College Access, Historical Research, and Student Empowerment: The National History Day Partnership in Minnesota

Matt King, University of South Florida
Tim Hoogland, National History Day in Minnesota
Jennifer Hootman, University of Kentucky Libraries
Mary E. Schoenborn, University of Minnesota Libraries
Lynn Skupeko, University of Minnesota Libraries

Over the last twenty-five years, the Minnesota Historical Society, the University of Minnesota Libraries, and Minitex have developed a partnership centered on creating pathways to higher education by engaging local middle school and high school students in immersive programs at academic libraries. These activities vary in scope and content, but are all tied together by a shared focus on the National History Day (NHD) program, which encourages students to create original research projects about a historical topic. The partnership between these three institutions, which emerged from humble beginnings in the early 1990s, has since grown to reach over 3,000 students during the academic year 2015-2016 through a combination of programs including field trips to academic libraries, research events for students working on NHD projects, and summer programs. Data collected from these outreach activities reveal the transformative impact of expanding access to University
of Minnesota resources to the K-12 community. By exploring this partnership and its impact on local schools, this article will serve as a blueprint for educators who wish to use history education to expand pathways to higher education for students, particularly those without easy access to a college campus.

Background and Methodology

At the center of the National History Day Partnership are three groups: the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS), the University of Minnesota Libraries, and Minitex. The MNHS is a private, non-profit institution devoted to preserving state history, sharing it with the public, and connecting communities together through local history. In recent years, the MNHS has focused much of its energy on community outreach, particularly to disadvantaged communities within the state of Minnesota.\(^1\) National History Day in Minnesota is one of the primary program initiatives at the MNHS working to achieve engagement with these students and to use the transformative power of history to assist student populations in the state.

The other two organizations partnered with the MNHS, the University of Minnesota Libraries and Minitex, both operate out of the University of Minnesota. The University of Minnesota Libraries provides personnel support for NHD programs in the form of library staff. It also allows students to use its facilities, particularly those in Wilson Library, which houses the humanities/social sciences collections and serves as the research hub for all NHD outreach programs. The University of Minnesota Libraries’ role in the National History Day Partnership is complemented by Minitex, which is a publicly supported network that works to improve library service for users in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.\(^2\) Through outreach at local schools, Minitex librarians prepare students for campus visits and teach them how to locate sources in academic libraries.

The role of the Libraries and Minitex in the National History Day Partnership aligns directly with the larger institutional goals of the University of Minnesota and the needs of the state writ large. As the state’s largest land-grant university, the University of Minnesota has long emphasized the need for community outreach. University president Dr. Eric Kaler argued that the University “must be deeply
involved in changing the current trend of inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes” in the state. The need for the University to facilitate educational equity is also explicit in its ten-year strategic plan, which is based on the “Grand Challenges” that confront modern society. This is a significant task, for in the state of Minnesota, disparities in educational achievement are endemic and significant. Minnesota’s racial achievement gap is among the largest in the nation for K-12 schools and, despite efforts by the state legislature to prioritize its reduction, it continues to widen. A 2015 report from the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) showed that the achievement gap in Minnesota had increased in almost every metric since 2013. Another 2016 report revealed that these issues persist, particularly in Twin Cities schools. Figure 1 and Figure 2, created using data from the 2015 NAEP report, illustrate the dramatic difference in reading proficiency for students across the state of Minnesota in fourth and eighth grade.

The National History Day Partnership, spurred by this educational inequity and the shared commitment to educational outreach by its institutions, revolves around the National History Day program empowering students through historical research. At its essence, NHD is a science fair for history in which middle and high school students create original research projects about a historical topic of their choice. Students are able to present their research in one of five categories: paper, exhibit board, documentary, website, or performance. In Minnesota, the NHD program is primarily focused on using these projects as required capstone assignments, not as extracurricular activities. After participating in a school History Day fair, teachers may elect to send projects through a series of competitions that ascend from regional competitions held in the winter all the way to the national competition in June. The state of Minnesota has a particularly robust infrastructure to support NHD programming: seven full-time staff at the MNHS, three graduate student teaching assistants (TAs), and a contingent of approximately 100 undergraduate History Day mentors.

Research conducted nationwide and in Minnesota testifies to the effectiveness of National History Day curricula. A study conducted by the National History Day Office (based in Maryland) found that participating in NHD affords students an opportunity to learn and build skills in critical thinking, problem solving, researching secondary
and primary sources, analyzing and synthesizing information, and communicating through oral and written mediums. The program also gives students an opportunity to develop affective capacities such as self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of responsibility.

