

Susan Sharpless Smith and Lynn Sutton

Embedded librarians

On the road in the Deep South

From May 25 through June 8, 2007, two librarians from the Z. Smith Reynolds Library of Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, accompanied faculty and students from the sociology course “Social Stratification in the Deep South” on a tour of the American South, focusing on the race, class, and gender issues that have long divided the region. More than a simple tour of civil rights sites, the course was a lived experience that challenged students to question and examine the evidence of stratification that still typifies much of the South.

The course

Summer 2007 was the third time the “South Course” had been offered at Wake Forest University. This year, 13 students from the university (including three football players, one basketball player, and one member of the women’s track team), one Wake Forest alumnus, one student from Appalachian State University, two sociology faculty members, four Wake Forest staff members, and two librarians from the Z. Smith Reynolds Library spent two weeks traveling from North Carolina through Georgia to Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

This was the first South Course trip to include librarians. The two professors who offer the course were on a scouting trip to New Orleans in the summer of 2006, coincidentally at the same time ALA gained national attention as the first major conference to return to post-Katrina New Orleans. The professors rode the airport shuttle with a bus full of librarians and marveled at their energy and commitment to help rebuild libraries for the devastated communities of Louisiana and Mississippi. Upon returning to Wake Forest, they approached

Library Director Lynn Sutton, about including librarians on the next trip. Not only did Sutton agree to fund library participation, she volunteered to go along. Susan Smith, head of information technology at the library, was selected to be the second library participant for her expertise in both library instruction and technology. Roles envisioned for librarians included research assistance for daily assignments, design and maintenance of the course wiki, blog and Flickr sites, planning and implementation of the service learning component of the trip, and, most importantly, as additional adult chaperones.

Embedded librarians

The most exciting prospect of the course was the opportunity to become embedded librarians in the original sense of the concept. The term was adapted from the use of *embedded journalist*, which described the assignment of reporters to join military units during the 2003 Iraq invasion to provide media coverage from the field. This is what we would do: travel with the course professors, students, and staff for the class duration.

This was a new role for us. As do many other academic libraries, we actively seek ways to become a more visible and integral part of the undergraduate academic experience. Our value is acknowledged mostly through traditional means: bibliographic instruction, information literacy classes, a variety of in-person and virtual reference services, and even occasional collaboration

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with a professor to develop course tutorials and research guides. This was our first opportunity to be aligned with a specific course on an in-person, daily basis.

During the 15 day trip, we traveled 2,900 miles on a chartered bus. Our itinerary took us to Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma, Alabama; Bay St. Louis, Mississippi; New Orleans, Louisiana; and the Mississippi Delta region. Each destination had a specific purpose in the curriculum's experiential study of social stratification and included local experts who temporarily joined our group to share their expertise.

The trip's early days in Alabama were spent exploring civil rights era locations and issues.

We visited Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park (site of the 1963 Children's March), attended services at the 16th Street Baptist Church (where four young girls were killed during the 1963 Ku Klux Klan bombing), and walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma (site of the 1965 Bloody Sunday conflict).

Midtrip destinations in Bay St. Louis and New Orleans provided a backdrop to study the after effects of the devastation Hurricane Katrina brought to the Gulf Coast areas. We toured the coastline where Katrina made landfall, and spent three days on a service project in the Hancock County Library System. In New Orleans, we walked through the Lower Ninth Ward with the nationally active ACORN group.

The Mississippi Delta provided a plethora of subject matter in a unique geographic region that is associated with the origin of blues music as well as an agricultural economy with a high level of poverty. Our experiences there ranged from an evening at Po' Monkeys (one

of the last remaining jook joints) to an afternoon spent in Parchman Farm (Mississippi's maximum security prison).

The professors asked us to fill three areas of responsibility throughout the trip:

- provide resource lists to assist students with research guidance on the topics they were assigned to study,
- offer a full range of technology support from troubleshooting hotel Internet access to facilitating daily postings onto the course Web site, and
- plan the service component of the trip at the Hancock County Library System.

