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A QUEER HISTORY OF SEATTLE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY: RECONCILIATION AND RECOVERY IN ORAL HISTORY MANAGEMENT AND SPECIAL COLLECTION CREATION

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A QUEER HISTORY OF SEATTLE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY:
RECONCILIATION AND RECOVERY IN ORAL HISTORY MANAGEMENT
AND SPECIAL COLLECTION CREATION

by

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Abstract

In order to deconstruct the process and product of the two-year long SERVE Grant funded research project, "A History of Queer Student Presence and Activism at Seattle Pacific University: 1990-2019", I analyze it through the acts of knowledge recovery and reconciliation. As an act of knowledge recovery, this project sought to uncover the unacknowledged history about SPU's queer community through the use of *The Falcon* and oral history interviews as primary sources. To properly commit to this act of recovery, the project also created a historical narrative, timeline, Special Collection, and website to preserve these findings and make them available to others. As an act of reconciliation, this project exemplifies how commitment to justice, forgiveness, and repentance can guide one's approach to the historical task of knowledge making.

Introduction

Every task pursued by historians is an opportunity to act with integrity and compassion. This is because the nature of historical research demands intense scrutiny and persistence in order to develop a faithful account of the past. Since the historical task is driven by the collective standard of developing an honest and useful history, all historians must be mindful of the impact their contributions will make and their consideration about the truths revealed in this. Because of this, it is necessary for historians to be aware of the patterns of the past, their relation to current events, and their value in the continual process of knowledge making.

However, it is also valuable to understand that the histories created will never fully and accurately represent the nature of the past. They will be subject to internal unrecognized biases, to the facts available to the researcher, to the scope of their investigation, and to the very nature of historical knowledge making. The historian's task is limited by an inability to fully capture how it was to live through a certain period, event, lifestyle, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual-orientation, and so much more. But this limitation should not prevent historians from continuing to partake in historical knowledge making. Instead, it illuminates the areas in which historians can improve their method in order to address the facts about the past which are misrepresented or unacknowledged.

In order to analyze this unique task of historical knowledge making, this paper will briefly describe the work of the two-year long grant funded research project, "A Queer History Student Presence and Activism at Seattle Pacific University: 1990-2019", my role and contributions, and it will explore how our work and product is a valuable example of knowledge recovery and reconciliation through historical research.

Proposal and Products

This project began in 2021 and was funded by the Seattle Pacific University SERVE Grant Program. SERVE stands for Spiritual and Educational Resources for Vocational Exploration and this grant seeks to "provide support for SPU faculty and staff to explore and practice the theological aspects and implications of Christian vocation." Our project team included professors from the SPU History Department and a total of six student researchers. These students included Isabel Bartosh, Marisa Inez Silva, Lou Bridges, Megan Nixon, Cambria Judd Babbitt, and myself.

In our grant proposal, we described that the aim of our project was to "accomplish Seattle Pacific University's goals of reflecting the diversity of God's kingdom, cultivating diversity and reconciliation, fostering an environment of belonging, and maximizing the resources for equitable outcomes. By providing a documented history of queer student presence and activism at SPU, this project can contribute to SPU's established reconciliation goals." By leaning into SPU's existing goals surrounding diversity, reconciliation, and inclusion we designed our project in such a way that would seek to illuminate an existing gap in our institutional histories. These goals were the guiding principles to our research, analysis, and dissemination processes.

In order to accomplish this, our project sought to provide an account of the complex history of SPU's queer community in an accessible format. We did so in three ways. First, through our research and analysis, we were able to construct an intricate historical narrative and timeline covering the major trends and events of SPU's queer past between 1990 and 2019. Second, in partnership with the Seattle Pacific University Archives, we created a Special Collection in which to protect, preserve, and make accessible to others the oral histories revealed by alumni and faculty related to their experience in this history. And third, we constructed a

detailed website to house and share our findings, narrative, timeline, archive materials, and more. This website serves as a front-facing product of public historical research in a format which is widely accessible now and will continue to be in the future.

The products of our historical research and task provide a valuable record of the university's institutional history and represent the unique approach knowledge recovery can offer regarding an ignored and unrepresented history.

Our narrative, timeline, resource archive, and oral history interviews cover a number of topics related to the University policies, campus lifestyle, and queer identity as it existed during this 30-year period. They uncover and highlight the origins of the institutional Statement on Human Sexuality which was created and persisted in several forms during this period. They follow the queer campus student club Haven from its origins in 2007 to their long-awaited administrative approval as a recognized student club in 2013. They investigate the involvement of the Associated Students of Seattle Pacific (ASSP), in calling for the removal of the Statement on Human Sexuality from the Student Handbook in 2019. Most importantly, the products of this research highlight the individual experiences of queer students as they sought to foster an inclusive and safe community on SPU's campus.

Since this paper is an analysis of this project and historical task, no further explanation will be given about the findings and facts uncovered. If you are interested in learning more about this narrative and history, please refer to the website and information included in the appendix.

My Role

As a project partner and student researcher on this team, my role focused on gathering information through oral history interviews and creating a Special Collection in the Seattle

Pacific University Archives. As an interviewer, I spoke with SPU alumni, faculty, and staff members in order to research their experiences and reflections as members of the SPU community. This role involved actively participating in the act of knowledge recovery through the creation of recorded oral histories. Additionally, during the dissemination portion of our project, I collaborated with the SPU Archives to create a Special Collection to house these oral histories. That process represents the final act of recovery because it created a space in which the information and knowledge conveyed can be preserved and protected.

