MU partners with South African school to preserve Robben Island documents

Political prison is the subject.

By Karyn Spory

Monday, December 9, 2013

After Nelson Mandela died last week, the University of Missouri College of Education will have a hand in honoring his legacy by partnering with the University of the Western Cape and Robben Island Museum in South Africa to preserve thousands of historical papers, photos and items related to the political prisoners held at Robben Island.

Thomas Kochtanek, associate professor in the School of Information Science & Learning Technologies, said MU has been partners in education with UWC since 1986, and the schools have collaborated on several projects over the years. "This project is entirely new. It began out of that long-term relationship between the universities, percolated over the past year and resulted in the crafting of a memorandum of understanding between the two universities to pursue the project," Kochtanek said.

The memorandum of understanding was signed last Monday.

"This is really an access project; we're going to provide access to documents that otherwise you would never be able to see" unless you would "get in an airplane, fly for 24 hours to South Africa and make an appointment to see these documents, which are pretty special," Kochtanek said.

Kochtane said UWC will handle the primary documents — the paper, photos, videos — all the things in the archives that are memorable. He said while UWC is preserving those artifacts, it will scan them, and that is where MU takes over.

"The expertise at Mizzou is digital curation. … Mizzou's task is to make sure we adhere to international standards for the exchange of pictures, videos and so forth and design a really cool website," Kochtanek said.

Kochtane said the content, which includes hundreds of thousands of pages of historical papers and about 120,000 photos, belongs to the Robben Island Museum. Robben Island is where many
political prisoners, including Mandela, were incarcerated for opposing apartheid and the South African regime from the 1960s to the early 1990s. Others mentioned in archive documents included former Archbishop Desmond Tutu and South African Constitution author Albie Sachs.

Kochtaneck said the project will take a couple of years but will be worth the work.

"These are treasures and resources, and it's all classics, and all of this material was underground until democracy prevailed. This is really a story of democracy and the struggle through the apartheid era," Kochtanek said.

"While the loss of Mandela has saddened everyone, Mandela's legacy of reconciliation and forgiveness, towards the vision of the 'rainbow' nation, will live on in this way," Daniel Clay, dean of the MU College of Education, said in a prepared statement.

Clay said he is proud to continue a working relationship with UWC, adding their partnership was the first ever between a U.S. university and a nonwhite South African University.
MU will be working with two South African institutions, the University of Western Cape and the Robben Island Museum, where former president Nelson Mandela was imprisoned, to create a website to feature photos, videos, oral histories and other media from the apartheid era that still affects the country today. The effort is expected to take five to 10 years.

"We're digitizing it and making it accessible worldwide," said Tom Kochtanek, a professor at MU’s School of Information Science and Learning Technologies, who is leading MU’s participation in the effort. "The objective is to partner with these three groups and to make this cultural heritage, which represents the struggle against the apartheid, accessible via website."

The archive contains manuscripts, sound, hand-written documents, oral histories, video, art and nearly 120,000 photos from the apartheid era. Many important South African figures have submitted their own papers, including Albie Sachs, who was appointed to the Constitutional Court of South Africa by Mandela in 1994.

"It really details the struggle against apartheid," said Rod Uphoff, director of the University of Missouri South African Education Program and professor at the MU School of Law. "It's as if the people who were involved in the (American Revolution) gave their papers to one collection, and we helped digitize those papers."

MU senior Connor Wangler studied abroad in South Africa during the summer of 2012 and he learned that the nation’s history of racial segregation still affected the people who live there.
He felt the effect of that segregation in the cities he visited with his peers, where they studied South Africa's urban layout, post-apartheid.

And he felt it when he volunteered at a children's home and met a 14-year-old girl named Annie, who told him she was inspired by his success as an American college student.

Wangler was struck by the way his ability to travel and go to college amazed her. "We're visiting their country because we have the money to study abroad. We have the choice to be there and they don't.

"Going there and seeing everything first-hand gives you a more well-rounded understanding of the situation, instead of just reading in a book," he said.

For those not able to travel to South Africa, the website might help bridge the gap.

Kochtanek said MU College of Education faculty and graduate students, as well as those from other MU colleges, will work to create a website that everyone is interested in.

"What we're trying to do is engage teachers and students both here in the state of Missouri and in South Africa," he said.