Student data collected in Minnesota echoes the findings of the National Office and has produced optimistic numbers that may help address Minnesota’s ever-widening racial achievement gap. The MNHS collected some 1,900 student surveys at regional events in 2016. Of the students surveyed, 72% reported being “much more interested” or “more interested” in History Day compared to other classroom assignments. Student interest in NHD projects subsequently drove participants to read more and more challenging materials. Furthermore, 76% of students reported that they read more for NHD compared to other assignments, 53% reported using more library resources for their projects, and 33% of students reported reading more difficult materials for NHD than other assignments. In the context of Minnesota’s achievement gap, these statistics are significant. NHD in Minnesota serves a diverse student population, reaching a nearly equal proportion of minority students (47.5%)
By encouraging all of these students to read more and more challenging texts, NHD actively seeks to improve the reading level of participating students. This helps shrink the endemic reading achievement gap in Minnesota, in which students of color routinely score much lower on standardized state tests than their white peers (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Literacy behaviors, though, are not the only NHD in Minnesota survey results worthy of attention. For instance, 68% of students that participated in regional events reported that NHD “increased their expectations for success in school” and a further 91% found that the program had a discernable impact on their college-readiness skills. Students felt that the project also improved skills that will help them succeed in other academic areas. Over 70% of students reported that participation in NHD improved their knowledge of history, communication skills, critical thinking, and problem solving either “a great deal” or “quite a bit.” Through NHD programming, 43% of students visited a college campus and, of those students, 71% reported an increased interest in attending college. Given the racial diversity of students that participate in National History Day
in Minnesota, these increased skills and expectations for future success are impactful in reducing the statewide achievement gap.

Even with the understanding that self-reported student data is often regarded as an over- or underestimation of skills, these results have produced strong indicators that the National History Day in Minnesota program has built an effective curriculum to address Minnesota’s achievement gap and access to higher education.14 Reports from teachers also confirm the positive effects that NHD has upon students: 86% of teachers felt that History Day positively impacted the graduate rate of participating students and 96% felt that it increased college readiness skills.15 Teachers overwhelmingly indicated that the project spurred student growth in communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. For example, 58% of teachers also reported that more students completed their NHD activities when compared to other assignments, yet another testament to the efficacy of the project to all students, not just those already likely to succeed in school.16 One teacher shared a powerful testimony of his own:

I had several students who were entirely disengaged in class, and school in general. Their History Day projects changed that. They not only engaged in the class/assignment, but found a passion for history/learning/school they didn’t realize they had.

National History Day in Minnesota thus helps to facilitate academic growth and the expectation for future success in students across the state. On a more theoretical level, though, it provides new models of history pedagogy and promotes a more active role for academic libraries. In 2012, Professor Terrie Epstein published an article for the American Historical Association in which she highlighted many of the problematic approaches to teaching history at the middle and high school levels, particularly the perpetuation of the idea that there is one “true” historical narrative.17 Epstein then outlines ways to go about reframing the study of history to students. Drawing on the research of Chauncey Monte-Sano, Linda Levstik, and Keith Barton, she argues that teachers ought to organize lesson plans about history “around open-ended questions, rather than definitive texts” to question dominant historical narratives.18 The careful interpretation of primary sources and the use of long-term projects are possible avenues through which teachers can accomplish this goal. This
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approach to history is further seen in projects like Facing History and Ourselves, which builds inquisitive students by having them “do” history instead of merely memorizing it.\textsuperscript{19}

National History Day’s curriculum is driven by and furthers this new wave of history pedagogy. It utilizes a model of project-based learning driven by student choice and narrative creation by encouraging students to explore areas of history that appeal to them, particularly for students who have only been exposed to Euro- and U.S.-centric narratives. In the communities of Minneapolis, for example, a number of Hmong and Somali immigrants have produced powerful NHD projects about their country’s history by putting their own immigrant experience in historical perspective. One student who participated in the 2016 state competition, for example, recorded that his/her favorite part of NHD was “being able to use documents from my own family’s history.”\textsuperscript{20} Another student remarked that he/she most enjoyed, “finding out things that happened in this country that I never new [sic] before.”\textsuperscript{21} Through this student-centered, project-based learning model, NHD prepares students for higher-level thinking and stimulates their interest in history.\textsuperscript{22}

The participation of the University of Minnesota Libraries and Minitex in NHD curricula similarly draws upon recent research to suggest that academic libraries must adapt to the changing world. In 2010, Megan Oakleaf published for the Association of College and Research Libraries a lengthy report called \textit{The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report}.\textsuperscript{23} Within, Oakleaf calls for a reconceptualization of academic libraries, one that shifts them from a “passive role” to an active one in shaping the institutions they represent.\textsuperscript{24} She argues that the current environment of higher education permits librarians to “reconceptualize their expertise, skills, and roles in the context of institutional mission, not traditional library functions alone.”\textsuperscript{25} Numerous articles and reports echo Oakleaf’s sentiments and provide examples of the ways that librarians are redefining their traditional roles.\textsuperscript{26}

The commitment of the University of Minnesota Libraries and Minitex to the National History Day Partnership aligns with Oakleaf’s call to action and pushes it one step further. By encouraging students from middle schools and high schools to do historical research in its libraries, the University of Minnesota Libraries and Minitex are actively asserting their place as a facilitators of community
engagement in the state of Minnesota. Their participation in NHD also pushes Oakleaf’s argument about the reconceptualization of traditional library roles by fundamentally reimagining the target audience of an academic library. In Oakleaf’s report, libraries are strictly segmented based on the population they are ostensibly meant to serve: academic libraries serve the university community, elementary school libraries serve elementary school students and teachers, and public libraries serve their local communities. This presumption is inherently restricting, particularly for university libraries, which often have access to far more resources than other kinds of libraries. By reframing a land-grant university’s library as one meant for both university-level research and the research of K-12 schools in local communities, the University of Minnesota Libraries and Minitex embed themselves even further in the transformative institutional goals of academic research libraries.