When the idea for this project was proposed, I knew we were being presented with the valuable opportunity to partake in a research and knowledge recovery which hadn't been pursued before. As students at SPU, we were uniquely situated to have access to the materials and individuals necessary for our research as well as an understanding of the basic social context during that period of SPU's past. We were passionate about uncovering the truth about SPU's past queer communities while also constructing an accessible format in which others can learn and participate in it as well. These goals guided us during the whole two-year process. But, what remained most important to our historical task was that we were students researching students. The scope of our research, narrative, and timeline was centered on the value and acknowledgement of past student voices and experiences during their time at SPU. Our work would be a resource and gift to all past, present, and future members of SPU's campus community. Overall, it allows the opportunity to reflect on our past in order to more faithfully consider the future we are fostering as a faith-based institution in this diverse world.

A Definition of Knowledge Recovery

To effectively describe the act of knowledge recovery in this project, I must deconstruct what this phrase entails through an explanation of knowledge and recovery. In epistemology, knowledge is traditionally analyzed through the Justified True Belief model. This equates knowledge as a principle to anything which is objectively true about reality and is accurately believed and understood. However, this approach to knowledge is inadequate for many reasons. The Justified True Belief model fails to account for situations in which one may have a justified and true belief without them actually possessing knowledge. While this statement requires a much more thorough explanation—so much so that a whole branch of epistemology is dedicated to it—for the sake of this analysis, we will regard knowledge under simpler terms. Knowledge merely needs to be understood as that which is true about objective reality and is properly possessed in one's intellect or written record.

We can possess knowledge about any number of things. I know that I am sitting in a chair right now. Granted this is knowledge based on my own experience. I don't have knowledge about whether you are sitting in a chair as you read this, but I assume you would know this. When we begin to consider knowledge about larger topics, the task of determining whether it is knowledge and our regard for one's ability to actually possess it becomes more complicated. With this in mind, let us regard knowledge in the historical task as being any true fact about the past which one intellectually or physically possesses.

Since many individuals may possess knowledge of the past within their minds as memory, it is important to recognize that their knowledge on that topic has the ability to be lost. It is lost when they forget, die, or are led to believe that what they experienced was actually false. This latter route is so important that there is a whole branch of epistemology which seeks to investigate those "epistemic injustices" that cause an individual to reconsider their own

authority about the truth of an experience. All that to say, knowledge about the truth of the past is being lost every day.

With this basic understanding of the concept of knowledge, we may now consider the term recovery. Recovery is the process of regaining possession of something which was lost. In order to effectively recover something, it must be protected in a preservable state. This means that while we may temporarily recover some information, the fact that it could still be lost again threatens its initial recovery.

In terms of knowledge recovery, this practice entails the faithful act of recovering some knowledge and preserving it in a manner fitting of its material. In historical research, this practice of knowledge recovery can take form when uncovering valuable primary resources related to a topic. For example, letters and diaries are valuable insights into the general experiences related to events and circumstances. If they are not recovered, preserved, and utilized by researchers, the knowledge they hold will be lost in relation to our study and history about *that* past. Knowledge recovery can also take many other forms in the historical task because of how large this task actually is. Given that the past encapsulates everything which came before this present moment, the historical task is ever growing and continues to yield so many opportunities for research. Yet, it's clear that any historical research must be based on some form of knowledge. This entails and necessitates the use of knowledge recovery in order to create any accurate analysis of the past.

Our Project as Knowledge Recovery

In this project, we partook in knowledge recovery in two ways. The first was through our use of the campus student newspaper, *The Falcon*. The second way was through the interviews

we conducted with alumni and faculty who were able to share their experience and knowledge with us. The fact that these interviews are recorded and preserved in an archival special collection reinforces their value as historical resources.

The Falcon

The Falcon played a necessary role in our recovery of information. It is a significant source for our research because it is, and always has been, a student-run campus newspaper. As primary sources, the articles published reveal insight into the state of the university from a student's perspective. They reported on campus events, utilized student voices, and highlighted the concerns across this community. In addition, *The Falcon* used to publish "Letters to the Editor" which could be submitted by any student, faculty, or staff member. These letters addressed the current conversations circulating around campus which allowed us to better understand the relevant facts and general approaches our community had to these subjects at the time.

In this format, *The Falcon* was an entity which possessed valuable knowledge about these events. Knowledge was possessed in the articles written by students who were being held to the high standards of journalistic integrity and accuracy. It was also possessed in the "Letters to the Editor" because these letters reveal information in a different manner than the news articles. They relay knowledge through the themes and subjects addressed as well as the language utilized. Since each "Letter to the Editor" represents at least one voice of the campus community, they are useful insights into the campus as a whole at that time.

In order to properly recover the knowledge conveyed in *The Falcon*, we utilized it as a primary source in the writing of our historical narrative. Additionally, we created digital scans of the articles used and uploaded those to our website. In this format, individuals also interested in

discovering this history could read and utilize them as a collection. Our provision of a space and format for accessing primary source information has empowered others to receive knowledge beyond our written narrative.

Oral History Interviews

The second way we partook in knowledge recovery was through the oral history interviews we conducted and the creation of the archival Special Collection. This was the part of the project I was most involved in. In order to properly recover knowledge from the individuals who personally experienced the history we were uncovering, we conducted 27 oral history interviews with alumni, faculty, and staff. They possessed the knowledge we sought to recover in their memories, journals, emails, social media posts, and more.

