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Submitted on 02/07/2019**

The History of the Emory Black Student Union Records, 2013-2016: A Collaboration Between Student Activists and the Emory University Archives

Due to a series of unjust afflictions imposed by the Emory University community upon Black students, Black students and their allies protested on Emory University's campus beginning in 2013. One of the victories of these protests and collaboration with faculty and staff was the establishment of the Emory Black Student Union (EBSU), a safe space and a Black student organization. Emory University's faculty, staff, and students are allowed to reserve the EBSU for programs and events as long as they support the mission of the EBSU, which is to support and celebrate the Black community at Emory University. The EBSU is an organization that creates and maintains records. These records spanning from 2013-2016 are archived in Emory University's archives as a part of the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (Rose library). This collection is called The Emory Black Student Union records, 2013-2016. It consists of 1 box (.25 linear feet), and it is composed of the following EBSU records: event flyers, meeting minutes, foundational documents that reveal the history of the safe space, and project proposals. The following is an image of the container list for the Emory Black Student union records¹:

¹ Emory University Archives (2016). Emory Black Student Records, 2013-2016. Retrieved January 31, 2019, from Emory Finding Aids, <https://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/eua0282ebsu/printable/>

Container List

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	Campus Life Assessments: Safe Space Lunch and Learn Program, Student Conduct Process, Leadership Emory Qualitative Assessment Report, 2012-2013
1	2	Campus Life Compact
1	3	EBSU 2015-2016 Projects: Bookcase Project and Adobe Suite Workshop
1	4	EBSU Advisory Board Meeting Agendas, Minutes, and Rosters, 2014-2016
1	5	EBSU Meetings with Emory University Administration Minutes: Meeting with President James Wagner, 2015, and Meetings with Dean Ajay Nair, 2015-2016
1	6	EBSU Flyers, 2013-2014
1	7	EBSU Flyers, 2014-2015
1	8	EBSU Flyers, 2015-2016
1	9	EBSU Staff Meeting Agendas, Minutes, and Rosters, 2015-2016
1	10	Emory Black Student Union Description, Mission, Policies, and Vision

History of the EBSU

Due to several events, Black students at Emory University began to protest in 2013. The first event was the racially insensitive remark that University President, James Wagner, made in an article that he wrote in *Emory Magazine*. He compared the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 as an example of the American cultural ability to compromise during hard times². He lacked context, awareness, and sensitivity as he attempted to justify Emory University's recent departmental cuts that disproportionately affected underrepresented students. This infuriated the Black community at Emory. The second event that caused tension on Emory University's campus was an episode that Emory TV aired during *The Dooley Show*. This show used satire to offer commentary on current events. During the date of this particular episode, there was much national talk about affirmative action. *The Dooley Show* anchors joked that, in response to the public's disapproval of affirmative action, they should hunt down underrepresented students at

² Wagner, James (February 2013). "As American as... Compromise". Retrieved May 18, 2016, from Emory Magazine, https://www.emory.edu/EMORY_MAGAZINE/issues/2013/winter/register/president-message/index.html

their colleges and then tar, feather, and lynch them and burn crosses³. The obvious blow to the African-American community in this instance caused Black students and their allies to take action. During the opening of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) exhibit at the Emory University Woodruff Library, which featured an appearance by Senator John Lewis, students protested against the departmental cuts, President Wagner's comments, and *The Dooley Show's* comments⁴. Out of these protests came a collaboration between the Dean of Campus Life, Ajay Nair, and student activists, faculty, and staff. They created a document called the "Campus Life Compact"⁵. Within this document are several proposals made. One of those was the creation of a safe space for Black students. This proposal was accepted and in 2013, the Emory Black Student Union was established⁶.

The Structure of the Emory Black Student Union: An Ecosystem of Productivity

The Emory Black Student Union is a safe space for Black students and a student organization that serves as a gathering space and central organization to Emory University's thirteen Black student organizations. Two Black staff members who worked in Campus Life were appointed to be the EBSU Advisors. They supervised all of the EBSU interns and attended the monthly EBSU Advisory Board meetings and EBSU staff meetings. The Emory Black Student Union Advisory Board consisted of a representative from each of Emory University's thirteen Black student organizations, several Black faculty members, and several Black staff members. During each of these meetings, the EBSU Historian recorded the minutes. These minutes are archived in the Emory Black Student Union records.

