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Interim Director, Matthew Jacobs, Ph.D.  
Samuel Proctor Oral History Program  
241 Pugh Hall, P.O. Box 115215  
The University of Florida | Gainesville, FL 32611

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to apply for the position of Director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida. With a Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri conferred June 2024, extensive experience in oral history processing, archival management, and public history outreach, as well as a strong background in research and teaching, I am excited about the opportunity to lead and contribute to one of the nation's premier oral history programs at the University of Florida. This position aligns with my scholarly expertise and commitment to public-facing history, interdisciplinary collaboration, and innovative archival practices.

Throughout my career, I have developed an expertise in oral history, particularly in the areas of collection, preservation, and digital dissemination. As project lead for Madison Historical, a countywide digital archive, I supervised the collection of more than a dozen interviews and processed over 70 oral histories alongside digital image collections for local museums and repositories. This experience taught me the importance of engaging communities in the preservation of their own histories and provided me with the leadership skills necessary to manage large-scale archival projects. Skills I hope to continue to grow and develop through community outreach and educating my local community on important role oral history plays on a scholastic level, but also to build community by bringing diverse people from across the community together. Additionally, my early work as an archivist technician at the U.S. National Archives further deepened my understanding of the technical and ethical considerations involved in preserving a wide variety of materials and mediums, a background I would bring to managing SPOHP's sizeable collection.

In addition to my practical experience in oral history, my academic research is deeply rooted in archival work and the study of transatlantic communication and scientific knowledge production. My book project, *Reciprocities Market* explores how colonial-era and early national communication networks facilitated the exchange of both knowledge and goods, shaping early American society by tracing the life, travels and writings of John and William Bartram. Through my use of social network analysis and traditional archival methods, I have demonstrated the ways in which local scientific knowledge, communicated materially, orally and textually, was instrumental in shaping the early

American market, intellectual and physical landscape. The University of Florida's location is ideal, as it also allows for student site visits and field research along the Bartram Heritage Corridor. This work reflects my ability to bridge broader scholarly debates on knowledge economies, public memory, and cultural exchange—an interdisciplinary approach that I would further develop as Director of SPOHP.

Moreover, I bring a strong track record of external funding and grant writing at the personal and institutional levels, an essential skill for this position. I have secured personal research fellowships from institutions such as the Huntington Library, the American Philosophical Society, Florida Atlantic University, and the Winterthur Museum, which have supported my own research and collaborative projects. Additionally, my certification in Museum Studies included formal training in grant writing for large-scale institutional grants, an invaluable skill in securing funding for community-engaged history projects and institutions. At SPOHP, I plan to build on these skills to secure grants that support both ongoing oral history collection and innovative public history programming, ensuring that SPOHP remains a leader in the field.

My experience as an educator also aligns with the teaching and mentorship responsibilities necessary for this role. Since 2019, I have taught courses ranging from large surveys to upper-level seminars at both McKendree University and the University of Missouri. My teaching philosophy emphasizes experiential learning, student engagement, and the integration of digital humanities tools. For instance, in my *Nature's Nation* environmental history course, students work in groups to use narrative records like oral histories, to create digital story maps and using sources to explore complex historical narratives. This pedagogical approach fosters critical thinking and allows students to connect with history in meaningful ways—skills I would impart to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Florida through SPOHP-related coursework and mentoring.

In addition to my work in the classroom, I am deeply committed to continuing to work in public history and community outreach. Serving as an executive member of the O'Fallon Historic Preservation Commission, I actively generated local history programming, landmark nominations, and community engagement efforts. This public-facing experience, combined with academic expertise, equips me to lead SPOHP in expanding its outreach efforts, fostering collaborations with other departments, and building new partnerships with communities and institutions.

The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program has long been a cornerstone of oral history scholarship. I am thrilled at the prospect of contributing to its continued growth. I would bring my interdisciplinary research, leadership in oral history, and commitment to public engagement to this role, ensuring that SPOHP thrives as both a scholarly resource and a dynamic platform for community history. Thank you for considering my application, I look forward to contributing to the future of SPOHP.

Sincerely,  
Shannan Catherine Mason, Ph.D.