**Programs in the Partnership: Research Field Trips at Wilson Library**

The partnership between the MNHS, University of Minnesota Libraries, and Minitex has manifested in programs to aid student learning through campus engagement. The most senior and expansive of these programs is the research field trip. From roughly October through February, Wilson Library hosts field trips for around thirty-five schools and over 2,700 students (around 10% of the NHD student population in Minnesota) participating in National History Day. At Wilson Library, students have access to vast print collections and computers from which to access online resources. During these trips, students receive help from Wilson Library staff and graduate-student TAs, who help them locate relevant sources for their NHD projects. Over the course of several hours, students are able to immerse themselves in a college library as they do their research alongside college students, allowing them to make a meaningful connection to the University of Minnesota campus.

The model of these research trips has been refined over the course of twenty-five years, during which time the program has grown from less than fifty student visits to over 2,700 each academic year. Each summer, staff from all three partner institutions meet to plan services for the next academic year. Most of the field trips
happen in early-mid January when the University of Minnesota is not in session, with other field trips sprinkled throughout October, November, and February. Due to finals and the end of fall semester, no field trips are scheduled during the month of December. Schools contact the University of Minnesota Libraries and the History Day TA coordinator to schedule dates for their trips. Once scheduled, the school can apply for funding through the MNHS, which has grant money available to finance transportation costs.

A Minitex staff member also contacts teachers to arrange a preparatory classroom visit in which Minitex librarians provide students with a comprehensive overview of the resources available for students when they travel to Wilson Library. During these sessions, students are introduced to the library catalog and assisted in finding books on their topics. This strategy both allows the students to quickly begin their research when they visit Wilson Library and also limits the need for computers at the library. These hour-long sessions have proven to be critical to ensuring that students have a working knowledge of the library and its resources before arriving on campus.27

On the day of a given field trip, all individuals that will be working on the trip—Libraries staff, MNHS employees, and library guides—assemble in Wilson Library fifteen minutes before the arrival of the school groups. Ideally, there is one staff member present for every ten students attending the trip. Upon students’ arrival, they are escorted into the History Day alcove, a space in the basement of the library that is removed from the main stacks and contains computers for students to use. The graduate-student TA delivers a brief introductory speech about the library before breaking the students into groups of ten to twenty and sending them up to the stacks with a library guide. The guides show students how to find the books they identified before their library visit and then spend the next hour monitoring the stacks and helping students locate other relevant resources.

After about an hour, most students have found the print sources they will be working with for the remainder of their time at Wilson Library. The students spread out over the History Day alcove, working alone or talking quietly in groups. Library guides assist students as needed, usually with locating online resources for primary sources using the Libraries’ databases. In schools with school-issued iPads, teachers often encourage students to take pictures of
the pages of their books so that they have access to their contents once they leave the library. Otherwise, students are encouraged to bring flash drives so that they can scan pages of their books and store them digitally for later use. Students continue their research for the remainder of their visit; this amount of time varies depending on availability of the school, the library, and the grade levels of the students. Most trips last around two hours, although certain groups, especially those that travel from outside of the Twin Cities, have stayed as long as two full days at Wilson Library.

Survey results collected from students and teachers indicate that these trips have many positive impacts on students. They increase a student’s likelihood of using libraries in the future and make them feel more comfortable in navigating library collections. Students that participate in these trips are also able to access resources that would otherwise be difficult for them to obtain. For instance, 68% of students thought that accessing new materials was the most useful part of these trips and an overwhelming 93% of students thought these trips enhanced their ability to conduct research. Teachers, too, saw the transformative impact these trips had on students. One teacher said that his/her “students loved finding their resources at the library because they felt like college students.” Another teacher stated that his/her students “saw libraries as a new place to research rather than always going online.”

While these survey results suggest the utility of these research trips, the National History Day Partnership continues to seek ways to improve upon the program. The most recent development in the research field trip model came in the winter of 2016, when Salk Middle School participated in an experimental variation of the library trip that involved a full school day’s worth of immersive activities at the University of Minnesota. Every day for three days, Salk brought a different group of 100 students to the University of Minnesota campus. Upon arrival, the students were divided into two groups. One of the groups went to Wilson Library to begin their standard research field trip and the other group went to a university classroom, where a staff member from the MNHS delivered a college-level lecture followed by group activities centered on the analysis of primary sources. This lesson concluded with a Q&A panel featuring undergraduates from the University of Minnesota who were affiliated with NHD through the MNHS’ mentoring program. After lunch, the two student groups
switched spots—one to the classroom and one to Wilson—completing a full day of activities at the University of Minnesota.

The response from Salk teachers and students to this expanded research trip was positive. One teacher mentioned that the classroom experience for the students was “absolutely fantastic” and put them in a friendly yet collegiate atmosphere. Furthermore, 87% of students reported that the field trip made them feel comfortable on a college campus. Another 70% said that their experiences at the University of Minnesota made them interested in attending a college or technical school. Both of these statistics are marked improvements over surveys taken before the field trip. One student, upon completion of the field trip, told MNHS staff, “I’ve never been excited about going to a school until now.”

The above survey results testifies to the effectiveness of the Wilson Library research field trips. Through the National History Day Partnership, schools in Minnesota can bring their students to a university library and conduct research in an immersive college environment. These field trips have a positive impact on students, who feel more confident conducting research, feel a deeper connection to a college campus, and are more likely to use libraries in the future.