³ Karishma Mehrotra (January 18, 2013). 'The Dooley Show' Sparks Controversy. Retrieved May 18, 2016, from The Emory Wheel, <https://emorywheel.com/the-dooley-show-sparks-controversy/>

⁴ Rupsha Basu (February 23, 2013). Civil Rights Exhibit Opens Amid Protests. Retrieved February 7, 2019, from The Emory Wheel, <https://emorywheel.com/civil-rights-exhibit-opens-amid-protests/>

⁵ Ajay Nair, et al. (2013). Campus Life Compact for Building an Inclusive Community at Emory. Retrieved January 31, 2019, from Emory University, http://www.emory.edu/CAMPUS_LIFE/documents/campus_life_compact.pdf

⁶ Rupsha Basu (September 3, 2013). Emory Black Student Union Opens in DUC. Retrieved February 7, 2019, from The Emory Wheel, <https://emorywheel.com/emory-black-student-union-opens-in-duc/>

The EBSU is maintained by a staff of paid, student interns who work ten hours per week. Five of those hours must be EBSU office hours, which means that the intern is physically inside of the EBSU while they are working. This ensures that all students see an EBSU intern during each day for most of the business day. During the EBSU office hours, the intern is able to answer any questions made by EBSU visitors and converse with them to create a sense of community. All EBSU interns must attend the monthly EBSU Advisory Board meetings and the monthly EBSU staff meetings. In addition to these requirements, each intern must lead an initiative to improve the Black community's experience at Emory University. Each intern is responsible for hosting several programs in the EBSU throughout the academic year that supports their initiative. Former initiatives have included: Black and Asian Solidarity at Emory, Black women's mental health, and career counseling for Black students. The list of interns are as follows: the Senior Student Staff Administrator, the Programming Intern, the Reservations/Logistics Intern, Historian/Caucus of Emory Black Alumni Liaison, the Outreach/External Affairs Intern, the Social Media/Communications Manager, and the Resources Manager.

The EBSU is structured in such a way that it has an ecosystem of productivity. By observing each intern's job responsibilities, one can see how this ecosystem was structured to foster continuous sustainable success. The interns' general job descriptions must be observed⁷. The general job descriptions are as follows: the Senior Student Staff Administrator is a college senior who oversees the other interns' projects, maintains the EBSU email, and governs the EBSU Advisory Board and staff meetings. The Programming Intern serves as the chair of the Programming Committee, chairs the annual Trailblazers program, and coordinates monthly Black organization calendars. The annual Trailblazers program is an event that takes place in the

⁷ All of the information concerning the EBSU interns' job descriptions is gathered from a document that was emailed to the author. The document has the following citation:
EBSU staff (date unknown). EBSU Intern Descriptions 2015-2016. Retrieved March 28, 2017, from email

EBSU in the spring semester, which celebrates the Black community at Emory. During this festive event, awards and scholarships are given to faculty, staff, and students, and the Legacy Project, which is a multimedia presentation about a specific aspect of Black history at Emory, is showcased. The Reservations/Logistics Intern manages all EBSU reservations and manages all catering for the EBSU Advisory Board meetings. The Historian and Caucus of Emory Black Alumni (CEBA) Liaison records the minutes of the EBSU Advisory Board meetings and EBSU staff meetings, collects and maintains the EBSU program flyers, photographs, and videos, maintains a relationship with CEBA and collaborates with this group during Homecoming activities, directs the EBSU Legacy Project, and collaborates with the Emory University archivist to archive the EBSU's records. During the 2015-2016 academic year, I served as the EBSU's first Historian and CEBA Liaison. The Outreach/External Affairs Intern strengthens the EBSU's relationship with Emory University's faculty, staff and students. The Social Media/Communications Manager maintains the EBSU Campus Life website, EBSU social media pages, and serves as the liaison to *The Emory Wheel* (Emory University's newspaper) and other media companies and organizations. Lastly, the Resources Manager maintains the order and cleanliness of the EBSU's physical space and manages the scrolling marketing and calendars on the televisions in the Emory Black Student Union.

