

**TO: Carol Christ, Susan Bourque, and the Committee on Mission and Priorities**  
**FROM: Sherrill Redmon, Director of the Sophia Smith Collection**  
**SUBJECT: Proposal for Strategic Planning (SSC #1)**  
**DATE: October 16, 2006**

The Sophia Smith Collection (SSC) is an established, vibrant Smith resource that can, with a little imagination and minimal additional resources, be used more effectively to provide learning opportunities for today's students. In 1942, Smith College created the first women's history archive in the country. Today, the SSC consists of more than 550 collections of personal and family papers and organizational records that document U. S. social history and women's experiences and ideas from the colonial era to the present, from anti-slavery and socialism to current struggles around welfare rights and sexual autonomy.

The SSC is, in effect, a world-class laboratory for inquiry and discovery in the social sciences and humanities. No other U. S. liberal arts college boasts the SSC's volume and variety of photos, diaries, letters, speeches, musical compositions, newsletters, meeting minutes, and other primary sources. The staff consists of archivists steeped in stories these collections tell and historians with years of research and teaching experience. In addition, a successful ongoing diversity initiative is yielding oral histories and papers of Latina, African American and Native American women, working-class organizers, lesbian activists and cultural workers. These new materials speak to the realities of an increasingly diverse student body. They also suggest Praxis and other partnerships for community learning and contain the components of curriculum units structured to sustain difficult dialogues across race and class barriers.

At present, fewer than 10% of Smith students benefit from this exceptional resource. The SSC is better known nationally than on campus. More 5 C and other regional faculty than Smith faculty choose to expose students to the Collection's opportunities for individual research and collective engagement with the historical roots of contemporary issues.

The SSC's depth and breadth can support learning across the liberal arts: architecture, landscape studies, education, race relations, art history, anthropology, national and international health and population policy, poverty and welfare, sports, immigration, labor organizing, urban politics, writing, spiritual traditions, and social movements. Recent conversations indicate that faculty would welcome demonstrations of successful classroom uses of the SSC and ample time to explore the archive for ways of incorporating primary sources into their own teaching. SSC

resources can also support programming by student groups such as the Smith Association for Class Awareness and the Center for Gender and Sexuality, among others.

The SSC welcomes discussion of these and other possibilities:

### **Research Certificate Program**

See separate proposal (SSC #2) for a sequence of credit courses to lead students through stages of research: formulating questions, finding and evaluating secondary and primary sources, crafting arguments, presenting conclusions.

### **Additional curriculum development**

- **Capstone projects.** The SSC could support many more advanced projects than it does, including traditional honors theses and seminar papers, production of historical documentary films and campus or online exhibits, and exploration of oral history as interactive research.
- **Teaching/learning options.** We propose workshops and stipends to assist faculty in the development of unique classroom applications of archival materials, including potential STRIDE student partnerships.

**Oral history.** Building on our ongoing Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, the SSC could offer instruction in the theory, ethics, and practice of oral history, either as a semester course, an intensive workshop, or a module for incorporation into existing classes.

**Praxis.** Students might spend time at the SSC, exploring careers in archival work and historic preservation. Or, after an SSC orientation to archival practices, students might work with one of our 30 national and local social change organizations, assisting with records management and drafting a history of the group. Upon returning to campus, the interns could use the Collection to produce an exhibit on campus and/or on the organization's web site.

**Kahn connections.** Rick Fantasia has asked the SSC a) to participate in the Kahn Institute's summer student research workshop next year and b) to collaborate in developing a year-long regional ethnography project in the Pioneer Valley that will include various methods of community documentation, with the data to be preserved at the SSC for future research.

**Smith Center for Women's History in Action: outreach and community-based learning.**

The SSC's long term plan, currently being drafted in collaboration with Gloria Steinem, Loretta Ross, and the Ms. Foundation, is for a Center that includes an activist-in-residence program, a permanent oral history program, and a school for organizers where today's activists tap into knowledge of their foremothers, build insights from the past into current strategies for change, and acquire basic archival skills to preserve the evidence of their own lives for future generations.

**Additional resources required:** The SSC staff is stretched thin. Developing the Collection from an underutilized resource into an integral part of classroom and co-curricular life will require additional support to shore up core functions and expand staff responsibilities for teaching, advising, consulting, and outreach.