**Programs in the Partnership: Library Research Sessions**

The success of Wilson Library field trips has resulted in the creation of other NHD programs at the University of Minnesota. These programs, although they are less frequent and service a smaller population of students, nonetheless provide an immersive college research experience that both empowers students and assists them in their NHD projects. The first of these programs is the research “Gopherbaloo,” an event at Wilson Library that is open to all participating NHD students. Held once a year in January, usually on the Saturday preceding Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the Gopherbaloo permits students to conduct research in Wilson Library with the help of MNHS staff, Libraries staff, and graduate students. MNHS and library staff members hold research workshops in conference rooms within Wilson Library and offer one-on-one advising sessions with students about their projects. The University of Minnesota Libraries graciously gives access to rooms in Wilson Library for the
Gopherbaloo and provides free printing for the day. Through this collaboration, students are provided with a further avenue through which they can experience a college research library.

The attendance at Gopherbaloo varies, in large part due to the weather, but averages around 300 attendees per year. Often accompanied by teachers or parents, students who have attended the Gopherbaloo have shown increased confidence in conducting research in libraries. According to a 2011 survey, over 81% of Gopherbaloo attendees felt that they were more comfortable doing library research as a result of their participation in this event. In addition, 98% of students found this experience either “very helpful” or “helpful” for the creation of their NHD projects. While not as expansive as the field trip programs through Wilson Library, the Gopherbaloo nonetheless accomplishes similar goals for the student population it serves: promoting college access through research at an academic library and using project-based learning to spur student interest in history.

The model of the Gopherbaloo is transferable to other universities and libraries. The NHD staff at the MNHS organizes research sessions called “Hullabalooos” at local public libraries that include many of the same features as the Gopherbaloo. MNHS staff give workshops to students and lead one-on-one advising sessions with them, while staff from these local libraries help students locate resources in their collections. Partnerships with libraries in the Twin Cities has permitted the model of the Gopherbaloo to extend outside the reach of the University of Minnesota and into other libraries to better serve students.

Several months after the Gopherbaloo, usually in March or early April, the MNHS holds “feedback sessions” for students who will be participating in the State History Day competition. Three of these individual advising sessions are held per academic term, one of which is in Wilson Library. The University of Minnesota Libraries staff permits the MNHS to use conference rooms and study spaces for these sessions. Unlike the Gopherbaloo, though, students are required to sign up for these twenty-minute advising sessions in advance. They are assigned a time and room, wherein a MNHS staff member talks to the student about his/her project and gives advice on how to improve it before the state competition. Wilson Library staff encourages students to conduct research at the library after their
feedback session by helping them locate resources and allowing them to print relevant sources for free. Last year, about seventy projects and 100 students attended feedback sessions at Wilson Library, further establishing the connection between National History Day and the University of Minnesota for participating students.

Although the Gopherbaloo and feedback sessions provide increased college access to students in Minnesota, the student body to which it caters is less diverse than the MNHS and University of Minnesota Libraries would prefer. For many students, particularly students of color in low-income areas, traveling to the University of Minnesota on a Saturday is difficult because of work commitments or transportation obstacles. As a result, the Gopherbaloo tends to attract white students from the suburbs of Minnesota who have parental support and the ability to easily drive to campus. A similar problem exists for feedback sessions. National History Day competitions tend to become increasingly white as students move through school, regional, and state competitions. By the time of the feedback sessions, many of the students of color have already completed their projects and are unable or unwilling to continue to the next level of competition. The NHD Partnership is thus seeking to find ways to make the University of Minnesota more accessible outside of school visits and to further engage students between their initial visits to Wilson Library in January and feedback sessions in March and April. One such manifestation of this desire to diversify the students involved in National History Day is the creation of immersive summer programs.

Programs in the Partnership: Immersive Summer Programs

The final two programs that have emerged from the National History Day Partnership in Minnesota are the Summer History Immersion Program (SHIP) and the Summer Athletics and Immersive Learning (SAIL) program. Both of these programs aim to provide pathways to higher education for potential first-generation college students of the Twin Cities through the innovative pedagogy of National History Day and the facilities of Wilson Library. The survey data and student-created documentaries from these camps show the transformative experience that these college immersion programs provide for students.
First run as a pilot program in the summer of 2009, SHIP is a two-week camp centered on the creation of original research projects in Wilson Library. Thirty high school students from the Twin Cities, divided up into two cohorts of fifteen, participate in SHIP every summer. During this program, participants create an original, eight-to ten-minute documentary on an historical topic of their choice using the resources of Wilson Library. They work on this project in the library every day from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. in computer labs generously made available by the University of Minnesota Libraries. Librarians permit students to leave their books in designated computer labs for the course of SHIP and they install software on the computers for students to use in the creation of their documentaries. Students utilize the program Audacity for audio editing and WeVideo for documentary creation.

During the middle of the day, students from both cohorts eat lunch at one of the facilities on the University of Minnesota campus and then participate in “immersions” from roughly 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. During these immersions, various groups around campus give presentations about the opportunities available for undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota. These groups include university bodies like the Admissions Office and the Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence, student group panels featuring undergraduates from the University of Minnesota, and off-campus institutions like the YMCA. The goal of these immersions is to show students the places and organizations that exist on campus to make the University of Minnesota feel smaller than its size might indicate to them.

