

SEPCHE

Nurturing Student Scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty-Student Undergraduate Research Project

Research Project: HISTORICIZING THE COAST: POSTCARDS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Discipline: HISTORY

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Project Description: For this project, students will undertake research based on a primary source collection of thousands of postcards from the turn of the century to the present. These postcards capture images of various American coastal destinations and provide an insight into the social, cultural, and environmental world of twentieth century Americans. Students may choose to focus on any number of coastal locations, but will be especially encouraged to focus on regionally-significant areas (including the coasts of New Jersey and Delaware). During their research summer, the students, with the guidance of their faculty mentor, will research not only the postcards but other primary source materials that place the postcards into the proper historical context. Most significantly, students will have access to an immense postcard collection not previously examined by historians or social scientists.

Research questions explored in this project will focus on understanding the intersection between American society and their environment. In particular, students will strive to examine the meanings American tourists placed on their vacation environments during the twentieth century. In other words, students will attempt to understand how American constructed their environments and what those constructions meant at a specific historical moment.

Student Task(s): Students will research coastal postcards from popular resort locations, comparing the postcards in the collection to understand change and historical trends as well as doing external primary and secondary research on the locations and time periods.

Student Time Commitment: 10 hours per week for 11 weeks

Student Learning Outcome: Student will gain an understanding of 20th century social, cultural, and environmental history. The student will also learn significant primary document research skills.

Expected Student Product: Students will produce a comprehensive report placing the studied postcards in historical context. This report will allow them to craft papers for the Fall Symposium and Honors Conference. Students will also contribute to comprehensive conference papers and ongoing studies of coastal development.

Other Expected Outcomes: Students will gain an exposure to issues of coastal development and the use of visual images in historical analysis.