Service Learning at Indian River State College:

*Students develop critical thinking skills while making local history material available to the world*

Service learning is an educational approach that combines learning with community service. The concept behind “IRSC and the Digital Archive: Digitizing Local History” is that students get practical experiences in the digital humanities, while also serving the community, by making archival sources available to researchers and the public.

Since 2017, the service learning project, IRSC and the Digital Archive: Digitizing Local History, led by Emerging Technologies Librarian Mia Tignor and Assistant Professor of History Dr. Michelle Carrigan has contributed to learning on the Indian River State College (IRSC) campus. Students in this project receive a hands-on approach to digitize and describe materials for upload to the IRSC Digital Archives and Special Collections. Through the
education provided, students gain a deeper understanding of how content is selected and how the way it is described affects the research process. At conclusion of the course, local history materials are made openly available in the digital archive for researchers and the public to use.

The project initially grew out of a grant application for a Public Engagement with Historical Records grant from the National Historical Publications & Records Commission (NHPRC). In preparation for the application process, the library completed all associated prep work, which included gathering a list of local archives and thinking through the process of how to partner them in the education process. A central goal in the initial planning was to identify possible ways to meet the Florida College System’s mission to "The mission of the Florida College System is to provide access to high-quality, affordable academic and career educational programs that maximize student learning and success, develop a globally competitive workforce and respond rapidly to diverse state and community needs." Particularly, the library identified and planned for possible ways to maximize student learning and success in the context of historical records activity supported by NHPRC. Later, when history professor Dr. Michelle Carrigan approached the library regarding service learning opportunities, the library had already fully considered these opportunities and planned out how to partner with local archives in the education process. IRSC Libraries was able to quickly partner with the history department and their local archive to implement a service learning project.

In 2017, Mia Tignor and Dr. Michelle Carrigan piloted the IRSC and the Digital Archive service learning project with a manageable, small class. Service learning was designed into the class with the goal of being scalable. The project was designed to use existing equipment, including a library owned flatbed scanner. In the course, students learn about cataloging, selection of materials for digitization, digitization, and describing the digitized material. Each topic includes teaching and lecture, along with a hands-on process that supports students’ work with a local
archive, the Hallstrom House, to select source materials to digitize and make available online. During the process, students develop critical thinking skills by experiencing how the selection and description of materials determine how people can research and learn about history. Specifically, students think through bias in selection, cataloging, and description, and how biases changes what can be researched at all.

Students who participated expressed support for the service learning process. In student response and reflection papers, at the conclusion, one student stated,

"Digitizing archives was such an amazing experience, and I enjoyed working with my classmates on this project."

The pilot project has been repeated each semester since, with a service learning project integrated into IRSC sections of AMH 2020 H2SL (Honors/Service Learning). Initially, the course was done with a small class of fewer than 10 students. As IRSC and the Digital Archive rolled out to a larger class, ability to scale up was tested. In scaling up, the service learning project hit some bottlenecks with having one scanner. For larger classes, the project shifted to have students work in groups to select and describe a resource. The service learning project was included in 3 classes in 2018, 2 classes in 2019, and 1 class in 2020.

The Pioneer Post student paper, available at https://irsc.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/irsc:irsc_college_pioneerpress, were digitized as part of this service learning project. While many student papers in digital libraries are comprehensive archives of back issues, IRSC and the Digital Archive took a different approach. Students examined physical copies of the Pioneer Post and selected an article with historical significance. Students then digitized and described a single piece of content from the newspaper. This results in rich article level records and allows researchers to come into the newspaper by searching specific topics, rather than just browsing by dates.

Pioneer Press materials made available through the project are also available in the Publication of Archival,
Library & Museum Materials (PALMM) and may be viewed along with other Florida history materials in the Florida Heritage Collection http://palmm.digital.flvc.org/islandora/search?type=edismax&collection=palmm:fhp, and are included in the Florida Open Academic Library at https://openlib.flvc.org/.

The service learning project also digitized some Hallstrom House materials. A translation of Swedish language letters from the Hallstrom House archives can be found at https://irsc.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/irsc:treasurecoastcollections. Community service through the IRSC and the Digital Archive grew these two significant regional collections. The IRSC Digital Archives and Special Collections site, including materials digitized and cataloged by students can be viewed at https://irsc.digital.flvc.org/.

More information and a recorded presentation about the service learning project and IRSC and the Digital Archive can be found at https://irsc.libguides.com/virtualconference/Archive