**Akaiia Ridley**

**End of Summer Report 2021**

My project was to research the experiences of Black alumni by using the archives and oral history interviews to create a virtual exhibit of the history of Black students while they attended Albion College and those who supported them while they were there. The long term goal is to create the exhibit but within the project were short term goals. The first short term goal was to conduct oral history interviews with the Black alumni in order to get the stories from their experiences and also to ask them what they would like to see presented in the exhibit. My second short term goal was to research the archival collections that we did have in the library to pull out information about Black students but to also see what’s missing. My third goal for the summer was to read literature with instructions on how to find themes and form the information into exhibit labels allowing the viewers to find their own interpretations. Finally, my last long term goal was to begin writing the exhibit labels with intentions of continuing the project in the fall.

For the most part I would say that I did achieve a good amount of work during this time span. One thing that took up most of my time was completing the oral history interviews. I completed over 30 interviews with Black alumni and others who supported them. Following that, I began to transcribe the interviews so that we could have them in written record. I also looked through the Pleiad for events and things that Black alumni were involved in and made note of what was and what wasn't there. I wish that I could have gotten a little farther with the themes and exhibit labels but one thing about the oral history interviews was that the opportunity spread by word of mouth. I wanted to wrap up interviews in the fourth week but instead I was still doing them up until the seventh just because so many more people wanted to share their stories. I am not complaining though because the amount of people allowed for me to get more variations of stories.

I believe that doing the oral history interviews was probably the best decision I made for the project because they allowed for me to hear the stories I did not get from either the archival collections or reading the older Pleiads. Not everything that Black alumni experienced was documented and if it was, it wasn’t the full story. One of the most important things I learned about was the Black student demands list from 1968. At that time, the response from the administration took almost four years to be delivered. This is interesting because there has since been four more separate years of demands from students of color up until 2021 and they all look the same. This project also resulted in me being able to connect with students from another college in Wisconsin who did a similar project and receive advice on how to continue.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1968 Demands** | **2021 Demands** |
| * Stepped up recruitment of qualified black students from all economic levels to create a student body which is at least 10% black * Increases in scholarship aid and active investigation of foundation grants to finance black scholarships * Active recruitment of qualified Black faculty and administrators, in particular, a full-time black admissions counselor * Inclusion in the Albion College curriculum of courses similar to the following: African History, “Negro” History, Black Religion, Negro social problems in contemporary society, Contemporary urban problems * Albion College should establish a pre-college training program for black students who lack a solid secondary education. A follow-through counseling program should also be initiated to complement the pre-college training * Union Board all-campus entertainment should be made to include exposure to black culture * An attempt should be made to equalize the ratio of Black men and women as the percentage of black students expands | * Transparency and communication: zero tolerance for hate, racism, and discrimination * Curriculum: increase in Asian/Latinx history, institute for race, ethnicity, diversity * Governance: students and faculty involvement in all decision making process * Student resources: health/counseling/ other support * Training: Green Dot and implicit bias * Student development: employment/ campus safety, increase of student wages * Campus life and Community living: increase in budgets for diverse organization, cameras in residence halls * Community engagement: free/reduced admission to sports for Albion residents, significant increase in resources and promotion of the ALBION Fellows program * Facilities: upgrades to residence halls, student advisory committee for facilities |

This project is important to me because as a Black student here on Albion’s campus I want to make sure that other students like me understand that they have the opportunity to conduct research on whatever they are interested in. Also, to see the Black alumni that have come before them and how they have gone off to be successful. This project will ultimately help the college’s new goals of prioritising diversity and belonging by acknowledging the experiences students of color have had at their institution. I am still deciding on what I would like to do following graduation at Albion but this project would help me with this decision. I have gained skills and experience that I will be able to carry with me forever.

I have decided to continue this work as a directed study for the fall semester to hopefully finish creating something to be shown to the community by Homecoming time. The digital exhibit will be available on the Albion College Archives website for the public to view. Also, I will be writing a thesis for the History Department where I will document the process of my research, its outcomes, and where I would like to see the project go once I am no longer a student here. Following that, I will be presenting my thesis and project at the Spring 2022 Elkin Isaac Symposium as this will be an opportunity to show more people what I have been doing and its importance.

I have learned that I really enjoy doing this type of research. It has been a learning experience to be able to see what could come from someone taking the time to research about different marginalized groups if they chose. I can honestly say that in the beginning I did not think that this project would become what it is currently. This project has also given me the opportunity to work on my “soft skills'', specifically talking to people over the phone who I have never met before. Also, as I mentioned before, this project has allowed me to connect with not only successful Black alumni but students from other institutions who have done similar work.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Hyde Fellows in Student/Faculty Research for contributing to my success. Without your funding and support, this project would not be possible. Thank you for trusting me to use these funds to better my research. It is a wonderful opportunity to be granted this funding, and I will continue to work hard and contribute to the college and community.