

Documentaries show progress students make

by: [Alexandra Burton](#) on August 30, 2012

In a small, soundproof room with a black backdrop, stories have been shared, tears have been shed and fists have pumped in triumph.

U & You unveiled three documentaries on Tuesday that marked the beginning of a video project to study the progress of student experience and create archives for future research. Researchers will use the video histories to enhance the student experience at the U.

Alison Regan, head of scholarship and education services at the U, said the interview collection will be an archive of student lives. Students can volunteer for a 15-minute interview each semester to share their story as they advance through their education.



Student Veteran's Project presented documentaries Tuesday afternoon at the Gould Auditorium.

Marie Paiva, a fine arts librarian, called the project “fantastic.”

“I don’t know how many universities are documenting student voices and archiving them for future use by researchers,” she said.

Research isn’t the only aim of the new video memoirs. The documentaries are also being used as a tool for “student recruitment and retainment,” said Amy Jensen, a recent graduate in anthropology who produced one of the documentaries as a MUSE intern last spring, and now works with U & You.

Her documentary focused on the stories of 12 nontraditional students who are trying to find a place at the U.

“The hope is when prospective students contact the U they will stumble upon these students’ voices and be inspired to push through,” Jensen said.

Jensen, who was a nontraditional student herself, said she didn’t realize 54 percent of U students shared her status until she worked as an assistant at Returning to the U, a program for former U students who were not able to finish their degree.

“I really wasn’t a lone fish in the ocean of students,” Jensen said.

For her, video memoirs are a step in giving nontraditional students an identity of their own. She said a feeling of not belonging can sometimes keep people from finishing degrees.

“We feel like we’re the only one in the classroom who is not 22 years old,” she said.

The stories told in the film brought chuckles from viewers. In Jensen’s documentary, Mary Andolsek, a senior in human development, described her anxiety about returning to school.

“I felt like I was old and [my daughter] said, ‘Mom, it doesn’t matter — you’re going to be old anyway,’” she said.

In addition to the documentary about nontraditional students, the program showed an interview with a veteran student. Plans are underway to do segments on students from a variety of backgrounds, including American Indian students, disabled students and undocumented immigrant students, who would be audio recorded anonymously.

About 25 students have conducted interviews thus far. Organizers of the project said students can use their personal documentaries in graduate school and on job applications.

“It’s a new way of showing who you are and your abilities,” Jensen said.

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