Uphoff said he hopes the website will reach beyond academia.

"The project is really designed to make the materials in the archives more accessible online, not only to researchers and students, but to the general public," he said.
MU professor remembers Mandela

by Mark Slavit

A Mizzou Black Studies professor has a close connection to the passing of Nelson Mandela.

Wilma King recently visited South Africa and saw Mandela’s prison and jail cell.

Two years ago, King got a grant to travel to South Africa and the University of the Western Cape. While working with faculty there, King found time to visit the Robben Island Prison that once held Nelson Mandela. King took hundreds of photos for her students and herself.

King said, “At 95 years of age and seeing the kind of progress that had been made in South Africa as a result of his work and the work of others who were very close to him, I could not imagine that he would have many regrets.”

King said Mandela had a huge influence over the lives of Mizzou faculty, staff and students because of his fight for economic freedom and civil rights.

King said, “In his death and even before he died, people could see a difference that he made. That’s very important. I think that’s very important.”

King got another grant to go back to South Africa next year. She plans to work with South African faculty members and help improve their Black Studies Program.

King has received several national awards for her books and publications.
A former businessman, the president of the University of Missouri System believes in his product — education.

Tim Wolfe, who leads the four-campus system, is in the midst of what may be characterized as a promotional tour, the “Show Me Value Tour,” to highlight the importance of higher education.

Tour stops are Missouri middle schools, including visits with community and business leaders. Last week, he visited California Middle School, followed by a stop at our News Tribune office.

Wolfe said the tour is not a recruitment effort; continuing enrollment growth negates the need to “sell” a University of Missouri education to prospective students.

Instead, the president’s objective is to counter a growing sentiment that student debt and declining job placements have rendered a college education undesirable, unnecessary, or both.

“By any measure — income, prosperity, health — a college education has a profound effect on an individual, which in turn can provide a tremendous boost to our communities, culture and state as a whole,” Wolfe said.

To support his claims, he cites data that: college graduates will earn nearly twice as much as high school graduates; and college graduates enjoy healthier lives and greater longevity.
In addition, Wolfe said a college education allows students to discover their talents, hone their strengths, think creatively and learn to work in teams, which are skills needed in today’s workforce, regardless of the job.

Those skills extend well beyond the job site and encompass overall quality of life. The ability to analyze and scrutinize varying assertions and opinions, to establish reasonable strategies and goals, and to imagine possibilities are valuable assets in all aspects of life.

We believe learning is a lifelong activity. And we believe a structured environment — in elementary, secondary and higher education institutions — prepares people to learn from the full spectrum of life experiences.

The value of education to enhance a person’s enjoyment and quality of life cannot be overstated.
Letters to the Editor

Bonus for coach

I read with interest/disgust the Dec. 4 article, “Pinkel cashing in with bonuses,” describing the bonus money that coach Gary Pinkel has already made because of the University of Missouri’s successful football season.

Mr. Pinkel, whose base salary is $2.6 million annually, has qualified for $200,000 bonus money while nine assistant coaches and three unspecified others have qualified for $5,000 apiece.

This strikes me as being as unfair as Michael Duke’s recent retirement as CEO of Wal-Mart.

The poor guy is being asked to eke out a living on a $113-million IRA, which is 6,182 times greater than the average Wal-Mart employee’s IRA.

I don’t know anything about coach Pinkel.

Maybe he is a generous guy who will share some of his bounty with his assistants and other people who are part of the football program.

It looks like he can afford it.

Roland P. Pera

Read more here: http://www.kansascity.com/2013/12/08/4674771/bonus-for-coach-opposing-obamacare.html#storylink=cpy
Newsy sold to E.W. Scripps for $35 million

COLUMBIA — Newsy, the Columbia-based digital video news provider, has been sold to E.W. Scripps Co. for $35 million.

The sale is expected to close Jan. 1, according to a news release from E.W. Scripps, which owns 19 television stations and 13 newspapers across the U.S.

Newsy, which was founded in 2008 and has 35 employees, has a partnership with the MU School of Journalism that allows students to earn course credit while working there. It is run out of an office at 904 Elm St.

"Leveraging the power of Scripps and Newsy together means reaching more consumers with the quality journalism they expect on a larger variety of platforms," Newsy founder and CEO Jim Spencer said in the news release.