As we approached this task, we needed to determine who would be the most relevant individuals to interview. This required structuring the scope of our research focus into three categories. The first category was the creation of the Statement on Human Sexuality which we determined began in the early 1990's. The second category was the creation and history of the queer student club Haven from 2007 to 2013. The third category was the involvement of ASSP in the call to remove the Statement on Human Sexuality from the Student Handbook which began in 2018. For each section, we interviewed individuals directly involved. To uncover the history about the Statement on Human Sexuality, we interviewed the professor whose class led to its creation and another professor who was on the committee that wrote the statement. To collect information about the creation of Haven and general queer life on campus, we reached out to notable alumni involved in Haven leadership, club members, friends, and their faculty advisors. These individuals recommended other people we could interview and often directly introduced us. This was the same tactic we used for the history of ASSP involvement as well.

For each interview, we provided questions beforehand to allow interviewees an opportunity to recall information they would want to share. In practice, these interviews took a more organic nature and allowed the interviewee to share more personal and intricate experiences than would have been possible from just the interview questions. These interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee and later transcribed using an AI software. This transcription was very useful in allowing us to quickly return to specific portions of the interviews where relevant information was shared. It also helped us to pull quotes more easily for use in the narrative writing process. However, we still needed to edit portions of this generated transcription to guarantee that the words written were the actual words spoken. This attention to detail and deliberate effort to ensure accuracy serves as an example of just one of the ways that knowledge recovery must be executed with diligence. Additionally, since three of us were conducting these interviews, we also needed to guarantee that we were doing so in the same manner to maintain consistency and accuracy of the stories shared. This process went very smoothly, and we quickly collected many primary oral histories from willing and trusted individuals.

The knowledge they shared with us took two different forms. The first was purely through the relevant facts shared about their experience at SPU. We asked about their roles and reflections during significant events and involvement while also providing space for them to share other pertinent information. This was incredibly valuable because it allowed our overarching narrative to grow according to the facts and themes revealed by our interviewees. This information helped to shape the historical narrative in crucially complex ways. It was clear to us that each interviewee already possessed the narrative we sought to uncover, our task was simply to piece it together in a format more accessible for others. This practice is a necessary

part of knowledge recovery because, as I explained, the knowledge recovered in any historical

task must be preserved and made available in a manner fitting of its form and audience. The

historical narrative we produced allowed us to do so by combining the facts of *The Falcon*

articles with the facts of these oral histories. This fact-based approach is necessary to any

historical task.

The second form in which knowledge was shared was through the emotionally personal

nature of their stories. Many of our interviewees shared deeply significant moments from their

lives because it related to their experience at SPU. Some of these personal experiences were the

result of policies and decisions being made on campus in regard to queer inclusion and lifestyle

expectations. Yet, when they shared these things, a piece of their experience and story was being

preserved as a valuable example of the ways SPU's queer past impacted real students at that

time. Our project couldn't only be about the facts which pushed this history forward. It needed to

relay the example of how actual queer students existed in the midst of these things. The stories of

real people are necessary and valuable parts of the historical task.

Special Collection Creation

In order to properly preserve and therefore recover these facts and stories, we

collaborated with the Seattle Pacific University Archives to create a Special Collection in which

these interviews could be housed and preserved. This was another process which required great

precision because of the number of steps involved.

First, we needed to receive permission from the interviewee that we could house the

recording and transcript of their interview on the Digital Commons site. This is a digital platform

through which digital archival materials can be housed, accessed, and preserved by various

institutions who pay for the service. Interviewees needed to determine the access type, name,

image, and information they did or did not want to appear in this Special Collection. They had the option to keep the access type open to any individual who visited the digital commons site, limit it to anyone with SPU login credentials or physically on the campus, or completely deny approval for their interview to even be included. All choices were treated with respect.

If they did choose to include their oral history interview in this Special Collection, they had the option to use their name, utilize a pseudonym, or remain completely anonymous. Additionally, we provided them an opportunity to review their recording and transcript to determine any redactions they wished to make. In order to track each interviewee's preferences, I created a detailed spreadsheet and updated it as they communicated their preferences. If they decided on changes to their name or redactions, I would edit the recording and transcript to account for this. In these cases involving physical redactions, I would again share the updated materials with the interviewee to receive their final approval. Once files were ready to be uploaded, I was trained and given access permission to upload materials onto SPU's Digital Commons site. SPU Librarian Kristen Hoffman manages this site and works with every department of the university to ensure proper legal and copyright permission and access is being maintained before materials become available. Because of this, it was necessary that I completed each upload and file creation consistently and accurately. When the uploading was complete, I would check that the metadata connected to these files was also accurate and ready to be posted.

Our team has ensured the ongoing relevance and usefulness of the knowledge recovered from these sources by providing greater public access to the oral history interviews and articles included in our narrative and timeline. Our project is an example of the way commitment to knowledge recovery in the historical task must take several forms depending on the historical

material. Yet, what remains clear is that use of this recovered knowledge opens the door to greater discovery and analysis about the past.

A Definition of Reconciliation

In this next section, I will deconstruct the nature of reconciliation and reveal the ways our project exemplifies it in practice. Reconciliation is the process of reconciling two things by resolving the differences between them in a manner which productively benefits both sides. This definition doesn't necessarily mean that the problems caused by the differences will be eliminated, only that a new path is being developed to account for these differences. This process involves bringing those two things—people, events, facts, concepts, experiences, etc.—into a more harmonious state. When they are able to come together in this way, our interaction with these things changes and adapts in relation to our task.

