

Cultural Protocols in Latino Communities

Presentation by Bob Diaz for IRLS 557: Documenting Diverse
Cultures and Communities

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Before I became a librarian at the age of 27, I was a...

Student (BA in Psychology, minor in Sociology)
Worker (10 years at Fry's Food Stores)
Activist (UFW support group, others)
Musician (cello, saxophone, guitar and flute)
Actor (Teatro Libertad)
Radio programmer (KXCI Radio 1983-1986)



What these experiences taught me...

- Self confidence. Risk taking. Public speaking. Customer service skills.
- There is no “one” community, but a variety of sectors in a community, even an ethnic community. There are actually many communities.
- Politics is a very volatile topic. It brings out the best and worst in people. It’s very personal. Mixing art and politics can be problematic. If you do it, be aware of the pitfalls. It can also be exhilarating!
- There is highbrow and there is lowbrow and a lot of “in-between”. Hi-tone, lo del en medio, and rasquachi. All have their place and purpose.

Why I chose librarianship...

- I wanted to change the world!!
- I wanted to turn people on to reading. Children, especially.
- I wanted to help people improve their lives through the acquisition of knowledge.
- I wanted to teach and provide reference service.
- I wanted to ensure that libraries housed diverse collections.
- I wanted to bring diverse communities to the library.
- I wanted to always be learning new things.

My first job: Nogales Santa Cruz County Library. January-August, 1987.

- Children's librarian, provided general reference.
- Built collections, with a focus on children's materials.
- Did pre-school story hour, played my guitar and sang songs. Wrote songs.
- Did outreach to the schools. Taught school children how to use the library.
- Applied for a grant for community programming. It was funded!
- Organized a summer reading program.
- Went on television to promote the library.

My next job: The University of Michigan Undergraduate Library

- I was a public services librarian and provided reference, instruction, and had collection development responsibilities. Held position from August, 1987 through May, 1992.
- I participated in a number of workshops on “diversity” and “racism”.
- I became a member of the Library Diversity Council.
- I did exhibits...MLK Day, LGBT Literature, Diverse Collections at the UGLi.
- I participated in the MLK Day planning committee. Met Alex Haley a few months before he died.
- I was a Library Resident. Michigan Residency Program was an outstanding program.
- I supervised graduate student assistants and provided training.
- I drafted my first publications (published after I left), and got involved in ALA.

My first publications...

- Diaz, Joseph, and Downing, Karen. "Instruction in a Multicultural/Multiracial Environment" in *Learning to Teach Workshops on Instruction*, 37.-45. Chicago: Bibliographic Instruction Section, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association, 1993.
- Diaz, Joseph. "Collection Development in Multicultural Studies," book chapter in *Cultural Diversity in Libraries*, edited by Donald Riggs and Patricia Tarin, Neal-Schumann Publishers, 1994.

My next job: Assistant to the Dean at the University of Arizona Libraries

- Started in June, 1992 and continued through April, 1999.
- Diversity training and programming
- Recruitment of members of underrepresented groups into our applicant pools.
- Staff Development and training. Library re-structuring to a team-based environment.
- Administrative group and Library Cabinet member
- Work team leader for Human Resources team.

Accomplishments while in this position

- Learned how the administrative side of the fence saw things. Learned about budgets, strategic planning, organization development. HR issues.
- Coordinated and designed training sessions and educational programs on a variety of topics for staff.
- Published a number of articles on the Library re-organization process and other topics such as affirmative action.
- Worked with Latino library school students and started the local chapter of REFORMA.
- Became involved nationally on a number of diversity-related committees and initiatives. Spectrum, REFORMA, Lama Diversity Officers Discussion Group founder.
- Focused on moving the Library towards being a more welcoming environment for people of color. Staff was more diverse than ever.
- Promoted to Associate Librarian with continuing status in 1998.

My next job: Fine Arts and Humanities Librarian with a focus on music and dance

- Moved into the position in 1999 and stayed until 2011.
- Managed information resources management budget in music, dance, theater arts, media arts and other areas.
- Provided reference service to the Fine Arts Library's users and the larger community.
- Provided instruction to students in music, dance, theater arts, media arts.
- Focused on “diversifying” the library’s holdings in areas outside the “art music” realm, including jazz, Latin, popular, folk, and world music.
- Managed the National Flute Association Library.
- Learned as much as I could about “art music”. My knowledge base had only been basic prior to taking this position. I had to ratchet it up a few notches to be able to do the required work.