The Collaboration Between the EBSU Historian and the Emory University Archivist

The EBSU Historian is a student, fellow creator, and custodian, of the EBSU records. The act of recording and storing the electronic minutes of the EBSU's Advisory Board and Staff meeting, program flyers, photographs, and videos helps them to fulfil their multifaceted role. As the EBSU's Historian during the 2015-2016 academic year, I stored all of the records in the digital storehouse, Emory Box, where they could be accessed by the EBSU advisors and interns.

I contacted the university archivist, John Bence, and informed him of my desire to have the EBSU records archived. This started our collaboration, which led to the archiving of the EBSU records into the Emory University Archives. The only prior knowledge that I had with the Emory University archives, let alone, archives in general, was through the archival research that I had conducted in the summer before. John knew me because of this research that I had been doing. He assisted me with finding relevant collections for my research for my major discipline, apart from the EBSU Historian duties. I believe that this rapport that we had with one another made it easier for us to collaborate with one another faster and more efficiently. I was able to inform my EBSU colleagues of John as well as his archival collecting policy during our staff meetings. Also, I was able to inform John of the EBSU's vision for our collection and what we wanted to be included within the collection. John and I had a series of meetings to discuss these things.

During one of our meetings, John introduced me to a web crawler that he wanted to use to crawl the EBSU's Facebook page, but, he showed me that there were technological limitations. Not only was the web crawler new and vulnerable to glitches, there were privacy concerns for the EBSU Facebook page users and community members. Did we want the names of the EBSU Facebook page's users accessible by the public? Since the EBSU is an entity of Emory University, and this was the Emory University archives, John decided to archive the EBSU Facebook page, given that the EBSU and all of its social media is connected to Emory University. Further dialogue needs to take place between the EBSU and the Emory University archives to comb through this touchy subject. This reveals the realities of student activism as well. Though the EBSU was established because of the labor of Black students and their allies, the actual EBSU is an organization and physical space that is owned by Emory University, not

by the students. Thus, how do we truly view the EBSU and its products, events, and social media?

The meetings between me and John were fruitful. Another decision that John made was to print all of the EBSU records' items, and I agreed with this decision. Originally, all of these items were born digital, thus, an EBSU records *digital* collection would show the records' authentic state, but, Emory University's digital library was not capable of housing that type of collection at the time. Thus, John explained that although printing the items would transform the items away from their authentic state, having the items' presence in the collection for researchers and the community to use is still valuable. I also emailed every person whose name was listed on any item in the archival collection, giving them the choice to have their name and any other identifying information redacted. Once I finished that phase and gained everyone's approvals to be included in the collection, I was ready to give the items to John. John instructed me to place all of the items in a box, and he would pick them up from the EBSU. When he picked up the items, I remember seeing the pride on the face of the Senior Student Staff Administrator. I, too, felt great pride, because the EBSU's history was being archived in the University's archive. I felt as though the archives meant permanence, therefore, I felt as though no matter what turbulence would come in the future as far as race relations on Emory University's campus are concerned, the EBSU records would remain in the archive, for all to use and learn from. I definitely felt like my work as the EBSU Historian was completed after that moment.

What Is Not Included in the Emory Black Student Records, 2013-2016 Collection

The other EBSU social media platforms, including GroupMe, is not included in the EBSU records due to the University Archives' digital limitations and privacy concerns for students. GroupMe was the primary communication medium for many undergraduate Black