In Christian Theology, reconciliation means to 'make right.' In other words, it is about returning or renewing something to the state in which it was intended to exist. Reconciliation is often used to denote an element of Christian salvation which is the promise of a renewed relationship with God in the wake of humanities' sins. Throughout Christian scripture, the theme of reconciliation usually arises between people or communities when there is discord or fighting between them. They are unable to resolve their differences and continue causing harm to themselves and others because of this. However, through mediation by a spiritual person or even intervention from God, they are able to set aside the principles which prevented them from fostering peace and develop a new path for the future. This theme persists throughout Christian scripture as an example of the reconciliation we are promised in God.

While a Christian approach may seem unnecessary to this deconstruction of reconciliation as a principle and practice, reconciliation through the example of Christian ideals was a major influence in our project. Most of the researchers on our team are Christian and we had many conversations throughout the process about the ways our project was uncovering and emphasizing the injustices in our community. Additionally, we were conducting research about a Christian institution which claims to foster an environment of reconciliation through their leadership. Reconciliation in the form of justice, truth, forgiveness, and repentance is fundamental to the Christian community and can be pursued in every part of our lives. In this historical task, we allowed it to guide our process and motivate our perseverance.

In order to recognize the ways reconciliation manifests in operational practice, an explanation of what it specifically entails is necessary. To enter into this process of reconciliation, it requires the act of vulnerability. To be vulnerable means to acknowledge one's emotional and mental state, especially those that are uncomfortable or painful. Vulnerability is also understood in the sense of being in a situation where one could be harmed. It involves honesty with oneself so that difficulties can be known and addressed. When two people attempt to reconcile, they must be vulnerable with one another. In a situational setting with two or more parties, this implies an openness about the state of their differences and an agreement about their intended goals. In this way, the actual process of reconciliation requires constant reminder of each side's intentions and goals. By maintaining this standard of engagement, they are able to help promote productivity in this endeavor.

Reconciliation is a beautiful concept which permeates many parts of our lives. In the historical task, reconciliation can influence and guide historians as they seek to make sense of the past and derive meaning for a present audience. When historians attempt to reconcile two

concepts or facts, it is necessary that the deeper qualities of the concepts are fully understood and considered in this process. If we, as historians, are in a place of privilege or power given our ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and social or economic position, then we must recognize the impact this will have on our analysis, use, and created works surrounding this history. Historians are constantly attempting to reconcile with the facts of the past so that they may better understand the reality of that time. This is an important task and requires respect and careful intention to be accomplished successfully.

In this project, we partook in reconciliation in several ways. In the beginning, it permeated our goals and intended process. During our research, it guided us in conducting our interviews and gathering information. In the dissemination process, it was essential to how we made this history accessible and understandable to our whole community. To partake in reconciliation is to faithfully pursue justice, truth, forgiveness, and repentance in the manner consistent with the nature of the injustice being addressed.

Our Project as Reconciliation

As previously explained, the injustice we sought to address was the large gap in SPU's institutional history related to queer acknowledgement and inclusion. In the months leading up to the manifestation of this project, discussions were circulating across campus about the origins of the Statement on Human Sexuality and the uncertainty about the nature of SPU's past interaction with its queer community. Universities are interesting places where the collective memory about a recent past can remain largely unknown as the student body constantly cycles through the institution. The Faculty at SPU are generally aware of some of these facts, but the unified history

was still inconsistent and held by few. With this in mind, it was clear that our project could pursue reconciliation through uncovering this history.

As we gathered information from *The Falcon* articles and oral history interviews, reconciliation manifested in the care and attention we took in handling these stories. With *The Falcon*, we utilized articles which revealed painful facts about SPU's administration and student body. They told us about how students had thrown water balloons onto a student demonstration during the National Day of Silence.[1] They told us that university administrators continually denied the legitimate existence of the queer club Haven for years before they were allowed approval as a student club.[2] Several "Letters to the Editor" shared opinions about the nature of sexuality. Some of them supported the diversity of genders and sexualities while others aggressively denied any social or spiritual legitimacy for these individuals. We collected these articles and created a digital collection on our website so that others may utilize these primary sources in their own research. By highlighting these stories of injustice in our historical narrative and timeline, we encourage others to consider the reality of the past and invite them to pursue justice, forgiveness, and repentance as they seek to foster a more equitable future.

In the creation and management of the oral history interviews, we approached this task with great care and diligence in order to responsibly handle the stories shared with us and faithfully protect them. In principle, there was a divide between the alumni and faculty we interviewed and ourselves as current student researchers who were funded by the very university which caused them harm. We represented the two sides of a conflict and needed to approach these interviews with vulnerability. Each interviewee was vulnerable. They were the ones who experienced pain and yet agreed to share what they deemed necessary to help us uncover more

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[1] Bekah Grim. "Let SPU Be a Haven for Haven." *The Falcon* (Seattle, WA), May 7, 2008. 13

[2] Melissa Steffan. "Haven No Longer to Meet on Campus." *The Falcon* (Seattle, WA)*,* Feb. 2, 2011. 1, 3

about SPU's queer past. They shared about personal sadness, joy, hardship, and more during their years on campus. They even spoke about their reflections on these experiences in the years following and shared words of encouragement to the current queer community as they also seek to foster a safer and more inclusive environment on campus.

As researchers and interviewers, we needed to recognize our responsibility in protecting these individuals and their stories. This meant fostering a safe environment and relationship with them in order to reassure them of our intentions with their stories. Through each step of the interviewing and special collection creation process, our team was transparent with the interviewees about the state of the project, how their stories would be utilized and preserved, and how grateful we were for their participation. We also constantly reminded interviewee's that they have every opportunity to retract their shared stories and terminate involvement. In order to foster an environment of reconciliation through our project, we continually considered the demands of such a task and responsibly sought to exemplify those principles in practice.

