Cultivating Authentic Historical Research in the Archives and Classroom

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IN 1912, when asked by a student newspaper reporter about her views on women's suffrage, Laura L. Runyon, a Professor of History at District 2 State Normal School in Warrensburg, Missouri, echoed the Founding Fathers: "I am in favor of government of the people, for the people, and by the people. I think women are people." Her colleague Laura Yeater, an Assistant Professor of Latin, responded somewhat more light-heartedly to the same question: "I am for it, yesterday, today and forever, and I am afraid we shall be forever waiting for it in Missouri." For her part, Lucy A. Ball, Assistant Professor of English, wished readers to understand the wider significance of the women's vote when she answered: "Political Equality is one of the means to the end for which the world-wide woman movement is working, viz: improvement in the prime factors of society."

These women were suffragists affiliated with the State Normal School. They worked tirelessly and collaboratively with students and residents of Warrensburg to advance women's suffrage from the grassroots. In 1930, the League of Women Voters honored fifty women from throughout the state for their outstanding role

in advancing women's suffrage in Missouri. The League included Laura Runyon as one of their honorees. Although Runyon's activism, and the activism of other women like her in Warrensburg, were recognized at the time, they have been mostly forgotten by succeeding generations. The absence of scholarship about these women and other suffragists in Warrensburg, along with the availability and accessibility of archival resources to examine their suffrage activities, offered an opportunity for students in my women's history class to cooperatively engage in authentic research that added to our understanding of suffrage at the grassroots level. The class research project, "Chronicling Grassroots Suffrage in Warrensburg," served as a semester-long project for the Fall 2019 course, "Democracy Denied: Women's Rights in America, 1800-Present." The students' research for the class told a national story of democratic reform from the local perspective.²

This paper argues that local and state history research projects like "Chronicling Grassroots Suffrage in Warrensburg" enhance student learning by providing opportunities for students to conduct authentic research that not only engages them in the practice of "doing history" (i.e., collecting, analyzing, and conveying information), but actually produces new knowledge. While there is nothing new about the use of primary sources as pedagogy for the undergraduate classroom, I argue that historical research projects are not all the same.³ Authentic research projects, such as the one discussed here, promote discovery and generate excitement among students because they add new information to the historical record and ask students to analyze how their information modifies or changes what we think about a historical topic. Authentic research projects also often take students into historical archives, where many students rarely visit, to engage with a variety of primary source documents. These projects reinforce historians' emphasis on the identification and analysis of primary sources within their original context. Many students are unaware of how common documents such as newspapers, yearbooks, and other public records serve as resources for reconstituting the history of a locality. Finding an article about a suffrage parade embedded in a newspaper with other articles or advertisements about women's activities stimulates questions that are more contextualized than those generated digitally and isolated from context by a search

engine. The physical source allows readers to see how people at the time viewed this information, and in what context they viewed it.⁴ Finally, in its most intriguing elaboration, authentic research may also enlighten contemporary issues. The fight for social justice, for example, is at the heart of the struggle for women's suffrage, just as it is for contemporary movements such as the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. Students' discoveries of local suffrage activities in early twentieth-century Warrensburg serves as evidence of social justice efforts 100 years ago. Connecting Warrensburg's local history to movements for social justice in the past prompts associations with similar movements in the present. This is a major benefit for historians and educators in the current educational environment as they strive to promote understanding, generate interest, and demonstrate the relevance of the liberal arts.⁵

Course Design and Resources

The 2020 Centennial of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which secured women's right to vote, inspired and provided the foundation for the "Chronicling Grassroots Suffrage" research project. The project comprised part of a special project course I offered during Fall 2019 at the University of Central Missouri (UCM), titled "Democracy Denied: Women's Rights in America, 1800-Present." The fourteenweek course was part of a series of events examining women's suffrage. Beginning in 2017, UCM's "Centennial of Women Suffrage Speaker and Event Series" brought three nationally recognized scholars to campus to discuss the suffrage movement, sponsored a film series on suffrage, and offered a student-directed performance of a historic suffrage play. The series of events culminated in Fall 2020 with a gallery exhibit, "The Art of Suffrage," researched and labeled by UCM students, resulting from a collaboration between the History and Art programs and Gallery of Art and Design at UCM.6