The immersive, collegiate environment of SHIP culminates in student presentations of their documentaries. MNHS staff, Libraries staff, teachers, and families of the participants come to a lecture hall at the University of Minnesota on a Saturday to watch student documentaries and ask them questions about their research process in a Q&A format. Once all students have presented their documentaries, they receive a stipend of $500 and a diploma certifying their completion of the program. Many students report that, were it not for the stipend they receive at the end of SHIP, they would not have been able to participate in the program. It costs around $40,000 to run SHIP each year, with most of the funds spent on student stipends, food, and employee costs. The University of
Minnesota Libraries is gracious in its support of the program and does not charge the MNHS for use of any of its facilities.

Survey data indicates the transformative impact that SHIP has on students, their interest in history, and their perspectives on attending college. Of the participants in SHIP 2016, 89% felt that the program increased their interest in history and 100% felt that the program increased their knowledge of non-traditional historical narratives. The impact of SHIP was particularly strong among students who self-identify as African American. All of these students felt that the program increased awareness of their community, confidence in going to college, and doing college-level research. These positive experiences have led students to consider the University of Minnesota as a possible choice for their future education. One student remarked, “I didn’t really consider the U of M before participating in SHIP but now that I’ve seen all the different opportunities it has to offer, I will most likely apply.” Other students commented that the balance of research and immersion activities made them feel like they were actually in college, an experience that motivates them to want to attend college in the future.

SHIP’s success at the University of Minnesota has spurred interest from other universities. In the summer of 2016, Augsburg College sponsored its own SHIP cohort of fifteen students. The format of Augsburg SHIP was similar to those held at the University of Minnesota, albeit with different immersion activities that catered to the strengths of Augsburg College. The results of Augsburg SHIP were comparable to those of University of Minnesota SHIP. All of the students felt that the program was either “excellent” or “very good,” with 85% of students noting that the research conducted during the program was harder than what they do in school. One student noted that it “was the hardest project that I ever did…It felt like it I’m write a college essay [sic].” The success of Augsburg SHIP has shown that the model of this immersive summer experience can be transferred to other institutions, including private universities, with only minor modifications made to the curriculum.

The transformative potential of SHIP led to the formation of a similar program in the summer of 2015 for rising eighth-grade students, called Summer Athletics and Immersive Learning (SAIL). This program, made possible through the addition of the University of Minnesota Athletics Department to the National History Day
Partnership, puts fifteen middle school students on campus for a week of research and engagement with University of Minnesota student-athletes.\textsuperscript{34}

SAIL is designed to engage students physically in the morning and mentally in the afternoon. In the mornings from 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m., students participate in various athletic exercises at facilities across the University of Minnesota. MNHS staff and student-athletes from the Athletics Department work as coaches during this physical training. Then, from 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., students attend brief talks from college alumni about the importance of education. From 12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m., students eat lunch on campus. The day concludes with three hours of intensive research at Wilson Library on a topic related to the history of athletics. At the end of the week, students are expected to have completed a three- to five-minute narrated PowerPoint about their research. The athletic and academic portions of this camp are thematically tied together by the participation of student-athletes throughout the day. Students also participate in physical and mental toughness challenges meant to push them to accomplish more than they thought possible.

Due to the age of SAIL participants and the time constraints of running a one-week camp, the research portion of this program requires significant scaffolding. Students are divided into groups based on their favorite sport before the program begins, and these groups are given several topics from which to choose. Students interested in basketball, for example, could choose to complete their projects on either Earl Lloyd or the Fab Five. Each topic comes with a short summary and a selection of three primary sources for students to read. MNHS staff, undergraduate mentors, and student-athletes help students read these sources, find other relevant information, and turn this information into a historical narrative. The intensive nature of this research is reflected in the student-teacher ratio of SAIL, which is approximately 3:1.

The logistical burden of running SAIL is far more onerous than SHIP due to the need to book athletic facilities, provide and wash athletic attire for students, and coordinate with employees from the Athletics Department. The payoff, though, is worth this investment. Over 75\% of the students felt that the program increased their confidence in their ability to go college, helped them deliver effective presentations, and improved their ability to use historical-research
resources. Another 60% of the students felt that the program made them either “much more interested” or “more interested” in history. One student wrote that the program was the “best fun I had [sic] in years” and another simply noted, “I loved it.” These survey results provide a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to show the transformative impact this history-education program had upon its participants.

Blueprint for Similar Programs

The programs developed by the University of Minnesota and Minnesota Historical Society to support National History Day are the result of over two decades of partnership. Looking back on both the successes and failures of this partnership, we have compiled a set of resources to help individuals or organizations create similar programs outside the state of Minnesota. Although individual libraries, historical societies, and schools might have divergent goals with regard to history education, we hope that the following blueprint will assist in the creation of programs to assist in the development of transformative history programming nationwide. We have addressed the following section primarily to teachers of history, but have also included ways in which affiliate organizations can begin to build fruitful partnerships around the National History Day program.