As our team approached the dissemination portion of our project through the creation of an accessible website and digital special collection, we sought to invite our community into our task of reconciliation through their participation with this queer history. As I explained before, reconciliation means to 'make right.' In order to collectively address the ways in which our community could foster renewal, it is necessary to make them aware of the ways in which this renewal has been prevented and limited in the past. To properly attempt reconciliation within a community, every member must know the reality of the situation. By making our historical narrative, timeline, and special collection of oral histories available to the SPU community, we allow them the opportunity to pursue reconciliation themselves.

While our group sought to foster reconciliation in these ways, the only way to ensure enduring effectiveness in this endeavor is to equip others to responsibly participate as well. Our project is merely the beginning of this and an invitation to the SPU campus and wider community to continue to respond to the demands of the present with an accurate understanding of our past.

Conclusion

As an act of knowledge recovery and reconciliation, this project was successful in uncovering the unacknowledged queer history at SPU and doing so in a manner which remained committed to integrity and compassion. The principles which guide academic endeavors and progress may at times appear disconnected from the concerns of real people in the communities around us. But while this fact may be true of some academic endeavors, it is clear that this project exemplifies the way in which these complex principles have the ability to foster justice, forgiveness, and redemption through the concerns of the community. In order to continue in this act of reconciliation, our community must remain committed to addressing the injustices which persist with compassion for the past, present, and future individuals impacted by them.

Bibliography

Grim, Bekah. "Let SPU Be a Haven for Haven." *The Falcon* (Seattle, WA), May 7, 2008. 13

Steffan, Melissa. "Haven No Longer to Meet on Campus." *The Falcon* (Seattle, WA), Feb. 2, 2011. 1, 3

Appendix

A. Link and Images of Website created for SERVE Grant Project

https://servegrantspu.wixsite.com/lgbtq--serve-grant

Main Page

Timeline tab features main events and links to parts of written narrative and primary sources

| October 2013 | Haven becomes an official ASSP student club with full funding and privileges. |
| Fall 2018 | ASSP President Nathan Samayo and his ASSP leadership team create a petition for the removal of the Statement of Human Sexuality from the Student Handbook. Petition receives almost one thousand signatures from SPU students, alumni, faculty, and staff. |

Jumps in timeline align with the three sections of the narrative

1990-2007

The Controversy Begins: Mary Fry, Michael Roe, and HSC 2035

In 1969, a maternity nurse named Mary Fry started teaching a course on reproductive and maternity nursing at Seattle Pacific University. As she was teaching her courses, she realized just how little her nursing students actually knew about human sexuality. Sex and sexuality was still such a taboo topic that many of them couldn't look Fry in the eyes and name anatomy parts without blushing. Realizing that her course needed to be expanded, Fry consulted with Michael Roe, a psychology professor at SPU, and another biology professor to develop a new course on human sexuality. The course covered several typical nursing subjects, such as anatomy and physiology of the reproductive system, psychosexual growth and development, and contraception, but also included a unit on variations in human sexuality. The course had a week-long unit on homosexuality itself, wherein Fry and her co-teachers attempted to mitigate the cultural and medical

First section of narrative: 1990-2007

The Roots of Haven: Soul Force and the 2007 Equality Ride

On April 16, 2007, a group of LGBTQ+ Christian activists came to Seattle Pacific University with the expressed intention of protesting the university's homophobic Statement on Human Sexuality and student lifestyle policies and promoting open and honest conversations about human sexuality on campus. The group—Soul Force— was founded by Mel White, a man who used to be a speechwriter for prominent conservative American evangelicals before he revealed that he was gay. Soul Force sponsored several "Equality Rides" between 2006 and 2007 that were modeled after and inspired by the Freedom Rides of the 1960s. In a phone interview with Falcon writers, Equality Rider Brandon Kneefel shared the group's vision for their visit:

> "We're a nonviolent, interfaith group that works to establish dialogue in the way Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi did…We're not protesters. We're not here to get people's attention. We're here to foster dialogue and to create a space for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. It has been tricky to get a balance of opinions out there. We are coming as outsiders trying to share a message. We are trying to find the best way for conversation to be conducted. There have been plenty of schools that have not welcomed us. Sometimes they welcome us, sometimes they don't. We just try to take it one day at a time."

Equality Riders notified Seattle Pacific University administration of their visit in advance. A series of faculty- and Equality Rider-led panels and discussions were planned. The campus responses were varied.

Administration decided that they would not attempt to block the Equality Riders the way other universities had or arrest them for trespassing; however, this decision did not come from a place of affirmation or genuine

Second section of narrative: 2007-2013

2013-2018: An Interim Period

For a few years, Haven flew under the radar as a discussion group. They met weekly, observed national occurrences like Trans Day of Remembrance and National Day of Silence, and connected students with resources in the area. Haven also hosted open mic and karaoke nights, and spread awareness about critical queer issues through open discussion nights and social media posts. In March of 2014, Adam Hutchinson shared in The Falcon regarding a pastor panel held in Otto Miller Hall regarding the queer community and the church. At this point, Letters to the Editor were no longer featured in The Falcon, so there is less to reveal how the student body responded to this panel, but in the same issue there was an article published sharing statistics on the shifting views of the country towards LGBT rights.