students at Emory. The GroupMe channel, which changed names, but at one point, had the name, “WATTBBatEmory”. In this channel, many important conversations in the Black community about the Black LGBTQIA+ community and Black women students at Emory took place. Factions and alliances in the Black community at Emory were formed before and after these critical and intimate conversations. The channel was for current students *only*, therefore, I and other alumni, are no longer members of the channel. I respect this rule, because I realize that the channel was for current events that were affecting the present Black community at Emory University. Of course, though, this rule may have consequences. It may prevent the conversations from being recorded and archived and referenced in the future. However, due to the vulnerable information that was (or is) shared on this GroupMe channel, I am concerned about protecting the privacy of students who are members of this GroupMe channel. Parallel to the concerns about preservation and storage for digital media and social media archival collections is the privacy of the persons who are participants in the social media. John also shared this concern. Thus, we both decided to narrow the scope of what was collected in the EBSU records. The Black student demands of 2015 are also not included in this collection. I assume these demands are not archived in the collection because they are already well documented in *The Emory Wheel* and *The Demands*⁸. One way, though, to gather the information that was shared through social media is through oral histories. The interviewees can visit their own social media pages and tell their own stories while deciding which information to include and omit from their oral histories.

Processing the EBSU records, 2013-2016 Collection During a Summer Internship

⁸ Black Students of Emory (December 2, 2015). Black Students at Emory: List of Demands. Retrieved February 7, 2019, from The Emory Wheel, <https://emorywheel.com/black-students-at-emory-list-of-demands/> ; WeTheProtesters (2015). Campus Demands. Retrieved January 31, 2019, from The Demands, <https://www.thedemands.org/>

Although my work as the EBSU Historian completed in May 2016 when I graduated from Emory University, I was presented with a summer paid internship opportunity to begin that year. During this paid internship, I would work as the EBSU records collection Project Archivist. Again, this labor would be *paid*. I accepted this position. During this internship, I not only processed the EBSU records and created its finding aid, but I also wrote a blog post for the Rose Library, communicating the importance of this archival collection⁹. My blog post was honest and bold. I view this blog post as communicating the authentic experience of a Black Emory University student to an audience that is predominately White. Sure, John Bence could have written this blog post, but, the post needed to be written by a Black student who would communicate their experience in order to show the context of this collection and why its presence within the Emory University archives is revolutionary. In fact, being hired to curate and process the EBSU records collection was revolutionary; it allowed a Black student to choose which items to include and exclude and which words to use to describe the collection in the finding aid.

This internship was a launching pad for my career, which I decided to be in the field of archives. I had gained real professional archival experience. Due to my wonderful experiences with conducting archival research and collecting the EBSU records, I decided to become an archivist. I had committed to attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Master of Science in Library and Information Science program, which I would begin in fall 2016. With my Master's degree and years of archiving experience in my hands, I am equipped to reach out to my communities and help them with recordkeeping and archiving (In fact, my experience as the EBSU Historian and the EBSU Records Project Archivist can inform the creation of a

⁹ NaVosha Copeland (July 26, 2016). Guest Post: The Black Student Union Collection. Retrieved February 7, 2019, from Rose Library Blog <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/marbl/2016/07/26/black-student-union-collection/>

pipeline for underrepresented groups to enter into the Library and Information Science field. More of this will be discussed in the conclusion.) I realize now that during my entire experience of being the EBSU's Historian and the processor of the EBSU records, I was a student activist as well as an archivist, and I viewed my archival processing as activism. In fact, during this experience, I decided to become an archivist to further fight for justice by enriching the collective memory and assisting marginalized communities with archiving their records.

Conclusion

Although I made the commitment to be a student activist during my first year of college, and my commitment to activism was one of the primary motivations for being the EBSU's Historian and CEBA Liaison, the paid incentive for my labor activism further motivated me to do this type of work. This is because during my Emory University experience, many of my peers and I felt as though the University benefited from much of our unpaid labor. Therefore, the presence of consistent pay from the EBSU and the Rose Library was refreshing and it helped me to focus on my work, rather than on the cost of living. Since my involvement in student activism was the primary motivation for my work, perhaps, university archives should center their outreach, oral history projects, and archiving projects around events (such as: student protests, moments of controversy on the campus, etc.) because events have the momentum needed to unify people and propel people to work. Also, I was the EBSU's Historian. I think that university archives' staff members should conduct outreach with the historians of student organizations (that have missions to help marginalized groups of people) in order to foster more fruitful collaboration between students and university archives as well as to increase the volume of student activists' papers that are preserved in their universities' archives (given that the students *want* their papers to be archived in them). I believe that every student should have the right to *not*

be represented in their university's archive, just as much as they should have the right to be represented in them.

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