Teachers interested in making National History Day part of their curriculum ought first to consult the expansive resources compiled by both the MNHS and the NHD National Office in order to choose how to best incorporate it into their classroom. Some teachers choose to incorporate NHD curriculum into their classes as part of a capstone project, while others advertise it to students in history-based clubs. In Minnesota, the former option is predominant. Teaching NHD in the classroom requires substantial effort on the part of teachers—both with regard to helping students create their projects and the curriculum that teachers must design to move their students through these projects. If possible, teachers should reach out to their state NHD affiliates to see if there are special resources allocated for helping teachers with these burdens. In addition, collaboration between English and Social Studies teachers within schools is encouraged, as many of the writing skills that students learn in National History Day align with the learning outcomes of English classes.
Once teachers have established NHD curriculum into their classroom, we encourage them to reach out to librarians, both within their own schools and from outside locations. Librarians and media specialists at middle schools and high schools are well equipped to help students locate print and online resources for their NHD projects. Often, though, students will require access to historical documents only available at academic or large public libraries. We recommend that teachers reach out to librarians at these institutions and ask about the possibility of bringing a group of students to their facilities. Minnesota’s library field trip program began in this fashion—with teachers making ad hoc calls to Wilson Library about the possibility of bringing students to campus. Staff at Wilson Library were happy to assist these teachers and, over time, collaboration with the MNHS helped transform the library field trip program into the experience described above. Some libraries outside the state of Minnesota have also made special arrangements with teachers to help their students complete NHD research projects. Libraries at the University of California, Irvine; University of Kansas; and University of Texas at El Paso have extensive experience working with students on NHD projects and have a dedicated web presence for helping students locate relevant resources. Some public libraries, like the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland, have also created research classes and offer research appointments for students participating in History Day.

For teachers looking to build relationships with libraries for which there does not exist pre-existing NHD infrastructure, we recommend asking local librarians about the logistics of bringing students to their libraries. The questions below, compiled by University of Minnesota librarians, help to establish the parameters for student visits:

- May I bring a school class to the library during the school day to conduct research using your books and databases?
- Do you have a reservable meeting space to accommodate collaborative learning?
- Do you have staff/adult research support/assistants in using technology and finding materials? If so, do they offer classroom visits to prepare students prior to the library visit?
- Is there a cost to reserve/use this space?
What is required for students to use computers to search for books and online content?

Is printing or photocopying available?

Upon the successful arrangement of a research trip to an academic or local public library, teachers should ensure that students will be able to make effective use of their time there. In Minnesota, students that participate in library trips complete a “pre-search” form so that they have some understanding of the library resources that might be useful to their projects (see Appendix D for the Wilson Library “pre-search” form used by NHD in Minnesota). Librarians at Wilson Library also provide guest login forms to students so they can access online databases that are normally only accessible to University of Minnesota students, faculty, and staff.

As teachers work to develop their curriculum and connections to libraries, we also recommend reaching out to their state NHD affiliates. Many of these affiliates are run through state historical societies, although some operate out of individual museums and universities. The resources that NHD programming has varies widely depending on the state. California, Texas, and Minnesota currently have the most robust NHD infrastructure and, consequently, have the most resources available to help teachers with their projects. Other states, although operating with less infrastructure, nonetheless have substantial resources to help teachers develop their NHD curriculum. Teachers should ask whether their state NHD affiliate has funding or personnel available to help with research field trips. Contact between teachers, librarians, and state NHD employees can ideally lead to a fruitful partnership that provides students with access to valuable resources to help complete their projects.

Financing NHD-related field trips and curriculum is a perennial problem. NHD in Minnesota is fortunate to have received substantial grants from the MacMillan Family Foundation, the Cargill Foundation, and the Schulze Family Foundation to finance immersive college experiences for students. Although staffers at the Minnesota Historical Society have typically applied for these grants, the input of teachers and librarians has been invaluable to their completion. The collaborative programs that NHD in Minnesota has developed at the University of Minnesota have also been central to the justification of costs for these grants. We hope that collaborative
grant writing in other states will yield similar results and provide NHD affiliates with the funding needed to help finance immersive college programming.

**Conclusion**

The programs described in this article form the heart of the National History Day Partnership in Minnesota. These programs facilitate access to higher education through engagement with the University of Minnesota and the development of the skills that are required for college-level research. Students that participate in these NHD Partnership programs feel a greater connection to the University of Minnesota, feel better equipped to succeed in future academic endeavors, and show an increased interest in history.

Despite these successes, though, there remains ample room for improvement and growth in this partnership. National History Day in Minnesota has a problem with its competitions becoming increasingly white from the school to the state level. Programs like SHIP and SAIL, which target the diverse student populations of the Twin Cities, are meant to help rectify this imbalance, but there is still more to be done. In the future, the Partnership seeks to facilitate further connections to the University of Minnesota and these communities by providing Wilson Libraries staff, Minitex staff, MNHS staff, and undergraduate mentors as a support system before and after the schools’ visits to Wilson Library. It is our hope that this kind of outreach will help ameliorate some of the other perennial issues that have affected these programs. Some of these issues have included students omitting source citations, exhibiting inappropriate behavior in the library, and not understanding what resources can be accessed after leaving Wilson Library.

