

Proposal

CTL Fellows Program

2020-2021

**Podcasting History:**

**Audio Stories from The Watkinson Archives**

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This proposal is being submitted jointly by Seth Markle, Associate Professor of History and International Studies, and Christina Bleyer, Director of Special Collections and Archives, Watkinson Library. If accepted, this fellowship would enable us to think through developing a course tentatively titled, “**Podcasting History: Audio Stories from The Watkinson Archives.**” The development of this course represents a concerted effort at collaboration between the History Department and The Watkinson Library and demonstrates how both entities have been working together towards creating and/or supporting courses that proactively explore archival research and curation as a medium through which history is taught and learned, produced and disseminated.

“Podcasting History” will be course that primarily focuses on the production of history and audio storytelling. By training students in podcasting techniques in sound design and editing, archival research, and narration, students will gain a deeper understanding of the intersection between history and the media arts. This class will serve as an introduction to podcasting whereby students will study the uses of sound and work in teams to create audio stories culled from the archival collections housed at The Watkinson Library.

Over the past year, the faculty of the History Department have had to think seriously about how to curb the steady decline in history majors over the past 4-5 years. One factor that has contributed to this nation-wide trend is the belief that a history degree from a liberal arts institution lessens or inhibits one’s chances at gainful employment after college. While this argument is flawed, it speaks to both student (and parent) anxieties as well as to the need for historians and archivists to develop creative strategies and approaches that show students the use-value of a history degree. Podcasting has taken the United States by storm. It is industry that has generated over \$400 million in revenue last year, which is projected to increase to \$1 billion in 2021. Currently, there are over 86 million podcast listeners in the United States. That number is set to increase to 132 million in the next two years. Incorporating podcasting into the history curriculum cannot only lay the groundwork for a professional career in the podcast industry for history majors, but also addresses the lack of history courses that go beyond historiographic reading and writing. Student conceptions about the pressures of the real world, in a sense, urges us to think outside-of-the-box in showing students how a history degree can be applied in a range of professions, including podcasting.

This fellowship presents The Watkinson with a unique and significant opportunity to discover and highlight its collections while simultaneously showing a larger public what archival sources can reveal and what engaging in archival research entails. This course offers the library an excellent opportunity to present to a larger audience, a glimpse into some of its lesser known resources through the unique lens of the students interacting with them. In and through the

relationship that is developed between a researcher (student) and an archival object, new ideas, insights and values emerge. To be able to present this one of a kind experience to a larger public through podcasting is novel and emphasizes the importance of the archive as one source for both individual and communal memory. In addition, given that the priorities for collecting at The Watkinson have generally been more centered on rare books, this course will provide the library with the impetus to delve deeper into its archival collections and bring to the surface audio or video recordings that the library staff may not even be aware of. Collections that especially provide firsthand accounts of the human experience and then when students bring their own unique perspectives to these archival collections and share them, the process of archival research is demonstrated and the importance of interacting with archival materials is highlighted through the insights gleaned from this relationship. Finally, by collecting, preserving, and making these podcasts accessible the Watkinson adds to its archival collections.

During this year-long fellowship, we will work closely together to accomplish the following objectives: (1) To identify archival collections at The Watkinson, particularly collections that contain audio and/or video files that could be highlighted and used for the course; (2) To review selected collections to determine their possibilities and limitations; (3) To consult with Trinity's Instructional Technologists as well as Mary Mahoney, the Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow in Digital Humanities, about the technology and software needed for a course of this kind and figuring out effective approaches to training students in script writing, storyboarding, and sound editing; (4) To collect and review college syllabi about podcasting and audio storytelling in order to gain a better understanding of pedagogical approaches used; (5) To engage in critical discussions that revolve around a set of questions such as: What are the benefits and drawbacks of designing this course for history majors only? Should this course serve as the required history workshop for juniors majoring in History (i.e. HIST 300) or should the course be a 300-level seminar cross-listed with other departments/programs? To what extent would this course be best served with a lab component in order to ensure proper audio software training? What constitutes a good audio story about history? What kind of assignments should students be required to complete? (6) To read and critically review academic articles about podcasting; (7) To discuss and develop a comprehensive assessment model for the purpose of measuring student success and; (8) To design and finalize a detailed syllabus for the course.