One month later in April 2014, another report was featured on a ten day lecture series about sex, sexuality, and relationships. This particular session focused on homosexuality and "bridging the gap" between the LGBT community and the church. The article quotes senior Claire Nieman, who remarks that it is the first campus-wide event she has seen on SPU campus that had not ended in "a heated debate."

> …the first campus-wide event she has seen on SPU campus that had not ended in "a heated debate."

Intermittently over the next few years, conversations began about the gendered, transphobic language in the Student Handbook and other group constitutions on campus. In 2016, articles were published in The Falcon

Interim Period: 2013-2018

Passing the Torch: ASSP Picks Up the Fight, Begins Relationship With the Board of Trustees

It was in 2018 when LGBTQ+ issues made their way back into the attention of SPU's upper administration—and the Board of Trustees. Student Nathan Samayo ran for ASSP president for the 2018-2019 academic year, seeking to be a bridge between marginalized groups on campus and administration. He would serve as ASSP President from 2018 to 2020. Nathan Samayo very much led the student attempts to remove the Statement on Human Sexuality from the Student Handbook. The Statement on Human Sexuality was developed in the early 1990s due to the conflict over Mary Fry and Michael Roe's course on human sexuality, and was stitched into the Student Handbook to inform residential living policies and lifestyle expectations. Here is the full Statement on Human Sexuality as it exists on SPU's website and as it existed in the Student Handbook when Samayo began his term:

"Human beings are created in the image of God, male and female. The explicit relational dimension of human beings and the inherent differentiation of gender are foundational to our understanding of creation itself. Our discussions and considerations of human sexuality, therefore, take place within the context of these assumptions. Human sexuality is both a relational truth and it is gender differentiated…In particular, we affirm the institutions of marriage and family as central to the purposes of God. We believe it is in the context of the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman that the full expression of sexuality is to be experienced and celebrated and that such a commitment is part of God's plan for human flourishing. Within the teaching of our religious tradition, we affirm that sexual experience is intended between a man and a woman. We believe this is the ancient and historic teaching of Christian scriptures and tradition, including the teaching of Seattle Pacific's founding denomination, the Free
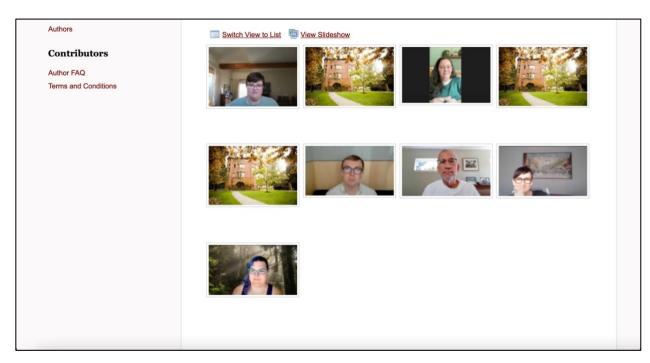
Third section of narrative: 2018-2022

A History of Queer Activism at SPU

Search... 🔍

About the Project   Timeline   1990-2007   2007-2013   2013-2018   2018-2022   Interviews   Archive   Looking Forward

Interviews

Transcripts from Oral History Interviews

In addition to archival research, oral history interviews constituted an important part of our research. Transcripts and, if available, video, of the interviews are available through the SPU archives Digital Commons.

Abigail Stahl
she/her
student at SPU 2004-2008

Joy Bethune
she/her
student at SPU 2008-2011, Haven co-leader

Samuel Ernest
he/him
student at SPU 2011-2015

Interviews tab links to SPU Digital Commons files of Interviews and Transcripts

B. Link and Images of SPU Archives Digital Commons, Special Collections Page "The History of Student LGBTQIA+ Activism at SPU (1990-2022): Oral History Interviews"

https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/historylgbtq_interviews/

C. Project Presented at SPU Honors Symposium on May 20th, 2023

Panel #5 - "dear reader": Testimony, Poetry, and Power in Historical Narrative

The past is nothing without the creation of history. This panel explores different stages of knowledge recovery while synthesizing multi-disciplinary approaches to historical study. A focal point of this analysis is the recovery of marginalized voices and the power of testimony to connect areas of knowledge often seen as disparate. These projects holistically question our role as consumers of knowledge in order to highlight the principles utilized in the collective pursuit of meaning making and reconciliation.

Rebecca Cavanaugh
> *Honors Research Project Title:*
> A Queer History of Seattle Pacific University: Reconciliation and Recovery in Oral History Management and Special Collection Creation

Marisa Inez Silva
> *Honors Research Project Title:*
> Survivor accounts of sexual violence in the Holocaust and Rwandan genocide: A comparative history

Annie Griffin
> *Honors Research Project Title:*
> "A Shadow of a Magnitude": The Parthenon Marbles through the Eyes of Keats and Byron

Symposium Speech

Thank you for coming to our panel! I have the privilege of opening our panel's joint exploration of the different stages of knowledge recovery as they are exemplified in multi-disciplinary approaches to historical study. Each of our projects grapple with recovery in ways which produce new content, establish deeper meanings, and re-visit past ideas for a modern audience. These stages of recovery can be understood as modes of meaning as they relate to the original historical content. Early stages will focus on the practical discovery and protection of historical knowledge while the middle stages will utilize these facts to develop deeper and more

nuanced reflections that relate to bigger issues. Later stages of knowledge recovery can be more creative since the facts and principles used are more established in our collective memories.

