

STUDENTS, FACULTY PRESENT AT NATIONAL DIGITAL HUMANITIES CONFERENCE



From left: J. Michael Francis works with Rachel Sanderson and Hannah Tweet on the ongoing history project.

USF St. Petersburg Florida Studies graduate students Rachel Sanderson and Hannah Tweet recently presented alongside their professor at Digitorium, the Digital Humanities Conference at the University of Alabama. Their presentation, “Colonial Florida Digital History Initiative: Beyond the Primary Sources,” spoke to a new online database and digital archive pertaining to the history of colonial Florida that is expected to launch in the fall.

Sanderson and Tweet presented with J. Michael Francis, Hough Family Endowed Chair of Florida Studies at USFSP and a leading expert on colonial Florida and Spanish history. Their presentation provided an overview of the digital database and highlighted some of their ongoing research and contributions. The online center will contain maps, infographics, original documents, and a historical database of people who lived in Florida between 1513 and 1821. The information will evolve and grow as new information is added and will serve as a way for scholars worldwide to reach wider audiences.

“Hannah and Rachel have been instrumental in the design of this project and in creating a broader perspective of its vision,” said Francis, who heads the initiative. “This is a project that one person alone could never do. I am extremely fortunate to have the level of expertise and commitment from these graduate students.”

Working alongside Francis on the project, the students have handled, read, and translated original documents dating back to the 16th century. Each year, several Florida Studies students accompany Francis to the General Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain, to conduct research. Sanderson, who anticipates that she will graduate this summer, spent nearly a year in total in the Spanish archives during her time at USFSP.

“As undergraduates and master’s students, you don’t generally get the opportunity to work in the archives. So it’s a really great advantage in the Florida Studies program that you have an opportunity to engage in primary research that normally you wouldn’t get to do until you’re working on a Ph.D.,” said Sanderson. “To be able to touch those original documents and then read them, knowing that someone like Pedro Menendez wrote the words I’m reading—It’s really exciting and humbling.”

Tweet, who moved from Washington to enroll in USFSP’s Florida Studies program, will join Francis and Sanderson in Spain this summer.

“The paleography and research that the program emphasizes is what appealed to me, and they play a strong role in the digital history project we’re working on,” said Tweet. “I think a lot of scholars struggle with the challenge of making their research accessible. This digital history initiative provides a great avenue for helping contributing scholars reach a wider audience with their research.”

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