

“No preference (for quotes from Milton)”

I focused on a folder containing what proved to be a short history of John Muir College. I had no particular reason to choose this folder, given the size and span of the collection in general, but my lack of choice seemed to mirror the university’s as well. I’ll explain.

The folder on John Muir College contained a litany of documents, pamphlets, flyers, and invitations to faculty parties. The minutiae were spread amongst things like the John Muir College 10-year review, a spiral bound report of the college’s history and plans for reform. The report itself, as Ana’s write-up indicates, was both a “review” and an “evaluation,” with the latter signifying the goal of improvement. Interestingly, much of the evaluation portion of the report rested upon student responses to various questionnaires, with broad reaching questions ranging from the level of comfort students feel among faculty to the seriousness of rape on campus. While questions like the former would list student responses and then a more formalized university evaluation, questions like the latter were only given a statistic representation-- 72% of participants responded “serious” and 28% “not serious”—without a written plan of what the university’s response to this would be. Not unlike today, then, it appears that addressing sexual assault in an administrative capacity has a history of aggregating—not unlike the archive itself—data without meeting that information with an official response.

Yet what the rest of the folder shows is the less formalized ways that the campus responded to such issues. Alongside the ten-year report were issues of the *Muirall*, a student-led campus periodical that documented campus current events, op-eds, tips and cautions. The *Muirall* would often contain short recaps on campus events and responses to proposed curriculum changes as well as what appears to be information that needed to be spread without having the administration itself broadcast these happenings. Part newsletter and part official notice, the *Muirall* can be read as a conduit through which the university could adapt and reshape itself while retaining its traditional stance and separation from such matters. For instance, while the ten-year report addresses the seriousness of rape on campus without issuing a response, multiple issues of the *Muirall* rape prevention resources and practices. Furthermore, the ten-year review contained no mention of LGBTQ resources—or even a question about such concerns, for that matter—while one, 4-page, neon orange student publication indicated that such resources could be found through the on-campus psychologist, of all places.

To return to my original point, then, what struck me was the mix between the seemingly informal, even insignificant, bits of writing alongside the bound, university legislature that open with quotations from Milton. When I began by saying I had no preference in choosing a particular folder, I wanted to indicate the archive collection itself seemed to have no preference for what it contained and was instead a non-discerning repository of traces, which ran parallel and intersected.

In my view, the archive as a whole might be viewed along these lines, as a site of the official and unofficial capacities by which the university develops, reshapes, and deconstructs itself, all while cataloging these movements as a means of self-sustaining. Rodrick Ferguson has similarly argued that the archive might be one of the clearest means of reading the university, arguing that “the academy is an archive of sorts, whose technologies—or so the theory goes—are constantly refined to acquire the latest innovation” (*The Reorder of Things* 12). Ferguson further writes that “as an archiving institution, the academy is—to use Derrida’s description of the archive—‘institutive and conservating’... Revolutionary and traditional.” If we read the John Muir archive of a metonym for the university as a whole, then we see how Ferguson’s point about the contradictions of the academy actually unfold. That is, the ten-year review might be read as the traditional method of keeping order and a means of conserving administrative evaluations that conceptualize “the seriousness of rape on campus” as a

number and little more than that. On the other hand, however, we might look to ephemera like the *Muirall* as sites of reform, where small instances of change gradually enter the archive itself when the official reportage left them out. Thus the archive contains both traces of the revolutionary alongside its erasure. The questions this folder leaves me with, however, is who this archive is for and what do the informal glimpses of institutional change signal for the future?

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