The "Chronicling Grassroots Suffrage" research project served as a major component of the "Democracy Denied" course. The course objectives included both content learning in women's history and the development of research skills, especially critical thinking, organization, communication, teamwork, and collaboration. The course design utilized flipped classroom pedagogy within a mixed

or hybrid format. Flipped learning is an instructional method in which traditional classroom activities such as lectures are inverted and offered outside and/or before class to provide background and framework so that when hands-on, face-to-face interactions in the classroom occur, students are prepared to discuss and probe the content in greater depth and participate more fully in classroom activities. Hybrid courses employ a mixture of online learning and face-to-face classroom time. In "Democracy Denied," traditional educational activities occurred online, such as prepared lectures and discussions about assigned reading that contextualized women's struggle for equal rights. Face-to-face classroom sessions were reserved for hands-on research in the archives or libraries or for opportunities during which students collaboratively analyzed the historical information they uncovered in their research.⁷

Like many historians, much of my time teaching was traditionally spent lecturing. The flipped course design for "Democracy Denied" largely freed the class from that model, replacing it with a pedagogy that emphasized original research in the archives and libraries, along with collaborative, critical thinking about source materials. This approach shared an assumption articulated by historian Keith A. Erekson that "when our students experience where we do history they will more readily understand why we do what we do when we do history." One of those places where we do history is the archives. For Erekson, the whole process in the archives is important. It is "how historians find information, meaning, and evidence...and how we evaluate select and organize our findings." Like Elizabeth S. Manley, Rien Fertel, Jenny Schwartzberg, and Robert Ticknor, authors of "Teaching in the Archives," I believe there are other essential benefits to working in the archives:

There is also somewhat ineffable—but nonetheless very real—quality to working with actual primary materials rather than documents that have been reproduced in readers or sourcebooks, on the Internet, or in other reference volumes. Put bluntly, primary documents removed from their archival context—whether reproduced digitally or in print—lack the inspirational power of being in the presence of original documents.¹⁰

For archives, I relied on two repositories: the Arthur F. McClure II Archives and University Museum located in the James C. Kirkpatrick Library at UCM and the Warrensburg Branch of the

Trails Regional Library. Together, these two repositories offered full collections of original and microfilmed primary sources for the students to research. The McClure Archives and University Museum houses the University's historic collections, and the Museum additionally stores and displays an eclectic collection of historical artifacts. Among the University's collections of interest for the project were hard-copy volumes of the State Normal School student newspaper, The Normal Student (for the period of this research, 1890-1920) and hard-copy volumes of the State Normal School yearbook, *The Rhetor* (for 1914-1920). The University Museum also housed three collections of materials about female faculty members involved in the suffrage movement from 1890-1920. The Warrensburg Branch of the Trails Regional Library in downtown Warrensburg offered a microfilmed collection of historic newspapers from the region, including the local paper, the Daily Star-Journal, for the period of the project. The Warrensburg Branch allowed students to check out microfilm so they could read it at the University library, as well as at Trails Regional Library. Both repositories are in walking distance from the University. I met with personnel of both institutions prior to the class to discuss the project and the availability and access to documents, and to make sure there were suitable places for the students to work.¹¹

Project Design and Results

The "Chronicling Grassroots Suffrage" research project spanned the fourteen-week semester. Prior to the start of the semester, I selected a common research topic for the class and identified readily available historical sources at both repositories. This saved valuable class time and engaged students, almost immediately, in the project. Five students were enrolled in the class. During the first two weeks of the semester, I provided an introduction to the class, helped students develop research questions, and introduced them to historical research skills such as note-taking and documenting primary source materials. After visiting both repositories, the class decided how they wanted to divide responsibility for the primary sources among themselves. Two students chose to research microfilmed newspapers from the Warrensburg area. One student chose to research hard copies of the student newspaper. Another

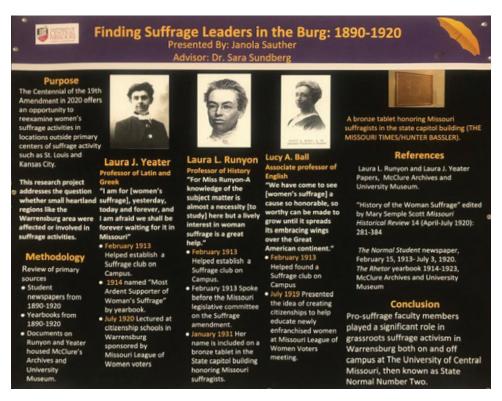


Figure 1: Student Research Poster: "Finding Suffrage Leaders in the Burg: 1890-1920." Courtesy of Dr. Jon Taylor.