The Partnership also seeks to streamline the logistical process for these programs. With so many moving parts in so many different programs, the lines of communication between the MNHS, Libraries staff, Minitex, and graduate student TAs can easily become blurred. In the coming years, we hope to establish more clearly defined roles for all programs so that there is less confusion about what parties are meant to perform what roles. In addition, the Libraries and Minitex hope to find ways of permitting students to access sources outside of the library, particularly online sources, so that students do not have
to rush through databases while at Wilson, saving PDFs of articles and uploading them to their Google Drives. Minitex’s ability to deliver books to certain schools on behalf of students is a step in the right direction, although at the moment it is limited to metro-area Twin Cities schools. Staff members are currently looking into the possibility of licensing contracts for University of Minnesota subscription resources to include certain partner NHD schools. Finally, all of the NHD Partnership programs have recognized the need to be more consistent with seeking feedback from students and teachers about the programs in which they participate so that the Partnership can better evaluate its programs, improve on existing models, and chart long-term trends.

Despite the issues that the National History Day Partnership currently faces, the benefits of these programs outweigh the hurdles it has to overcome. It is our hope that this article will serve as a model for other institutions that seek to further college access and history education for middle and high school students. The extent to which the National History Day Partnership has stretched the Libraries’ traditional position on service to its statewide community has created a unique opportunity to deepen its impact in new and meaningful ways. Students that participate in National History Day Partnership programs gain valuable research skills, feel a greater connection to university education, and feel empowered through the study of history. Through the introduction of similar programs in different states and with different institutions, we hope that history education can evolve to reach the changing needs of the students it must serve.

Notes

1. The first two goals of the MNHS’s 2016-2017 strategic plan are specifically devoted to engaging students, particularly students of color and those underachieving in school, through historical outreach. “Mission, Vision, Values & Strategic Priorities,” Minnesota Historical Society, <https://www.mnhs.org/about/mission>.


10. Ibid.


12. All statistics in this paragraph are found in Appendix C, “2016 National History Day Student Outcomes.”

13. For this latter statistic, 18% of students reported that NHD impacted their college-readiness skills “a great deal,” 43% said it impacted them “quite a bit,” and 30% said the program had “some” impact on them. See Appendix C, “2016 National History Day Student Outcomes.”

14. The Minnesota Historical Society has attempted to track the grades and academic performance of NHD participants. This has proven a challenge, though, given both restrictions on access to this data and the sheer number of students that participate in the program. As NHD programming persists and grows, the MNHS will continue to look for new ways to evaluate the impact of its programs. For examples of problems with self-reported student surveys, see Ernest T. Pascarella, “Using Student Self-Reported Gains to Estimate College Impact: A Cautionary Tale,” Journal of College Student Development 42, no. 5 (September-October 2001): 488-492. Jeffrey A. Rosen, Stephen R. Porter, and Jim Rogers, “Understanding Student Self-Reports of Academic Performance and Course-Taking Behavior,” AERA Open 3, no. 2 (April-June 2017): 1-14.

15. See Appendix B, “2016 National History Day Educators.”

16. Ibid.


21. Ibid.


24. Ibid., 28.

25. Ibid., 29.


27. Survey data collected from teachers about Minitex visits show their effectiveness in preparing students for their field trips to the University of Minnesota. Teachers stated that the visits helped their students learn how to use specific research tools and to make the most of their time at Wilson Library. One teacher wrote that the presence of Minitex staff “is immensely helpful in giving students a broader understanding of what they are about to do and the importance of it.” Another stated that the Minitex presentation “was a unique opportunity for our students; they were well-prepared and excited for the Wilson Library visit after their classroom trainings.” In addition, 100% of teachers surveyed thought that
these class visits had a positive impact on their students’ History Day projects. Minitex also runs a 24/7 statewide virtual chat service, AskMN, through which students can receive help to questions about their History Day research.


34. The involvement of the Athletics Department in this expanded partnership prohibits the participation of anyone who has completed eighth grade from this program.


Appendix A

2015-2016 at a Glance

National History Day in Minnesota is a co-curricular academic program that fosters in-depth research and critical analysis skills for students in grades 6-12. Students select a topic related to a national theme. Using primary and secondary sources, they research their topic and present their conclusions in one of the following ways: research paper, exhibit, documentary, performance, or website.

Students may choose to enter their projects in the History Day competition. This four-level competition includes school, regional, state, and national competitions.

27,000 students at 190 schools participated in 2016, guided by 444 educators and support staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics by Ethnicity</th>
<th>State of Minnesota</th>
<th>MN History Day Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, not of Hispanic origin</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, not of Hispanic origin</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Weighted average calculated based on teacher response and MDE Data.

History Day served a highly diverse student population.

Students were more engaged and worked harder on History Day compared to other school assignments.

72% of Regional students were more interested in History Day compared to other class assignments

86% of Regional students worked harder on History Day compared to other assignments

68% of Regional students felt that History Day increased their expectations for success in school
History Day participation has positive impact on college readiness skills.

43% of Regional students visited a college campus because of History Day. 71% of these students said the experience increased their interest in attending college.

The Minnesota History Day program provided 10,757 hours of support and generated 91,084 points of contact with students, parents, teachers, and judges.

- Classroom Outreach (68,474 interactions)
- Ed Achievement/Summer Programs (3,002 interactions)
- Events (13,315 interactions)
- Library Events/Field Trips (4,860 interactions)
- Workshops/Trainings (1,433 interactions)

History Day staff visited 69% of participating schools providing classroom support services that are vital to teachers.

