

Final Report
Professional Development Grant

Donna R. White
Department of English and World Languages

RESTATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY AND OF PROBLEM RESEARCHED.

I needed funds to attend the annual conference of the American Historical Association in Washington, DC, June 2-6, 2014. I had been accepted as a member of a panel on “Comics and the History of the Book,” sponsored by an affiliated organization, the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing. Since I regularly offer a course on graphic novels, this panel was directly relevant to my teaching.

BRIEF REVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY AND OF PROBLEM RESEARCHED.

I was accepted as a panelist for a session sponsored by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing, of which I am a member. As an affiliated organization, SHARP sponsors regular sessions at the annual conference of the American Historical Association. This year’s AHA conference was held in Washington, DC, from January 2-6, 2014. My goals were to learn more about scholarship in history and graphic novels, to make new scholarly contacts, and possibly to make new publishing connections. All of my previous connections were in the fields of children’s literature, young adult literature, fantasy, and science fiction, and I wanted to expand my scholarship. Attending the American Historical Association conference was intended to provide me a new set of academic and publishing connections and enhance my teaching of the graphic novels course. I have done considerable reading on the history of comics and graphic novels, which is a new academic subfield of both history and literature. In fact, my reading was directly responsible for my decision to become a member of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing. Although I was familiar with literary approaches to graphic novels, I was curious to see how historians approached the field.

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

I attended the American Historical Association conference in Washington, DC, from January 3-7, 2014 (weather-related flight delays changed my departure and return dates). My panel on “Comics and the History of the Book” was well received although it was attended only by other members of SHARP. The discussion after the panel was interesting and valuable and may have resulted in comics studies finding a permanent home in SHARP. As a multi-disciplinary field of study, it has bounced around in art history, English, Communications, popular culture, film studies, and history, among others. I also attended other conference sessions and made useful scholarly connections with colleagues in other fields (education, library science, history) who do research in comics studies. Several of the new connections are international because European scholars have been more open to research in comics than North American scholars.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Allowing scholars from varying fields to attend conferences that might not seem to be in their areas is a valuable tool for cross-generation of ideas and encourages interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and scholarship. What I learned from other scholars will inform my future teaching of the Graphic Novels course and stimulate my own scholarship in comics studies. I also have a stronger understanding of historians and their wide-ranging work. I hope the Professional Development Grant Committee will continue to approve of requests like mine.