As part of the entourage that accompanied the students each day—riding the



Participants in the 2007 South Course pose in front of the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama.

bus between cities, touring locations, and sharing meals—we were invited to fully participate in all aspects of the course. The hours spent riding on the bus were often

designated as “class time.” Students presented reports on topics relating to places just visited or those next scheduled, documentaries were shown to provide background or to introduce new themes, and the professors initiated interchanges on experiences just completed. During the ensuing discussions, our views were solicited along with those of the students. In addition, we wrote daily reflections about our experiences that were posted online with other course participants. This type of total inclusion in the course guaranteed that students viewed us as partners in the overall experience.

Technology

When the library was first invited to participate, one of the main facets that the professors hoped we could facilitate concerned technology. From the course's first offering



Susan S. Smith packs her bags to leave New Orleans.

day. In addition, course requirements included students writing daily reflections on their experiences. Both of these activities lent themselves to being disseminated via an online environment. Family, friends, and colleagues could participate virtually by viewing the daily postings from those on the trip.

Z. Smith Reynolds Library is known across the campus as a technology leader. We are the primary source for computer training for both faculty and students, and we participate in many campus technology initiatives. Our Web site was the first at the university to incorporate social software. So it was not surprising that the professors turned to us for help in finding a way to successfully enhance the online component of the course. They wanted our help in setting up technology to facilitate daily postings as the trip progressed, to handle other technology needs as they were identified, and to serve as the trip photographer.

Wiki and blog software were recent additions to our library Web site, and this course offered an opportunity to pilot the potential academic use of wikis and blogs. We developed a site using MediaWiki software to

in 2003, the professors saw the value of including an online component to the class: a course Web site. Much of the course's story could best be told through photographs taken each

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Lynn Sutton relaxes for a moment at the Shack Up Inn in Clarksdale, Mississippi.

present course content and WordPress blog software for participants' daily reflections. Because the inclusion of photos was a priority, we established a Flickr Pro account and linked it to the wiki/blog interface. All course participants had full access to add and modify content in all applications. Through this approach, we hoped to encourage students to post their own reflections, photos and assignments. And, because we thought people might like to visually track our travel progress, we established a Google Map that pinpointed the places we visited.¹

Instruction sessions were held to teach students to use the social software. Students embraced the blog software and photo-posting through Flickr. The wiki software, which didn't have a daily posting requirement and had a higher learning curve, was not used by the students as much as we had envisioned. However, it was very functional as a rapid development framework, making it simple to add and modify content as often as needed.

In preparation for balancing coursework against access to the Internet as we traveled, we preidentified the advertised level of access for each overnight location. As might be imagined, many of the trip destinations were in remote rural areas. Although hotels were selected for their claim to provide Internet connectivity, there was no guarantee of either consistent or affordable Internet availability. Some hotels had a free high-speed connection in each room, but that room was shared by four students who each had his or her own laptop and individual nightly assignments. Some hotels provided free wireless in common areas, or free access in a business center. Some locations charged for access. By knowing in advance what to expect, the professors were able to adjust overnight assign-



Wake Forest students work on a scrapbook project at the Hancock County Public Library in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

ments, and we were able to offer advice on how to make best use of what was available. Additionally, we carried a data modem that had an unlimited transmission plan so that, as long as we could connect to the AT&T mobile network, we could upload daily coursework. By combining a variety of approaches (including resetting one inn's router when the owner wasn't looking), we were successful in posting new content every day of the trip.

Service learning: Hancock County Library System

An important component of the South Course had always been the opportunity for experiential learning through a service project. Since the professors were so impressed with librarians at the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, they asked if a service experience could be designed around a library recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. In questioning colleagues from SOLINET, the library cooperative in the southeastern region, the Hancock County Library System was recommended as an outstanding example of libraries serving as the foundation for community restoration. SOLINET was the recipient of a three-year, \$12.2 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to assist public libraries in 13 communities in the Gulf Coast region, including the four libraries of Hancock County, Mississippi, where Hurricane Katrina actually came ashore. While

much of the nation's attention was drawn to the breach of the levees in New Orleans, the devastation to the Mississippi Gulf Coast often went unnoticed. Two branches in Pearllington and Waveland, Mississippi, were completely swept away by the storm surge and were scheduled to receive temporary Gates facilities. Two other branches in Bay Saint Louis and Kiln were damaged by wind and water. The Hancock County Library System is notable in that it served as a central community service agency in the days immediately following Katrina. It housed the National Guard, distributed

food stamps, and provided the only working toilets, air conditioning, and Internet access in the county in the days and weeks following the storm.