- Staff visits are a VITAL resource that help ensure my ongoing participation
- Staff visits SUPPORT my instruction but are not critical to my participation
- Staff visits DO NOT enhance my instruction and are not part of my decision to participate
- I did not have a staff visit in 15-16

"The MN History Day Team shows true dedication to this entire process and makes this project all about the students from start to finish. They continuously go out of their way to make connections with students and go above and beyond in the organization of the process, communication, and student/teacher support."

- Minnesota History Day Teacher

National History Day in Minnesota is a partnership between the Minnesota Historical Society and the University of Minnesota.
Appendix B

2016 National History Day Educators

The success of a National History Day program is often the result of dedicated, supportive, and enthusiastic educators. This year, 444 teachers at 190 schools participated. National History Day is a partnership between the Minnesota Historical Society and the University of Minnesota.

87% of teachers felt students learned more through History Day, compared to other classroom assignments.

87% of teachers had an excellent (44%) or very good (43%) experience with History Day.

96% of teachers felt History Day improved college readiness skills for students.

Teachers gave History Day a net promoter score of 56.4.

| Impact of History Day on Student Skills and Abilities that Benefit Students in the Future |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| High School Graduation | 86% |
| College Readiness | 96% |
| Enjoyment of School | 80% |

| Impact of History Day on 21st Century Skills |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Communication | 53% |
| Critical Thinking | 55% |
| Collaboration | 43% |
| Creativity | 42% |

77% of participating teachers had a Minnesota History Day staff member visit their school.

"The MN History Day Team shows true dedication to this entire process and makes this project all about the students from start to finish. They continuously go out of their way to make connections with students and go above and beyond in the organization of the process, communication, and student/teacher support."

-Minnesota History Day Teacher

Minnesota History Day Staff Support is Critical to Teacher Participation in Program

88% of teachers are using History Day as a required class assignment, in which all students participate.

"I had several students who were entirely disengaged in class and school in general. Their History Day projects changed that. They not only engaged in the class/assignment, but found a passion for history/learning/school they didn’t realize they had."

-Minnesota History Day Teacher

History Day Benefits All Students, Not Just Gifted and Talented

Teachers Reported Higher Completion Rates for History Day, Compared to Other Assignments

Better | Same | Worse
Appendix C

2016 National History Day Student Outcomes

In Minnesota, National History Day is most commonly assigned as a required class project, with all students in an assigned class taking part. Students can enter their work into a series of competitive events, advancing from school fairs to regional, state, and national competitions. National History Day is a partnership between the Minnesota Historical Society and the University of Minnesota.

72% of Regional students were much more (33%) or more (49%) interested in History Day compared to other class assignments. 75% of Regional students had an excellent (28%) or very good (47%) experience with History Day. 86% of Regional students worked harder (45%) or much harder (41%) on History Day, compared to other assignments. Regional students gave History Day a net promoter score of 7.2.

75% of Regional students had an excellent (28%) or very good (47%) experience with History Day.

86% of Regional students worked harder (45%) or much harder (41%) on History Day, compared to other assignments.

Regional students gave History Day a net promoter score of 7.2.

History Day Engages Students, Builds Literacy Behaviors

- 53% of Regional students said they were using public library resources more for History Day, compared to other school assignments
- 76% of Regional students said they were reading more for History Day, compared to other classroom assignments
- 33% of Regional students said they were reading more difficult materials for History Day than other classroom assignments

Student Outcomes and Behaviors Are Higher for Students Who Worked with History Day staff and/or Mentors

Participants Feel Impact Even after Project is Done

- 68% of Regional students felt that History Day increased their expectations for success in school
- 37% of State students say History Day was a transformative experience, developing skills, knowledge, and interests that have increased expectations for future success in school
- 13% of Regional judges and 18% of State judges were former History Day students themselves

Students Feel College-Ready, Interested

- 43% of Regional students visited a college campus because of History Day. 71% of these students said the experience increased their interest in attending college
- 43% of State students felt more connected to the University of Minnesota because of History Day

Describe the impact of History Day on the following:

- Knowledge of history
- Communication skills
- Critical thinking and problem solving

Describe the impact of History Day on your college-readiness skills:

- A great deal
- Quite a bit
- Some
- A little
- Not at all
Appendix D

Pre-Search Form: Preparing for a Visit to Wilson Library

Name __________________________________________________________

Your Topic ______________________________________________________

Directions:
Prior to your campus visit, it is recommended that you search the U of MN Libraries catalog, MNCAT (https://www.lib.umn.edu), selecting four to six books on your topic. Search by author, keyword, or title. When you find materials you would like to locate during your visit, write down the bibliographical information on this sheet. To determine the correct floor(s) in Wilson, use the Floorplan handout.

For History Day visitors:
Be sure to check the Primary, Secondary, and Biography pages for more research databases (https://www.lib.umn.edu/wilson/welcome-history-day).
If you have questions, please contact the Wilson Library Service Desk at 612-624-3321 or wilsirc@umn.edu

Book/Article Title ________________________________________________

Author(s) Last Name ______________________________________________

Publisher ______________________________ Copyright date ____________

(Availability) Call number ___________________________ (Quarto or Folio?)

Floor # _________________________________________________________

Book/Article Title ________________________________________________

Author(s) Last Name ______________________________________________

Publisher ______________________________ Copyright date ____________

(Availability) Call number ___________________________ (Quarto or Folio?)

Floor # _________________________________________________________