

The IDEA Fund Endorsed Award: Bicentennial Oral History Initiative

[The UVA IDEA Fund](#) is excited to offer its 2018 Endorsed Award to the Oral History Initiative. This award honors an existing University project or program that actively is seeking support and that aims to bring long-term, institutional change to the University in the areas of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and/or Access. For this project these funds were vital to supporting two major components of the initiative's pilot phase: the WTJU mobile studio refurbishment, and the hiring of a Design Thinking intern to move the initiative forward strategically and financially, in partnership with the Bicentennial Commission and Alumni Association.

Oral History Initiative Mission Statement

This initiative seeks to chronicle a more personal and inclusive history of the University by collecting and sharing the unheard stories of University students, staff, faculty, alumni, & Charlottesville community members who have contributed to its complex institutional narrative. With the ongoing participation of members from across the University and Charlottesville communities, we hope to encourage an intergenerational transfer of knowledge and a more comprehensive, diversified collection of stories that enrich and carry our University's history forward.

Pilot Phase

The Oral History Initiative has been working to implement pilot programs funded in large part by the UVa Bicentennial. These pilots will begin a new conversation around the University's history. Instead of a singular written perspective, the conversation is dynamic and reflective -- providing students an opportunity to dig deeper into the history of their University, and alumni a chance to share their memories and insights.



Summer 2018 Highlight: Reunions Oral Histories

In partnership with the Darden School of Business and the Alumni Association, we conducted oral history interviews across three Reunion weekends. Throughout these pilots:

- 65 alumni were interviewed.
- 25 students conducted interviews, working a total of 100+ hours.
- The initiative collected stories recounting the University's coeducation and integration, among other themes.

"I was really honored to have been asked to participate. It was an emotional experience (which I didn't expect). The young woman that interviewed me did an awesome job. We actually sat and talked for a few minutes after the taping, and I enjoyed that conversation so much."

- Curry Graduate, Class of 1978

"The thought of listening to stories from UVA alum[ni] that attended the University during tumultuous times was fascinating to me...having used oral history in my own research of the university (the French House), I knew that these stories would be invaluable resources for future researchers. I was excited to be a part of that."

- Student Volunteer, Class of 2019

Other ongoing pilots include the WTJU Radio Oral History and critical interviews of individuals who experienced historic times and challenges at the University. One such interview was conducted by WTJU with John Merchant, the first African American alumnus of the Law School.

The IDEA Fund Endorsed Award is truly enabling the Oral History initiative to make a difference at UVa. Moving forward, we are hoping to forge new partnerships, including with the Commission on the University in the Age of Segregation, alumni affinity groups, faculty, community members, and more.