student chose to research hard copies of school yearbooks, and another student researched the McClure Archives' collection of miscellaneous suffrage items. Meanwhile, weekly online lectures provided information about the broader context of women's rights, and the students read a published overview of the suffrage movement in Missouri. With the flipped classroom model, lectures were taped using Panopto and posted on Blackboard for students to view on demand. Once their formal research began, we met periodically for face-to-face discussions about their progress. It was during these sessions that the power of discovery to stimulate learning became evident. Each student brought their research notecards and shared them with the class. Through these sessions, the class began to sift through the information, ask questions, and create a storyline for the evolution of grassroots suffrage activities

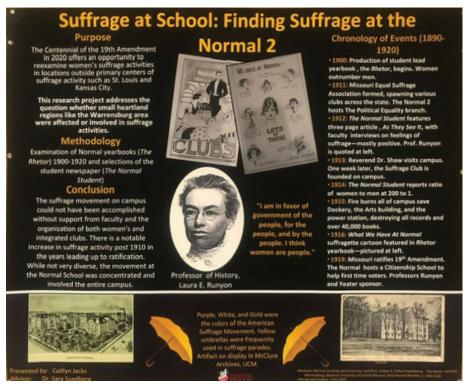


Figure 2: Student Research Poster: "Suffrage at School: Finding Suffrage at the Normal 2." Courtesy of Dr. Jon Taylor.

in Warrensburg. Ultimately, we found that we needed to adjust our expectations about the timeline of the study (originally 1890-1920) so we could focus on the most active period (between 1910 and 1920). The initial expectation for the class was that students would produce formal posters summarizing their research and conclusions.

Student Posters

The class decided that they could divide their research findings into four broad categories, roughly correlated with the category of primary sources each student researched, which they could present as three single-authored and one co-authored research poster (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** for sample posters). The four posters consisted of: "Suffrage at School: Finding Suffrage at the Normal 2"

(yearbooks); "Finding Suffrage Leaders in the Burg: 1890-1920," (suffrage collections); "Antis and Ambivalence: Finding Suffrage at the University" (student newspapers); and "Finding Women's Suffrage in the Burg" (local newspapers). Collectively, the four posters conveyed a narrative of grassroots suffrage activism in the Warrensburg area and highlighted the important role of the University and its female faculty and students in the local, state, and even national suffrage movement. The posters conformed to the dimensions and guidelines for research posters required by the graduate student research conference held on campus each spring. The posters highlighted each student's research question, the sources they researched, their findings and conclusions, and included visual imagery that illustrated their argument. Each poster was roughly equivalent to a short research paper.

Student Presentations

How best to share the results of student research? Turning again to historian Keith Erekson, he argued that "good history teaching... should place students in position where they turn from their research to either make a presentation or respond to an audience's questions or both." According to Erekson, the immense growth of information we all must evaluate in today's media environment makes this element of the research project vital.¹³ The students' research posters were displayed together in a large window exhibit available to the campus, under the title "Women's Suffrage in Warrensburg," in the James C. Kirkpatrick Library at UCM. In addition, one of the undergraduate members of the class presented her research poster at the University's Undergraduate Scholar's Symposium and Creative Research Day and the one graduate student in the class presented at the Graduate Scholar's Symposium. events are in-house university conferences sponsored by UCM, in which students present their work and respond to questions about their research from audience members. UCM's Graduate Studies Program also sponsors a highly selective "Three Minute Thesis" oral competition for its graduate students. Based on her research and poster for this class, the graduate student from the class also qualified for participation in that competition, though this format did not allow the opportunity for questions.

Student Podcasts

Recognizing that all these presentation venues were limited in terms of the audiences they reached, the class also agreed to participate in a roundtable discussion about their research for an episode of the podcast, "Women in the Burg." The podcast series was designed to focus on women and girls in the Warrensburg area and was a production of the University's Center for Teaching and Learning. As instructor, I facilitated a roundtable discussion for the podcast. During the podcast, students responded to questions about their research and highlighted the evidence they thought was most important or intriguing.¹⁴ Among the findings they discussed was the pivotal role of the University in bringing suffrage to Warrensburg, the unexpected participation of men in the movement, and the presence of anti-suffrage sentiment on campus. It was during the podcast in particular that students' comments reflected the value of working in the archives. The students were able to contextualize the information they found about suffrage with other notable events discussed in the source and see how the two were connected, such as suffrage and World War I. In the same way, working with all the university yearbooks in the archives allowed students to not only see a snapshot of university students' activities, but also change over time in those activities. It was also through comments during the podcast that students revealed the joy of discovery they found in their research, particularly regarding their surprise and admiration for Warrensburg's role in the suffrage movement. One student expressed the sentiment that "anything is possible" when a small place like Warrensburg can facilitate great social change. Other students agreed that the suffrage story they found was "inspirational."

