Notes from the Library Committee

November 13, 2014

Present: Amanda Wilcox (Chair), Dave Pilachowski, Chris Winters, Jochebed Bogunjoko, Ben Nathan, Eric Knibbs

Absent: Brent Heeringa, Dinny Taylor, Quinn Pitcher, Griffith Simon

Visitor: Katie Nash (College Archivist)

Before moving to the main item on our agenda, an introduction to the Williams College archives via Katie Nash, the College’s new archivist, we briefly considered an idea brought to us from the College Council’s “Great Ideas” committee for putting massage chairs in the library. Various members voiced reservations, and all in all, the faculty and staff members of the Library Committee were not disposed to support further exploration of the idea. DP noted that the library has been a successful venue for various “Stressbuster” events, and is happy to continue participating in occasional events of that kind.

Katie’s visit was our main business to the meeting. DP introduced her, and we welcomed her to Williams and to the meeting. Katie then took the reigns and gave us a very interesting presentation. First, she filled us in on the priorities she has already set on the basis of her first month here at Williams, which include increasing the accessibility of archives and special collections (for example, through improving finding aids and the website, and through better determination of what belongs in the LSF and streamlining retrieval to archives from LSF), and increasing the visibility and functioning of archives by working with faculty, students, and others to integrate archival materials and experiences more widely and deeply into the curriculum. Katie stressed the importance of building relationships, and asked us to let her know who came to mind as people it would be good for her to meet—suggestions included Ben Lamb, in the Office of Student Life, who would be an excellent contact for funneling the ephemera generated by student-led events on campus into archives.

To give us a sense of daily life in Archives, Katie shared with the Committee a few of the interesting reference questions she has already worked on at Williams, including a query from the Denison House Museum in Connecticut about a WWI era Cadillac owned by John Hopkins Denison, an alumnus of Williams. She also talked about two fall courses that have already engaged with Archives—one anthropology student who was assigned to write a biography of an object decided to focus on a bound journal volume that now sits on a shelf in the Mabie Room, and Professor Leslie Brown’s students are making extensive use of archives for a history course on the civil rights movement.

Katie also mentioned the potential for faculty to make use of the newly refurbished instruction gallery, in the old part of Stetson, and she mentioned her interest in actively soliciting Williamsiana from current students and alumni. There were suggestions from the committee (e.g., using Reunions, featuring archives in the alumni magazine), and Katie added that she is interested in using social media, particularly to reach out to more recent alumni and to current students.

Then Katie turned to Unbound: the Williams Digital Commons, the College’s institutional repository, which is a joint project of OIT and the library. One of the three elements of Unbound are digital collections maintained by Archives. She talked about how the dedication of the Mike Reilly Room at the new Weston Field House served as an exemplary occasion for bringing together physical objects from the archives and inviting interested alumni to view and contribute to the Mike Reilly scrapbook that already exists in Unbound.

DP let the Committee know that an *ad hoc* advisory committee for promoting and developing Unbound has just been formed. The faculty members of that committee are Joan Edwards (Div 3), David Edwards (Div 2), and Christian Thorne (Div 1).

BN noted that thesis defenses, particularly those in the history department, might make for a worthwhile addition to the oral history of the College, as would interviews with members of the College and community members who are retiring or leaving the area. He noted specifically Roger the barber, on Spring Street, who is about to retire.

DP noted that the College does have an ongoing Oral History project, and the digitization of its collection is underway but currently on hiatus, pending further funding.

The Committee thanked Katie for her very informative and entertaining remarks, and expressed our happy anticipation of working with her going forward. We concluded the meeting with a few remarks and questions—to wit, DP noted that the numbers for the first four months indicate that visitors to the new library this year will amount to a 40 to 100% increase in traffic over the numbers of people in and out of old Sawyer last year. From the last week of the July (first week it was open) through the end of October, 120,000 people were logged as visitors to the new Sawyer Library compared to 236,000 in old Sawyer in 2013/14. AW asked whether there is a users committee (like the Hollander-Schapiro users committee) for the office and classroom areas in the new Stetson (5th and 6th floors). DP responded that there is not a committee at this time; inquiries about those areas should currently go to the Dean of Faculty’s Office.

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Wilcox