Accomplishments as A Fine Arts/Humanities Librarian

- Gave a number of workshops on Latin music to librarians, the general public, students, at conferences, in classrooms, at libraries.
- Wrote articles about Latin music, published web pages on Latin music.
- Built a top notch collection of Mexican mariachi music. Materials in all formats.
- Was recognized as a Library Mover and Shaker by Library Journal. 1st cohort.
- Organized a film festival called “Cine Mariachi” as a fundraiser for the Tucson International Mariachi Conference Board of Directors. Made a profit!
- Reconnected with KXCI Radio and got on the air as a radio programmer hosting the Chicano Connection once again, after a nearly 20 year absence.

Next Stop: Special Collections

- Moved into the position in 2011, as a result of an open position and a library re-structuring.
- Curator of the performing arts with an emphasis on the borderlands.
- Exhibits and events coordinator.
- Provide reference and instruction.
- Work with donors and identify potential collections.

Accomplishments

- I have helped my colleagues Veronica Reyes and others secure the newspaper, “El Tucsonense” for the Library and have helped her make connections with members of the local Latino community. I gave her a long list of names to work with.
- I have created several major exhibits including the 50 Years of Civil Rights in Az. Exhibit, the Tucson Meet Yourself Exhibit, The Wilderness Act exhibit, and other smaller exhibits.
- I have coordinated many different programs associated with the exhibits, including cultural programs such as “Una Noche de Corridos”, an “El Dia De Los Muertos” event, and many others. Community focused, bringing in new audiences.
- I have brought in a number of collections—Tucson Gay Museum material, Curtis Acosta collection, UA Presents collection, William Damron collection, Silviana Wood collection, Dr. Charles Ford collection.
- I have provided instruction to history students and theater arts students, and have answered innumerable reference questions..
- I have given presentations at national conferences on performing arts collections and their care.
- Continue to publish. Most recent publication was an article entry on “Protest music in the Latino Community” in the Encyclopedia of Latino Culture.

Advice: Do Your Homework

- Know your collections. There are probably many hidden gems. Use your knowledge of your collections to connect with people when talking about archives and libraries.
 - Tucson Council on Civic Unity Papers.
 - Morris K. Udall Papers.
 - Ephemera files.
- You're your institution's policies around building collections. If you want to change them, figure out the right way to do that. There's an elegant way, and a sloppy way. Figure out the right way. Past practice does not have to continue.

Advice: Do Your Homework.

- Know what your colleagues in the community are collecting and doing.
- Are there other libraries or archives working with the community? If so, you should know what is going on. Do not make yourself look bad. Behave professionally at all times. Avoid competition if possible, but collaborate and work with your colleagues to agree on your areas of focus.
- Study what is in other collections. Learn where there are gaps. Learn where there are strengths.

Advice: Do your homework

- Learn all you can about the communities you are interested in working with.
- Get involved and get out to meet people. Talk to them. Ask them questions. Show you're interested. Don't be shy, but be respectful at all times.
- Keep up with what is going on. Read the paper and other news sources to keep tabs on events happening in the community. Go to them. Show up. Show you're interested.
- Study the history of your communities. Learn all you can about them. Don't assume you know everything. Don't act like you know everything. Read biographies and listen to oral histories. Develop your "cultural competency!"

Issues to consider

- Cultural sensitivity. Why should communities who have historically been ignored by institutions like archives and libraries suddenly show trust toward them?
- Cultural protocols. Learn them. Sometimes you learn them the hard way. The personal touch in some cases is much better than sending a letter in the mail.
- Learn the protocols around dealing with community elders.
- Consider how you approach members of a community and how you convince them that you have their best interests at heart.
- Listen carefully. Don't make promises you can't keep. Follow through.

Final thoughts

- Cultivation happens over time. Don't expect immediate results.
- Consider helping organizations and individuals learn more about their own archival materials and the many approaches to preserving information that is valuable. Offer workshops on basic archival preservation. Offer to do oral history interviews for members of organizations and communities.
- Dig deep into your own self and decide if you have what it takes to do this work. It's not just a job. You're dealing with people's lives and their legacies. You must develop respect for that. This is a calling!

One more...

- “No set model exists for working in communities. We have learned that the only constant rules are to be attentive to community needs and your institution. While cultural competency and understanding are obviously required when work with ethnic archives, ultimately, a willingness to see community members’ active input on legacy and historical significance alongside that of subject experts may be even more important. The day-to-day process has to develop in dialogue with the community partners and be oriented toward a shared vision (that may in fact have different goals), and then be tailored to the resources at hand.”
- From Tracy B. Grimm and Chon A. Noriega’s article, “Documenting Regional Latino Arts and Culture: Case Studies for a Collaborative, Community-Oriented Approach, in *The American Archivist*, Vol. 76, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2013, 95-112.