Sabbatical Final Report, Michelle Jolly, Spring 2016

I am grateful to Sonoma State University for granting me a one-semester sabbatical in Spring 2016, which enabled me to begin a new project, continue several professional projects that were already in the works, and recharge my academic batteries. The following is an outline of my sabbatical activities:

Presentations
1. “Where all the women are ‘girls,’” all the references are ‘too old,’ and all the vocabulary is ‘too specialized’: Building Bridges Between Students and the Archives,” Invited Opening Plenary Talk, Society of California Archivists Annual Convention, April 2016.


Articles

2. Michelle E. Jolly, Melinda Milligan, Margaret Purser, Laura A. Watt, “But where are the people? Grappling with Teaching New Approaches to Our Relationship with the Past,” In progress. Invited for edited volume of papers from the Pre-Conference Intensive Workshop at the Environmental Design Research Association in May 2016. The conference paper is being substantially revised and expanded for this article.

Sonoma County Oral History Project
The long process of editing the interviews and preparing them to be archived has continued since the completion of the interviews in 2010. During my sabbatical, I was able to arrange for the Bancroft Library to release the copyright on the interviews so that they may be archived at Sonoma State University along with the materials from the 2007 exhibit from the SSU Art Gallery, “A Fine and Long Tradition: Stories from the Contemporary Women’s Movement in Sonoma County.”
Sophomore Year Experience Program
Although I was not engaged in the day-to-day direction of this program during my sabbatical, I continue to work on the program. In addition to writing a conference paper and an article about SYE (see above), I also oversaw the implementation of the Social Sciences Undergraduate Research Initiative (SSURI) pilot program (managed by Heather Smith in Psychology), arranged for faculty to teach in the program during Fall 2016, created two professional development presentations for faculty and student peer facilitators outlining the challenges of sophomore year and the pedagogy used in the program, and worked with other program staff (particularly Heather Smith, Alvin Nguyen, Lindsey Greene, Alexis Boutin, and Robert Chase) on assessment and on preparation for the 2016-17 school year.

This new project, focused on women and sport in California’s Central Valley in the mid-20th century, brings together my interests in women’s history, California history, archival and oral history methodology, and questions involving community and place. For many years, I have explored the history of California with students, noting the dearth of scholarly work on California’s Central Valley. My early work on women’s politics in 19th century San Francisco focused on women’s roles and community participation in the face of rapid change, and my more recent work on the Sonoma County Women’s Oral History Project taught me oral history methodology and emphasized the importance of women’s roles in community organizations and community development. This new project brings these elements together to examine the role of women’s softball in the lives of women and the development of communities in early to mid-20th century Fresno, California.

In January 2016, I was unexpectedly invited to participate in all three of the conferences listed above. Consequently, I spent more time developing the conference papers and their related articles, and less time on the new project than I originally anticipated. However, both the plenary talk and the Bill Walker Symposium allowed me to explore some of the parameters of the new project and its connection to my other work.

During the sabbatical, I read and developed a bibliography of nearly 200 books and articles on the history of Fresno, the California Central Valley, women & sport, and softball. I began two main lines of research in Fresno newspapers, looking at the origins of softball (and particularly women’s softball) in Fresno and its role in the community as well as examining the coverage of women’s softball in the 1950s. I also began analysis of the extensive softball scrapbooks and other materials belonging to Yvonne Andersen and began a conversation with some of her teammates on the 1950s world-championship softball team, the Fresno Rockets. I am looking forward to developing this research into a proposal for a paper at the 2017 North American Society for Sport History annual conference.

Teaching
My sabbatical research also allowed me to make changes to history courses I regularly teach. I revised HIST 472, California History I, to include a significant component on the history of the Central Valley. I also completely revamped HIST 446, Women in American History, which I had
not taught since I became department chair. The course, which has always focused on women, politics, and law, now weaves in sport and its connections to women, politics, and law, challenging students to think differently about all these themes. Finally, I will be teaching a Senior Seminar in Spring 2017 that will allow me to work with senior history majors, writing 25-30 page primary-source based research papers, on some of the questions and sources I have been working with over the past year.

Conclusion
My sabbatical in Spring 2016 has allowed me to reflect on and publicly present some of the work I have done over the past decade in Teaching American History, the Sonoma County Women’s Oral History Project, the team-taught course Shared Places/Contested Pasts, and the Sophomore Year Experience. In addition, it allowed me to step back from my service to the University as History Department Chair, Chair of University Standards, member of the Academic Senate, and faculty coordinator of the Sophomore Year experience to write and to begin new research. One of the joys of working on this project has been the enthusiasm I meet with in students, conference attendees, and colleagues when I talk about the connections among gender, community building, and softball. I look forward to continuing the project, to sharing the results with those who asked, and to continuing to incorporate the work into my teaching for history majors, CRM graduate students, and sophomores in the SYE program.