

2013

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Recommended Citation

Zeidner, Jillian, "Indexing and Researching National Event Coverage in The Puget Sound Trail, 1963-1965" (2013). *Summer Research*. Paper 198.
http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/summer_research/198

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Indexing and Researching National Event Coverage in
The Puget Sound Trail, 1963-1965

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September 17, 2013

Introduction

The Puget Sound Trail, the student-run newspaper at the University of Puget Sound, has been published under various names and formats since 1895 and is one of the best sources on the history and culture of the University over the years. Many issues of *The Trail* have fortunately mostly been digitized and are currently housed in Sound Ideas, a digital archive run by the University. While this digitization has made it much more accessible and easy to use, I noticed some major problems that still block full utilization of this great resource, including a lack of an index that would allow finding specific subjects and a confusing search function. To begin remedying these problems, I indexed each issue in the academic years 1963-1964 and 1964-1965 as an example of how the rest of *The Trail* database can be streamlined to allow for greater use. I also did a small amount of research on how national events were covered in *The Trail* during those same years as an example of how the new index can be useful for anyone who might want to do research or even casual browsing. The implementation of this index will allow greater access to and awareness of the value of *The Trail* and the Archives & Special Collections of the University of Puget Sound.

Problems

While the digitization project has been great for opening up access to *The Trail*, there are still many problems that block full utilization. The current search function on Sound Ideas only allows for a keyword search, which means that it will only search for the exact search rather than allowing a more general subject search. For example, if someone was trying to do research on the civil rights movement of the 1960s and searched the phrase “civil rights movement”, Sound Ideas would only return places in *The Trail* where that exact phrase is used. There is no list of the

subjects contained in the issues, so while there may be many articles related to the civil rights movement, only a few are returned in the search because all of them may not use the exact phrase “civil rights movement”. The search page is also very confusing. The results returned are not in chronological order and seem to be returned in order of relevance although there is no indication of how that relevance is determined or why the returned results are relevant to the search terms. Thus, people wishing to find something specific have to spend a great amount of time just finding one specific article. This current system does not lend itself to easy use, whether for casual browsing or research. Anecdotal evidence indicates that those using *The Trail* for research projects have had to spend significantly more time on research than their peers. Also, while most of the issues of *The Trail* have been digitized, there are some that were unable to be digitized and are only available in hard copy in the Archives & Special Collections. These hard-copy issues are not noted in any way on Sound Ideas, and thus are not searchable at all, so people browsing Sound Ideas have no way of knowing if the information they are seeking is available in these issues.

The Process of Indexing

Having noticed all of these problems, it seemed to me that the best way to remedy them would be to create an index, similar to the indexes found in the back of many academic books and encyclopedias. The goals of this project were to have issues searchable by subject instead of just by keyword and to provide specific information on the location of subjects in each issue.

I did not have any prior experience with indexing, so I spent a few days researching best practices for indexing and possible methodologies to use. I uncovered a lot of very useful information, but perhaps the most surprising and helpful had to do with bias. Just like any other

academic work, there is no completely objective index. The indexer brings their own bias and experience into the production of the index, and since an index cannot possibly cover every single individual subject contained in a work the indexer must choose what seems most important and relevant to be included in the index. I am an historian so I tended to preference the things that seemed the most historically significant to the school and the world. An economist or a scientist who undertook the same project may have seen or preferred different subjects than I did, and their index would look different than mine.

Keeping that in mind, I started with indexing the issue from October 2, 1963. That date may seem pretty random but it was a logical starting point for a number of reasons; it was the first issue of the 1963-1964 academic year and President John F. Kennedy had visited Tacoma just the day before the issue was published. I created an Excel spreadsheet and input information into a number of categories: citation information for that issue of *The Trail*, the location of the issue (either its URL for Sound Ideas or Archives only), titles of the articles, author when an author's name was provided, and subject headings. The subject headings area allowed me to put in shorthand notes on what subjects were covered in the article, which I color coded to differentiate from the final product.

Once I had that information for the approximately 1200 articles from 1963-1965, I set about converting my shorthand notes into a more official format. Indexers use thesauri, databases full of official headings for subjects, to ensure standardization across all indices in a discipline. There are different thesauri for different disciplines, but the overarching standard in subject headings is the Library of Congress Authorities database. For my index, I used a mixture of Library of Congress Authorities and a thesaurus developed by a former librarian at the University for more institution-specific headings not included in the Library of Congress

Authorities database. While it could have been more time efficient to use the official headings at the beginning, the Library of Congress Authorities website is less than user-friendly, and it was easier for me to use consistent shorthand and then use the Find All and Replace function to replace the shorthand with the same standard Library of Congress heading.