Each section of stages is incredibly important to the whole act of knowledge recovery because in following them, we as researchers are partaking in the creation and enduring relevancy of the principles which guide historical research. In this panel, my project represents the early stages, Marisa's represents the middle stages, and Annie's represents the later stages. Framing our panel in this way has allowed us to invite you all to question your role as consumers of knowledge and realize the ways in which we utilize these principles in our own lives.

Before I proceed, I would like to clarify that throughout this speech, I will use the term "queer" to refer to all LGBTQIA+ individuals. This is meant to be inclusive of all peoples who live outside of the heteronormative standards out society persists in.

Now, In order to tell you about how my work exemplifies knowledge recovery, I must begin by briefly explaining the research project I am analyzing. Two years ago, five history students—including myself and others in this room—partnered with the history department to investigate the history of queer student presence and activism at SPU. Our research focused on student voices and experiences as revealed through primary source material. We used *The Falcon*, social media posts, photographs, institutional records, and oral testimony from past students and professors as our sources. Our goal for this project was to develop an accurate narrative detailing the major events of SPU's queer past so that our community could better understand the historical context to our current situation. If our community wants to pursue effective internal change, it is necessary to be aware of the whole complex situation.

When we completed our project in March, we launched a website housing the narrative written by members of our team, a timeline, and access to the primary sources we used in our research. This website also directs viewers to the Special Collection we created in the SPU Archives to preserve the oral testimony given by many of our interviewees. These materials provide a valuable record of the university's queer past and represent the unique approach knowledge recovery can offer regarding an ignored and unrepresented history. As a research team, we were committed to the faithful pursuit of reconciliation and justice in our community through our investigation of the past. We utilized the skills taught to us by our incredible professors and sought guidance from many in order to succeed in creating a reliable historical record. I am incredibly proud of the work by this team and am excited to speak with you all about how this project succeeded in accomplishing the early stages of knowledge recovery. In this analysis I will also describe how it exemplifies a responsible dedication to reconciliation. As I explain each process, I will define the nature of these principles and the ways they manifested in our research. If you are interested in reading more of my analysis, please see my complete paper when it is posted on Digital Commons at the end of the month.

To effectively describe the act of knowledge recovery in this and my collogues' projects, I must begin by deconstructing what this phrase entails through an explanation of knowledge and recovery. While the study of epistemology is dedicated to thoroughly analyzing knowledge from every relevant angle, for the purposes of this panel, knowledge merely needs to be understood as that which is true about objective reality and is properly possessed in one's intellect or physical record. With this in mind, let us regard knowledge in the historical task as being any true fact about the past which one possesses. Since many individuals may possess knowledge of the past within their minds as memory, it is important to recognize that their knowledge on a topic has the

ability to be lost. Historians don't like it when knowledge is lost, so we must invoke recovery in this practice. Recovery can be defined as the process of *regaining* possession of something which was almost lost. To do this effectively it must also be protected in a preservable state.

Now we may better understand "knowledge recovery." The practice of this principle entails the faithful act of recovering some knowledge and preserving it in a manner fitting of its material. In historical research, this can take form when uncovering valuable primary resources related to a topic. For example, letters and diaries are valuable insights into the general experiences related to events and circumstances. If they are not recovered, preserved, and utilized by researchers, the knowledge they hold will be lost in relation to our study and history about *that* past.

Knowledge recovery can also take many other forms in the historical task because of how large this discipline actually is. Given that the past encapsulates everything which came before this present moment, our task is ever growing and continues to yield so many opportunities for research. Yet, it's clear that any historical research must be based on some form of knowledge. This entails and necessitates the use of knowledge recovery in order to create any accurate analysis about the past.

In this project, we partook in knowledge recovery in two ways. The first was through our use of the campus student newspaper, *The Falcon*. It was a significant source because it is, and has always been, a student-run campus newspaper. The articles published in *The Falcon* possessed valuable knowledge about student perspectives, events, and happenings on campus. They gave insight into the environment and culture at the time and allowed us to consider the conversations which permeated the community we were investigating. In order to properly recover the knowledge conveyed in *The Falcon*, we utilized it as a primary source in the writing

of our historical narrative. Additionally, we created digital scans of the articles used and uploaded those to our website. In this format, individuals also interested in researching this subject could access the materials we spent hours searching for. Our provision of a space and format for accessing primary source information has empowered others to receive knowledge beyond just our written narrative.

The second way we partook in knowledge recovery was through the 27 oral history interviews we conducted with alumni and faculty and the creation of the archival Special Collection. The fact that these interviews were recorded and preserved in this collection reinforces their value as historical resources. This was the portion of the project I was most involved in. These interviewees possessed knowledge in their memories, journals, emails, social media posts, and more. Each interview followed a structure agreed upon by our team, but we also allowed space for interviewees to expand on their story more organically. The details they believed were necessary for the development of their personal narrative were incredibly nuanced and added several layers of intricacy to our written narrative.

Interviewees also shared knowledge with us in two distinct forms. The first was purely as relevant facts shared about their experience at SPU. We asked about their roles and reflections during significant events and involvement while also providing space for them to share other pertinent information. This was incredibly valuable because it allowed our overarching narrative to grow according to the facts and themes revealed by them. It was clear to us that each interviewee already possessed the narrative we sought to uncover, our task was simply to piece it together in a format more accessible for others. This practice is a necessary part of knowledge recovery because, as I explained, the knowledge recovered in any historical task must be preserved and made available in a manner fitting of its form and audience. The narrative we

produced allowed us to do so by combining the facts of *The Falcon* articles with the facts of these oral histories. This fact-based approach was essential.

