Impact Report:

Discover How the Gale-CLGBTH Fellowship Brought LGBTQ+ History to Life in a High School Classroom

A 12th Grade Government Teacher Invites Students to Explore the Evolution of LGBTQ+ Rights with Gale’s Archives of Sexuality and Gender

MEET THE SCHOLAR

As one of five scholars awarded a fellowship from Gale and the Committee on LGBT History (CLGBTH) in 2022, Trevor Ladner used digital humanities tools to enrich his research on LGBTQ+ teachers who fought for their rights to due process, equal protection, and freedom of speech. As a part of his research, Ladner explored archival materials to design a unit on civil rights in the court system for use in his 12th grade U.S. government course.

All Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellowship recipients were granted access to Gale’s Archives of Sexuality and Gender and Gale Digital Scholar Lab (the Lab) for a six-month period of research. The Archives of Sexuality and Gender is the largest historical collection available in support of the knowledge of gender studies and sexuality, spanning from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. The Lab is a cloud-based digital humanities tool that helps researchers tell impactful visual stories with data.

Fellows received training on how to use the text- and data-mining tools available in the Lab to explore the Archives of Sexuality and Gender and advance their work using digital humanities methods. Read on to see how Ladner used this powerful cloud-based platform to design a high school government course that examined the experiences of LGBTQ+ teachers as they fought for equal rights in the later twentieth century.
EXTENSIVE MATERIAL AVAILABLE THROUGH THE ARCHIVES OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Ladner’s project examined four key areas under the broader umbrella of employment rights of LGBTQ+ teachers:

1. The legal system’s role in interpreting LGBTQ+ rights
2. The role of local media in covering LGBTQ+ experiences
3. The lived experiences of individuals who took legal action against discriminatory practices
4. Historical parallels to contemporary government actions

The most valuable aspect of using the Archives of Sexuality and Gender, Ladner says, was the depth of the available materials. “Going into this project, I initially wanted to focus on legal rights of LGBTQ+ people more broadly,” he explains. “My focus narrowed due to the extensive number of available materials.”

With the wealth of materials available, Ladner refined his research to focus on cases dealing with LGBTQ+ teachers’ employment rights, to help his students learn about civil rights and civil liberties.

“I am especially hopeful to see this work expand in the digital space to keep up with current tech trends in education and to reach students in places where there may be limited access to queer archives.”

TAILORING RESULTS TO ENSURE RELEVANCE WITH HELP FROM GALE DIGITAL SCHOLAR LAB

As Ladner refined the scope of material for his course, he used Gale’s Archives of Sexuality and Gender to uncover the most-relevant materials—primarily consisting of articles, essays, legal files, and newsletters from the 1960s to the 1990s.

“I found the build tool to be the most valuable tool in the Lab for accessing materials that could be used by my students for primary source analysis or research,” Ladner says. “I found the keyword search and filters to be extremely effective for narrowing down my search results to relevant materials. I made great use of the ‘search within’ function to look for specific legal cases.”

To gather documents from his search into a more concentrated set to ensure relevance, Ladner used the clean and build steps. When it came to analyzing these documents, he states, “I used topic modeling to pull out specific documents that were more tailored to my research question.”

After using the Archives of Sexuality and Gender to identify relevant legal cases, Ladner summarized the facts of the case, the legal issues involved, and the decision of the court. The scholar explains, “This gives students a broad overview to examine what are the common legal challenges to cases of discrimination, identify where courts expanded or limited minority rights, and understand the decades-long process of securing these rights.”

“I was able to use the information from the archives to [help] create a timeline of over 20 court cases from 1969 to 1998 in which LGBTQ+ teachers have challenged employment discrimination.”
CLASSROOM APPLICABILITY: CONTEXTUALIZING HISTORY WITH A HUMAN APPROACH

In some instances, a certain level of information was already available online regarding the legal cases that Ladner studied. The Archives of Sexuality and Gender, however, was critical to bringing new life, humanity, and context to those cases—in addition to helping fill factual gaps. The articles that Ladner uncovered within the archives also helped improve the student experience.

“I find historical news articles to be more accessible to K-12 students who may be digging into essential questions or enduring understandings around historical events, rather than getting lost in the legal processes of a case text,” Ladner comments.

“Through these news articles in which plaintiffs who challenged discrimination were interviewed, students can ‘hear’ from the plaintiffs themselves on how these individuals’ dignity was affected by unjust termination, the critical role of openly LGBTQ+ identified teachers, and the importance of advocating for one’s legal rights even in a social context of pervasive prejudice.”

“I gravitated toward the media coverage by LGBTQ+ publications on the legal cases involving LGBTQ+ teachers, which illuminated the stories of the individuals involved in those cases.”

“My work in the [Gale] digital archive has invigorated my interest in doing more of this type of research in the future—both as an educator and as an aspiring historian.”


“Transsexual Teacher Settles with School Board for Back Pay,” by Tim Crowe, PHILADELPHIA—After a 10-month fight for repayment to what they had been used on,” but her attorney, Jack Fierl, was quoted in the Philadelphia Inquirer June 15 as saying, “If we find another plaintiff, we will go back to court” and settle the issue.

According to Brian, Ashlie had received satisfactory ratings from her principal and department supervisors. She had the backing of her fellow teachers in the Chester Upland Education Association, as well as her students, but parents of the middle school students objected to her presence after the sex change.

In the bulletin interview, Ashlie conceded that she had had many difficult moments during the last 10 months. “Nothing can compensate for what they (the school) have taken from me. I know people don’t have the rights to do that. That is what I was upset about. I was a good teacher.”

After the suit, only $50 to $100 to her name after her transsexual operation was done August 4, 1977 in an unknown surgery.

Access to Gale’s Archives of Sexuality and Gender and the Lab helped Ladner produce a usable unit plan for his high school government course, which takes students beyond the headlines and encourages them to develop critical-thinking skills. With access to multiple, disparate sources conveniently curated in a single research environment, he was able to save time and dive deeper into the material.

“Gale provides significant accessibility to materials that one may otherwise have to travel a long distance [to find] and spend hours sifting through a physical archive in order to obtain and curate,” the high school teacher shares.

“My work in the [Gale] digital archive has invigorated my interest in doing more of this type of research in the future—both as an educator and as an aspiring historian.”
Interested in learning more about CLGBTH?

Gale Digital Scholar Lab

Find more information about the Archives of Sexuality and Gender at gale.com/primary-sources/archives-of-sexuality-and-gender

Find more details about CLGBTH, including the society’s initiatives and events, at clgbthistory.org