

MISERICORDIA UNIVERSITY
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Misericordia University funded by NEH grant to collect ‘Pandemic Histories’

DALLAS TWP., Pa. – The Sister Mary Carmel McGarigle University Archives at Misericordia University will begin collecting reflections, artifacts and personal experiences from the Misericordia community to create an archive that documents life during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is partially funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities CARES Act grant.

“Life in the Time of COVID-19: Stories from the Misericordia University Community,” is a collaborative effort organized by Maureen Cech, MLS, university archivist; Jennifer Black, PhD., associate professor of history; and Brian Carso, JD, PhD., associate professor of history and government and director of the Misericordia Honors Program. The history program and the university honors program are supporting Cech’s efforts to collect, record and preserve the experiences of the Misericordia community throughout the global pandemic. Webinars on October 19 and 26 will highlight “Public History in the Pandemic” – the efforts of historians to preserve our contemporary moment – and kick off the project.

“We’re living through an incredibly historic moment in 2020,” Dr. Black noted. “Life has been completely uprooted by this pandemic and the quarantine, but we’ve also witnessed profound social unrest, economic instability, and political tension. We want to document the experiences of the community for later generations to explore.”

Misericordia University history majors Sara Shields, Tunkhannock; Kimberly George, Eastchester, New York; and Kendall Williams, West Pittston; and English majors Teresa Davis, Dallas; and Lauren Butera, Wyomissing; will support the collecting project as part of a service-learning component of Dr. Black’s “Introduction to Public History” course. Senior history-for-business major Ashleigh Rose, Duryea, is leading the effort to market and publicize the program as part of her capstone thesis. Students in the university’s honors program will provide additional support to publicize and complete the archive.

Students, faculty, staff, alumni and others affiliated with the university are invited to contribute photographs, personal reflections, creative works, social media posts, and other materials, which will be preserved in the Sister Mary Carmel McGarigle University Archives at the Mary Kintz Bevevino Library for future public access.

"The class of 2024 will be our centenary class," Ms. Cech added. "Like the first class that entered Misericordia — a group that witnessed the 1918 influenza pandemic — our students are living through one of the most challenging times in the past 100 years. Their stories deserve to be told."

The two webinars, organized by Dr. Carso and co-sponsored by the Misericordia Honors Program, will kick-off the collection effort. The first webinar, "History in the Making: Collecting and Interpreting the Artifacts of America Life," will examine how museums identify and display items that illustrate historical events, patterns and themes. Speakers include Elysa Engelman, director of exhibitions at Mystic Seaport (Mystic, CT); Miquael Williams, graduate student at New York University; Paul S. D'Ambrosio, president and CEO of the Fenimore Art Museum and The Farmers' Museum, Inc., Cooperstown, New York; and Tom Denenberg, director of Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont. The webinar will take place via Zoom conference on October 19, at 7 p.m.

The second webinar will be held on October 26, at 7 p.m. via Zoom conference. "You, Me, and History: How Memoir and Story Telling Explain our Past and Present," will present how our own lives are records of history and how the stories we draw from them help us understand the experiences we're living through. Jessica Pearce Rotondi, author of "What We Inherit: A Secret War and a Family's Search for Answers" (Unnamed Press, 2020), and Deni Ellis Béchar, award-winning journalist and author of "Cures for Hunger" (Milkweed Editions, 2012), are the discussants. The webinars will encourage Misericordia students, especially those in the honors program, to consider ways to reflect upon the events of the past year and memorialize those experiences for posterity. Both webinars are free and open to the public.

"Remember what life was like in February?" Dr. Carso quipped. "At Misericordia, we will put our minds to making sense of this historical change. But how will the next generation make sense of it? And the generations that come after? They will want to hear our voices — what we thought, what we worried about, what made us happy — and we want to tell them."

This project has been made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities CARES grant, "Humanities in the Time of COVID-19: Fostering Community Dialogue," Award Number: AH-274885-20.

For more information, including how to contribute to the archive, please visit www.mulocalhistoryprojects.org/pandemic-histories. Questions about potential contributions may be directed to Maureen Cech at 570-674-6420, archives@misericordia.edu. To RSVP for the webinars, or for other questions about the project, contact Dr. Jennifer Black at 570-674-1491, jblack2@misericordia.edu.

For more information about the Department of History and Government at Misericordia University, please call (570) 674-6400 or visit www.misericordia.edu/history. Founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1924, Misericordia University is Luzerne County's first four-year college and offers 56 academic programs on the graduate and undergraduate levels in full- and part-time formats. Misericordia University ranks in the "National Universities" category of U.S. News and World Report's 2021 edition of Best Colleges. The Princeton Review recognizes Misericordia as

a 2020 "Best Northeastern" college, and Money Magazine includes Misericordia in its 2020-21 "Best Colleges" list. College Consensus and the Wall Street Journal and Times Higher Education rank Misericordia among the top colleges and universities nationally.