The second form in which knowledge was shared was through the emotionally personal nature of their stories. Many of our interviewees shared deeply significant moments from their lives because it related to their experience at SPU. Some of these personal experiences were the result of policies and decisions being made on campus in regard to queer inclusion and lifestyle expectations. Yet, when they shared these things, a piece of their experience and story was being preserved as a valuable example of the ways SPU's queer past impacted real students at that time. Our project couldn't only be about the facts which pushed this history forward. It needed to relay the example of how actual queer students existed in the midst of these things. The stories of real people are valuable parts of any historical task.

In order to properly preserve and therefore recover these facts and stories, we collaborated with the Seattle Pacific University Archives to create a Special Collection in which these interviews could be housed and preserved. This was another process which required great precision because of the number of steps involved, but in doing so our team has ensured the enduring relevance and usefulness of the knowledge recovered from these sources. Our intention with this collection is to provide greater public access to the oral history interviews and articles included in our narrative and timeline. Our project is an example of the way commitment to knowledge recovery in the historical task must take several forms depending on the historical material. Yet, what remains clear is that use of this recovered knowledge opens the door to greater discovery and analysis about the past.

In this next section of my speech, I will deconstruct the nature of reconciliation and reveal the ways our project exemplifies it in practice. By definition, it is the process of reconciling two things by resolving the differences between them in a manner which productively benefits both sides. This definition doesn't necessarily mean that the problems caused by the differences will be eliminated, only that a new path is being developed to account for these differences. In Christian Theology, it means to 'make right.' In other words, it is about renewing something to the state in which it was intended to exist. I know there is a lot more literature investigating the nature of reconciliation in Christian theology, but for the purposes of my analysis but let us proceed with this simple definition.

In terms of historical research, reconciliation can influence and guide historians as they seek to make sense of the past and derive meaning for a present audience. When historians attempt to reconcile two concepts or facts, it is necessary that the deeper qualities of the concepts investigated are fully understood and considered. If we, as historians, are in a place of privilege or power given our ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and social or economic position, then we must recognize the impact this will have on our analysis, use, and created works surrounding this history. Historians are constantly attempting to reconcile with the facts of the past so that they may better understand the reality of that time.

As previously explained, the injustice we sought to address in our project was the large gap in SPU's institutional history related to queer acknowledgement and inclusion. In the months leading up to the original manifestation of this project, discussions were circulating across campus about the origins of the Statement on Human Sexuality and the uncertainty about the nature of SPU's past interaction with its queer community. The Faculty at SPU are generally

aware of some of these facts, but the unified history was still inconsistent and held by few. It was clear to us that our project could pursue reconciliation through uncovering this history.

As we gathered information from *The Falcon* articles and oral history interviews, reconciliation manifested in the care and attention we took in handling these stories. With *The Falcon*, we utilized articles which revealed painful facts about SPU's administration and student body and created a collection on our website. By highlighting these stories, we encourage others to consider the reality of the past and invite them to pursue justice, forgiveness, and repentance as they seek to foster a more equitable future.

In the creation and management of the oral history interviews, we approached this task with great care and diligence in order to responsibly handle the stories shared with us and faithfully protect them. In principle, there was a divide between the alumni and faculty we interviewed and ourselves as current student researchers who were funded by the very university which caused them harm. We represented the two sides of a conflict and needed to approach these interviews with vulnerability. Each interviewee was vulnerable… They were the ones who experienced pain and yet agreed to share what they deemed necessary to help us uncover more about SPU's queer past. They shared about personal sadness, joy, hardship, and more during their years on campus. They even spoke about their reflections on these experiences in the years following and shared words of encouragement to the current queer community as they also sought to foster a safer and more inclusive environment on campus.

As researchers and interviewers, we needed to recognize our responsibility in protecting these individuals and their stories. This meant fostering a safe environment and relationship with them in order to reassure them of our intentions with their stories. Through each step of the process, our team was transparent with the interviewees about the state of the project, how their

stories would be used and preserved, and how grateful we were for their participation. We also constantly reminded them that they have every opportunity to retract their shared stories and terminate involvement. In order to foster an environment of reconciliation through our project, we continually considered the demands of such a task and responsibly sought to exemplify those principles in practice.

As our team approached the dissemination portion of our project through the creation of the website and digital special collection, we wanted to invite our community into this act of reconciliation through their interaction with this queer history. As I explained before, reconciliation means to 'make right.' In order to collectively address the ways in which our community can foster renewal, it is necessary to make them aware of the ways in which this renewal has been prevented and limited in the past. To properly attempt reconciliation within a community, every member must know the reality of the situation. By making our historical narrative, timeline, and special collection of oral histories available to the SPU community and beyond, we allow them the opportunity to pursue reconciliation themselves.

While our group sought to foster reconciliation in these ways, the only way to ensure enduring effectiveness in this endeavor is to equip others to responsibly participate as well. Our project is merely the beginning of this and an invitation to the SPU campus and wider community to continue to respond to the demands of the present with an accurate understanding of our past.

The curriculum of the honors program encourages us to consider what it means to be human. One way in which I have understood and investigated this concept has been through the lenses of history and philosophy. The ways in which we create meaning in our lives,

relationships, and communities is complex and amazing. In this paper, I had the opportunity to combine these two disciplines in order to evaluate the history of our own institution. My groups project exemplifies the acts of knowledge recovery and reconciliation and invites others to participate in them through their skill sets as well. The products of this project succeed as early stages of knowledge recovery and I look forward to seeing how others continue in this task.

D. Visual Component from Honors Symposium 2023