Student Publishing

Even though the class was officially over, the students' research stimulated research questions that, ultimately, led to additional research on my part. Combining my research with that of the students culminated in a manuscript, co-authored with the students, titled "Championing Women at the Grassroots: The Suffrage Movement in Warrensburg, Missouri, 1890-1920." The article was published in the *Missouri Historical Review*. 15

Student Feedback on the Project

Providing students opportunities to experience the joy of discovery through authentic historical research defined this project. When I first introduced the idea for the research project to the class, one of the students immediately expressed doubt that we would find anything, given the political conservatism of the region. That proved not to be true. On many occasions throughout the semester, students reacted with pleasure when they found a missing link in the narrative. I would begin discussion with comments from some of the leading suffragists in Warrensburg uncovered by the students' research. These comments dispelled any notion that there was little or no suffrage activism in Warrensburg. The discovery of those comments alone, although there were other similar discoveries. reinforced for the students the value of historical research and critical analysis using primary sources. Although there were no systematic student evaluations during the course, student reactions to classroom discussions about their research were consistently and overwhelmingly positive. The graduate student in the course also received validation for her work from outside the class. She earned Level I prize status for her E-Entry poster in the University Virtual Graduate Symposium.

An enlarged understanding of the suffrage movement, as a social justice movement with connections to today, did not come through in the students' research posters, but it did surface in class discussions and during the podcast. For example, in class, students recognized the continuities across time in arguments—pro and compertaining to suffrage, which are still applied today to the effort to pass an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). They also enlarged their understanding of the mechanics of the suffrage movement from one consisting of a few women who were influential nationally, to one comprising a broad grassroots network of women across ordinary places throughout the nation, like in Warrensburg.

Facilitating best practices in historical research and analysis proved challenging. Only two of the five students had engaged in historical research before this class. It became necessary, for example, to ask students to return to sources multiple times to rethink what they had recorded. That said, one of the strengths of embedding authentic research into a course offering like this is

that it provides students valuable practice with some elements of historical research before they are asked to develop a full-blown research project for a capstone course. This project, for example, did not ask students to independently develop a research topic or identify pertinent sources, but it did ask them to record and critically interpret primary sources from actual archival repositories.

Finally, the project tied together individual research with collective discussions about that research. The students eagerly shared with each other what they found, and they offered each other alternative explanations for source materials. Similarly, their collective critique of each research poster sharpened their individual end projects. Although the high degree to which this class worked together as a team may have been unusual, this format clearly allows students to practice the creative teamwork and collaboration so often sought in the workplace.

Conclusion

Authentic historical research projects that spark discovery of new information engage students in learning history through "doing history," allowing them to practice critical thinking skills in a way that results in a tangible outcome they can meaningfully share with others. "Chronicling Grassroots Suffrage" relied on two pedagogies to facilitate the project: 1) flipped classroom learning and 2) hybrid learning. Combined, these pedagogies allowed students to take advantage of existing archives and research physical sources. It also fostered creative and collaborative interpretation. The hybrid flipped classroom model for teaching content and historical methods worked well for this case of a small class engaged in a local history research project with accessible archival resources. The biggest challenge to apply this design to a larger class will be selecting a topic and finding enough accessible archival resources. Dividing a larger class into small groups and partnering the groups with local historical societies, library special collections, or city public records or county courthouse departments could provide a similar experience of authentic historical research. In any case, it would require considerable work for the instructor to find and evaluate sources ahead of time—work that is well worth pursuing.