A scouting trip was made to Hancock County in March 2007 to plan for the service experience. The following projects were designed for Wake Forest students to assist library staff in their recovery efforts:

- *Oral histories.* Many library staff members had fascinating and moving stories to tell of how they and their families survived the storm. Staff members were eager to have their stories recorded for posterity as a permanent record of this life-changing event. Students received training on oral history techniques from course professors and technology training from librarians in the use of digital audio and video equipment. Twelve individuals were interviewed over a two-day period.

- *Local documents project.* Library staff had not had time to keep their local history records up-to-date and in the aftermath of the storm realized anew how precious photographs, news clippings and local artifacts were to the community. Students worked on local history scrapbooks, researched sites from a historical postcard collection, and scanned archival records.

- *Independent film festival.* The library received a grant to purchase and host a series of independent films as a community-build-

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Trust in Britain and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in the United States, have also implemented similar requirements.

The NIH mandate should provide a strong impetus for the implementation of similar policies by other U.S. government agencies, by governments and governmental agencies in other countries, and by additional private research funders. It should also encourage further consideration of the Federal Research Public Access Act (FRPAA), which was introduced into the U.S. Senate in May 2006. The mandate is a critical step in the ongoing effort to establish public access to all funded research worldwide.

Notes

1. The following is the specific language of the new law: "The Director of the National Institutes of Health shall require that all investigators funded by the NIH submit or have submitted for them to the National Library of Medicine's PubMed Central an

electronic version of their final, peer-reviewed manuscripts upon acceptance for publication to be made publicly available no later than 12 months after the official date of publication: Provided, That the NIH shall implement the public access policy in a manner consistent with copyright law."

2. Current members of OAWG include the American Association of Law Libraries, American Library Association, Association of Research Libraries, ACRL, Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries, the Creative Commons, Greater Western Library Alliance, Medical Library Association, Open Society Institute, Public Knowledge, Public Library of Science, Special Libraries Association, and SPARC.

3. "Measure would require free access to results of NIH-funded research," *Washington Post*, Friday, December 21, 2007, p. A33.

4. The NIH budget of \$29 billion produces an estimated 80,000 peer-reviewed journal articles annually. *W*

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ing project. Students made popcorn, greeted attendees, and handed out programs to the local premier of the award-winning Finnish film *Mother of Mine*.

- The wishlist feature of Alibris.com was used to list children's books that were needed by the library system. Upon returning home, students wrote to family and friends, suggesting that they consider donating a book.²

The three days in Hancock County were intense and emotional. Even two years after Katrina, a ride along the shore revealed little more than concrete slabs where family homes had once stood. It is difficult for outsiders to understand how little has been accomplished, or to appreciate the small steps that have been taken, given the obstacles of federal, state, and private insurance bureaucracies. Stratification was evident in Hancock County, as the national fast food chains were the quickest to recover and the local casino was humming while other local industries were not. It was clear, however, that the library system was the center of community growth

and rebuilding. There was nothing the library staff would not do to bring vitality, comfort, and assistance to their residents, regardless of race, class, or gender.

Conclusion

Embedding librarians into the fabric of a two week course "on the road" was a resounding success. Upon our return, we were local celebrities as the course had been highlighted by the ABC news affiliate in Biloxi, Mississippi, it was featured on the main page of the university Web site, and a follow-up story appeared in print and online versions of the *Winston-Salem Journal*. The Z. Smith Reynolds Library achieved heightened visibility as a critical partner in the academic process. We are already planning the next iteration of the trip!

Notes

1. The course site can be viewed at wiki.zsr.wfu.edu/social_stratification/.

2. The wishlist may be viewed at tinyurl.com/2lt5yx. *W*