepared to go into the archives. Fostered new approaches to old sources, old approaches to new sources. I focused on building community in cohort, how these relationships are essential to research
- **SS:** I did my fellowship at the LOC and then ended up coming back as a permanent employee. Acknowledge Amy, Christa, and Nikki. And Ryan. Still see you as a mentor - yours was the voice that came when we were most lonely. What are your reactions to the conversation we listened to?
 - [audience]: Why the program is being brought to a close? It's been such a success with the community. Is it simply funding or the changing nature of digital scholarship?
 - **AL:** Most of it is simply funding. CLIR + Mellon have been connected to it. Mellon has not traditionally funded in perpetuity even though they did fund this program for a long time. They're thinking about their funding patterns and thought it was time for CLIR to step back and collectively evaluate. There was not a chance for CLIR to renew with Mellon at this time, though there is some ongoing conversation. This symposium could help CLIR reconceptualize the program. The need is still strong. The feeling that so much is available online is true - even in 2000, there was this concern that the value of the original source was not being appreciated the way it should be.
 - **SS:** it is a grave mistake that everything that is digitized is everything that an institution has. LOC is hungry for scholars to come in as digitization has focused on the

most popular collections rather than the depth of collections

- [audience]: Heard of the program through a professor who encouraged practice in writing grants. As obtaining grants was the real work of a researcher +1
- [audience]: Going into university libraries, they are empty of people. If there's not a huge task for CLIR to draw people in, creating the university culture before getting people into the archives. Loss of hands-on experience where CLIR could impact
 - **RK:** the program has been on the horizon to sunset for years, even though this has been such a huge impact on the field. Supported the humanities broadly in such important ways. The symposium will help us think through the potential future of the program. Take stock on the past but think ahead to the future to the questions we need to address.
- **SS:** as we think about the conversation. COVID ramped up the digitization process to keep feed researchers with sources. But there is still a greater need now to pull people back into the library to work with original resources. The need for this dissertation fellowship still stands. I do hope we find a way to go forward in whatever creative capacity that may be.
- **RK:** Many of you are faculty now in academia. At some fundamental level, you are teaching your students + colleagues about good practices in archives, ways to think about libraries, archives, and sources. You are already continuing to carry on the program in one of the key aspects: primary resources + teaching
- **SS:** To think of the people that work in libraries + archives as colleagues - continue to establish those relationships. Remember the networking and community building
- **RK:** the archive is not just a place + the objects - it's also the people.

- **SS:** walking into an institution is not just about getting the papers you want, it's about establishing the relationship with the person behind the reference desk to unlock the new avenues for your career
 - **RK:** looking forward to the rest of the conference as we're continuing in community and thinking about collaborative grant writing. We'll be able to think in detail and at a grand scale.
Reflect on past, present, and future
- **NF:** 2 sessions in particular. 'Healing harms" - goal to think about what CLIR + the community can do in this field. In St. Louis - working group session to think about what's next.
- Skipped the questions
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