

Student-faculty grant leads UWO history student to Hollywood

by Kristin Stockheimer - Thursday, April 10, 2014

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When you think of Hollywood, you might think of celebrities, glitz and glamour; but for one University of Wisconsin Oshkosh student, the California hot spot meant research. Yes, research.

UW Oshkosh history major Anna Yarish isn't your typical student; her passion for and satisfaction found in research recently led her well beyond classroom walls to study the lives of women in Hollywood during the 1940s.

When recently awarded a UW Oshkosh Student-Faculty Collaborative Grant of \$3,000, she immersed herself in her research by heading to Beverly Hills for 10 days last January to study at the Margaret Herrick Library's archives.

Yarish was ecstatic given the opportunity to look through personal papers, scrapbooks, receipts and photos of films from actress Katharine Hepburn, costume designer Edith Head, screenwriter Sara Y. Mason and film director Alfred Hitchcock.

"It was so amazing to take a personal look into numerous people's lives," Yarish said. "It was an incredible experience that people overlook all the time. Going there made everything clear to me and made me realize how much my passion meant to me."

The trip gave Yarish a chance to apply research in a setting that she never thought possible and do so with the support of UW Oshkosh History Professor Stephen Kercher. By having Kercher as a mentor, Yarish has been able to stay on the right track throughout her research.

"Anna demonstrates the real vital qualities the University supports in research within humanities," Kercher said. "She is a very motivated and conscientious researcher with a real independent spirit."

Originally, Yarish applied for the grant as a way to differentiate her academic experience from other students applying for graduate school. However, her experience ended up being much more. It was her first time "flying solo," finding a host family to live with while in California and learning how to create her own itinerary.

"I would be in the archives six hours a day," she said. "The rest of the time, I was soaking up the sunshine, getting to see as much of Hollywood as I could. I was researching by day and seeing LA (Los Angeles) by night," Yarish said.

She thoroughly enjoyed staying with her host family and had a blast discovering and uncovering hidden secrets throughout her research.

"With history you never know what you're going to find out," Yarish said. "The library had such great

materials that I ended up having an epiphany while I was there, and I fell in love with Edith Head, which transformed my research."

Head was a legendary Hollywood costume designer who, over the course of her career, racked up eight Academy Awards. Her first film was 1949's "The Heiress" and launched a career in the movies spanning well into the 1970s.

Taking the time to refocus her research has taken time, as has another project that Yarish is working on with another history major, Alexandra Rugger. The duo is investigating feminism in the 1960s and 1970s by interviewing women from the time period.

"One thing that makes Anna stand out is that, although she is very serious about the work, she has a genuinely good time doing it," Rugger said. "It really demonstrates how passionate she is. She doesn't just do it to plump her resume; she does it because she loves it."

In order to keep up with all of this research, Yarish spends much of her time in Polk Library archives reading through personal newspapers and data. UW Oshkosh's Archivist Joshua Ranger sees Yarish there often and said she makes good use of her time.

"The favorite part of my job is when I see that moment when a student stops just studying history and instead starts doing history," Ranger said.

Ranger said Yarish has an excellent opportunity to research in a campus this size because the Area Research Center network with the Wisconsin Historical Society allows researchers to borrow archival collections from network partners. And those collections include the rich movie history materials of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research (WCRTR). The only other archives in the country that similarly allows its patrons to borrow from its resources is in the University of Missouri system.

Currently, Yarish is thoughtfully constructing a speech to present at the UW Oshkosh Celebration of Scholarship, a campus research showcase that features scholarly work, projects and creative activities that give students the opportunity to be judged on their presentation, posters or visual art.

Yarish presents her speech on April 24. Meanwhile, she also is gradually compiling more research for a paper that she plans to write this summer for submission to *Oshkosh Scholar* and other publications.

Learn more:

- [Celebration of Scholarship](#)