Workshop Title: Autobiography as a Primary Source

Summary: This workshop teaches students about the differences between primary and secondary sources and uses the autobiography as a starting point in looking at some of the critical concerns in evaluating the reliability of primary sources.

Locations: Ideally, the workshop would take place in Crossett Library so that students could retrieve books from the collection. But that is not an absolute necessity as long as students have laptops and can access the library's online catalog and databases.

Term: Spring

Specific Knowledge Outcomes:
- Be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
- Gain experience in evaluating sources with critical insight.
- See primary sources as historical evidence and understand their role in contributing to the ongoing development of historical knowledge.
- Locate useful and relevant secondary sources

Activity: The workshop begins with library instruction about what constitutes a primary source, and what are the differences between primary and secondary sources. After a discussion of some of the possible pitfalls of autobiographies or memoirs as primary sources, students break up into groups of 2 or 3. Each group chooses an autobiography or memoir from the library catalog. Using OneSearch, databases, or Google Scholar, students identify 2 or 3 secondary sources related to the subject of the autobiography. The class reconvenes to share its findings.

Questions for students to consider for primary sources:

- Who created this source? When was it created? Why was it created?
- What was happening at the time this source was created?
- Is this source credible? Does its creator seem to be a reliable information source?

Questions for students to consider for secondary sources:

- Is this source scholarly or popular? How can you tell?
- Who is the author? What do we know about the author's background?
- Who is the intended audience for this source?
- When the author makes a claim, is it supported by evidence?
- What did you find convincing, or unconvincing, about the author's argument?