All my headings converted, I began the process of uploading all of the information I had gathered in my Excel spreadsheets into Sound Ideas. I created a procedures document that includes more information on that process, but suffice to say that it involved a lot of copying, pasting, and formatting. But the final product was worth it. The indexed issues are now each tagged with all of the credited authors for that issue and all of the subject headings for that issue. Indexed issues of *The Trail* are now searchable by subject, not just keyword. Each issue page has its own individual index organized alphabetically by subject, which means that people using *The Trail* for research no longer have to sift through every single page of multiple issues to find an article on one subject. This also paves the way for the integration of *The Trail* into larger databases. In one year, the Sound Ideas database will be integrated in WorldCat, the library catalog, which means that this index allows *The Trail* to be searched the same way as any other sources in the catalog. For example, if someone searches for John F. Kennedy in the catalog, the issues of *The Trail* that are tagged with the John F. Kennedy subject heading will be returned as results right alongside books and academic articles.

National Event Coverage in The Trail, 1963-1965

As an example of how the index can be used I undertook a small research project. I had already read the articles so my research was done while I was indexing, as I read every article in more than 40 issues of *The Trail*. I had originally proposed to research the coverage of the many

assassinations that occurred in the United States in the 1960s, such as that of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. I was interested in the response of the campus and students to these major national events. However, there was a simple answer to my question about assassination coverage: they were hardly covered at all. The only one that got some attention was that of John F. Kennedy, about whom there was a one page memorial piece three weeks after his assassination. As often happens with academic research, the source material did not provide and I had to change my research topic somewhat. I decided to broaden out to look at how and why national events in general were covered in *The Trail* from 1963 to 1965.

I found that events were only really covered when they touched campus directly in the 1963-1964 academic year. In my research, I was fortunate enough to interview Bill Baarsma, who was the editor of *The Trail* for two years from 1962 to 1964, as well as a long time faculty member at the University and the former mayor of Tacoma. In the interview I asked him why national events were covered (or not) in the way that they were. He told me that during his tenure as editor students got their national and international news from outside sources such as magazines and radio. Students turned to *The Trail* for news about the school that they did not get from any other sources and did not particularly desire to read about national news there.

Coverage of national events greatly increased in the 1964-1965 academic year, and there are a lot of factors for this. The 1960s were a turbulent time in the United States, and 1964 was one of the most eventful years of the decade. The summer before the academic year was the Freedom Summer, when huge drives to increase African American voter registration in the South were met with a lot of violence by Southern whites. The Civil Rights Act, which provided for total racial equality, was passed on July 2, 1964. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which allowed for military action in Southeast Asia without a formal declaration of war and effectively started

the Vietnam War, was passed on August 7, 1964. Due to these and other events, the University of Puget Sound campus was much more politically aware and active. A chapter of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an organization for college students to participate in the civil rights movement, was founded on campus at the beginning of the 1964-1965 academic year. In *The Trail* itself, there was a weekly column written by alumnus Dennis Flanagan, who was volunteering with SNCC in Mississippi, on the state of the civil rights movement called "Letters from Mississippi". There were more letters to the editor about national events, especially civil rights and the civil rights movement. There were a few surveys published in *The Trail* that dealt with student opinions on the intervention in Vietnam. Finally, 1964 was an election year so the country in general was more politically active. Campus had several prominent visitors during the 1964-1965 academic year. Hubert Humphrey, who was the Vice Presidential candidate at the time, spoke to the campus community on October 1, 1964. Dan Evans, who was the gubernatorial candidate for the state of Washington at the time, visited on October 21, 1964. These visits sparked a great deal of discussion on campus that often took place in *The Trail*.

The conclusion of my research is that when political activity increased nationwide as well as on campus and in Tacoma, *The Trail* began covering national news more heavily. The most important conclusion of my research, though, demonstrates how an index of *The Trail* is useful and necessary. While fortunately I was already reading forty issues for the index, if I had wanted to undertake this project in the days before those issues were indexed, I would have had to read through every single article in those issues to come to the same conclusion as I did for my research. Now, if someone wanted to research this topic, they could search "civil rights

movement” or “John F. Kennedy” and spend their research time much more effectively by only having to look through the relevant articles.

Conclusion

Although I only created an index for two years of the many years of *The Puget Sound Trail*, it will provide a template for the implementation of an index for every single issue, and potentially even other resources that are held on Sound Ideas and in the Archives & Special Collections. This type of index remedies many of the obstacles that are currently blocking easy access to *The Trail* and allows for easier use by researchers, alumni, and casual browsers. It also increases awareness of what is held in the Archives & Special Collections by allowing *The Trail* to be integrated into larger databases like WorldCat and even Google. The index allows this excellent primary source to be utilized to its full potential.