Notes

- 1. "As They See It," *The Normal Student*, May 4, 1912, p. 2, Arthur F. McClure II Archives and Museum, University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg, Missouri (hereafter cited as "MAM").
- In 1930, the League of Women Voters of Missouri honored the work of fifty suffragists from throughout the state with a bronze plaque inscribed with their names. It hangs in the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City. See "Data for State Roll of Honor Records," SO232 League of Women Voters of Missouri Papers, 1911-1976, Box 1, Folders 13, 15, The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis, University of Missouri-St. Louis. Works that discuss Laura Runyon and/or Laura Yeater include Susan Lee Pentlin, "Laura Runyon, Friend of Maude Williams, Suffrage Leader and Colleague of John Dewey," unpublished paper, Laura Runyon Papers; Leslie Anders, Education for Service: Centennial History of Central Missouri State College (Warrensburg, MO: Leslie Anders, 1971), MAM; and Mary Miller Smiser, Campus Personalities: Biographical Sketches of Faculty Members, Central Missouri State College, Memorialized by Campus Buildings (Warrensburg, MO: Mary Miller Smiser, 1971), private collection. For more information about the women's suffrage movement in Warrensburg and Laura Runyon, see Sara Brooks Sundberg, Janola Sauther, Keegan Eatherton, Caitlyn Jacks, Nicole McGinnis, and Khala Moss, "Championing Women at the Grassroots: The Suffrage Movement in Warrensburg, Missouri, 1890-1920," Missouri Historical Review 116, no. 3 (April 2022): 238-254. The centennial celebration of Women's Suffrage in 2020 has produced efforts to document grassroots suffrage nationally. See, for example, Thomas Dublin and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eds., Online Biographical Dictionary of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States, Alexander Street Press, available at https:// documents.alexanderstreet.com/VOTESforWOMEN>.
- 3. See Michael Eamon, "A 'Genuine Relationship with the Actual': New Perspectives on Primary Sources, History and the Internet in the Classroom," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 3 (May 2006): 297-314.
- 4. Keith A. Erekson, "Putting History Teaching 'In Its Place," *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 4 (March 2011): 1067-1078.
- 5. James Grossman, "Op-Ed: History Isn't a 'Useless' Major. It Teaches Critical Thinking, Something America Needs Plenty More Of," Opinion, *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 2016, https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oegrossman-history-major-in-decline-20160525-snap-story.html>.
- 6. The "Centennial of Women's Suffrage Speaker and Event Series" received a Missouri Humanities Council grant, supplemented by a grant from the American Democracy Project. Speakers for the Centennial included Dr. Carol Faulkner, Professor of History at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, speaking about "Lucretia Mott at Seneca Falls: Religion Race and Women's Rights"; Dr. Catherine Cahill, Associate Professor of History Penn State University, "Who Fought for Women's Suffrage? A More Diverse View"; and Dr. Susan Hartmann, Professor Emeritus Ohio State University, "What Women Had to Do to Win the Vote." The films series included

Iron Jawed Angels (2004) and *Suffragette* (2015). "Suffrage on Stage" included staged readings of five short suffrage plays.

- 7. For a discussion of the value of teaching through archives and flipped classroom pedagogy, see Elizabeth S. Manley, Rien Fertel, Jenny Schwartzberg, and Robert Ticknor, "Teaching in the Archives: Engaging Students and Inverting Historical Methods Classes at The Historic New Orleans Collection," *The History Teacher* 53, no. 1 (November 2019): 67-91.
 - 8. Erekson, "Putting History Teaching 'In Its Place," 1068.
 - 9. Erekson, "Putting History Teaching 'In Its Place," 1070.
- 10. Manley, Fertel, Schwartzberg, and Ticknor, "Teaching in the Archives," 83-84.
- 11. Since this project was completed, the James C. Kirkpatrick Library at UCM has digitized Warrensburg historic newspapers.
- 12. All of the students were required to read Mary Semple Scott, "History of Woman Suffrage in Missouri," *Missouri Historical Review* 14, nos. 3-4 (April-July 1920): 281-384.
 - 13. Erekson, "Putting History Teaching 'In Its Place," 1070.
- 14. The podcast may be accessed on YouTube: "Suffrage Podcast," posted by Digital Learning and Instructional Innovation, January 8, 2020, video, 35:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvfFcKf5Ylc.
- 15 Sara Brooks Sundberg, Janola Sauther, Keegan Eatherton, Caitlyn Jacks, Nicole McGinnis and Khala Moss, "Championing Women at the Grassroots: The Suffrage Movement in Warrensburg, Missouri 1890-1920," *Missouri Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (April 2022): 238-254.

RANAWAY, From the residence of A. King, in St. Charles, on Wednesday night, the 2nd instant, my servant girl, named "ANN." She is a bright copper-colored mulatto, medium height, rather slight form, quite likely, and about 20 years of age. Reamand. I will pay a reward of \$25 for the arrest of said girl, if taken in St. Charles county, \$50 if taken out of said county, and \$100 if taken out of the State and returned to me or said King, in St. Charles county, or placed in confinement so I obtain possession CATHARINE E. PITTS. of her. St. Charles, Mo., August 7th, 1854, "Ranaway" [Advertisement for Apprehension of Ann], broadside advertisement placed by Catherine

E. Pitts, St. Charles, Missouri, August 7, 1844. Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Broadside advertisement regarding an escaped slave, August 7, 1854.jpg>.



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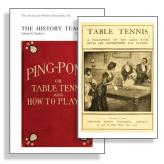
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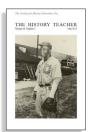
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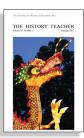
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