

Supporting Native Voices, Cultures and Stories Through Multicultural Programming, and Community and Campus Engagement at Fresno State

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Abstract:

From the Western Mono and Yokuts of California's Central Valley, this paper offers a case study on how academic librarians developed student collaboration and community engagement programs to highlight and support issues concerning cultures of Native Americans around California State University, Fresno. This type of programming promotes diversity and inclusivity across the campus and enhances lifelong learning opportunities for community members to experience how the academic library can shape and build programming opportunities in multiculturalism. Using the case study from the Henry Madden Library at California State University, Fresno, the paper explores how the Library Diversity Committee from this university collaborated to create a variety of academic outreach activities, exhibits, and resources to encourage learning and understanding of indigenous cultures in multidisciplinary studies: health, language, history, art, and cultural experiences in Fall 2016.

Keywords: library, libraries, multicultural programming, outreach, diversity, academic libraries, community engagement, Native Americans, American Indians, indigenous cultures, multiculturalism, health, language, history, art, cultures, cultural sensitivity

INTRODUCTION

California State University, Fresno (Fresno State), located in the heart of the Central Valley in the state of California, has the proud distinction of serving a very diverse population from Central California. Fresno State is designated as a minority-serving institution, including a Hispanic-Serving Institution and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-

Serving Institution. Fresno State's mission is "to boldly educate and empower students for success." Diversity is a core value to the university's mission, and the exhibition entitled *Native Voices: Native Peoples' Concepts of Health and Illness* was clearly in line with our university's mission and values.

At Fresno State, the Library Diversity Committee (LDC) promotes and celebrates a culture of diversity and inclusion. Hosting the Native Voices exhibition at Fresno State provided the library with an opportunity to celebrate the cultural diversity of Native Americans, both nationally and regionally. The committee sought to bring awareness not only to what is different but also to similarities. They also hoped to show some of the differences between western perspectives on health, illness, and healing compared to that of traditional American Indian healers. They also highlighted the need for cultural sensitivity and awareness in health care for American Indians. The Native Voices exhibition achieved the organizational goals to celebrate the cultural diversity of Native Americans.

Consistent with the university's mission and the Library Diversity Committee, the goal was to educate students on the rich diversity of Native American healing practices and cultural perceptions of wellness and illness. The exhibition was in a key library location and readily accessible to students. As a result, a significant number of students were able to access the exhibition. University Outreach staff included the exhibition as a part of their student campus tours, including special tours for the Native Youth Conference which highlighted the Native Voices special exhibitions, as well as the numerous designs borrowed from Native American artwork, our Table Mountain Rancheria Reading Room, and our Native Garden.

In this paper, we will address a few key features of the Native Voices program: the exhibitions, the opening program, the Debbie Reese programs, the Talk Story program, International Coffee Hour, the webinar, and how they all support diversity initiatives for the community through the academic libraries.

Native Voices and the Library Diversity Committee

In the Spring and Summer of 2016, the American Library Association (ALA) and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) in the United States released a traveling exhibit opportunity to libraries interested in hosting an exhibit called *Native Voices: Native Peoples' Concepts of Health and Illness*. It explores "the interconnectedness of wellness, illness and cultural life for Native Americans, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians. Visitors will discover how Native concepts of health and illness are closely tied to the concepts of community, spirit and the land."

The Library Diversity Committee, composed of library staff and librarians, discussed how to include this exhibit into the library. There were three co-principal investigators (co-PIs) for this project: Julie Renee Moore (Co-Chair of the LDC and Special Collections Catalog Librarian), Gretchen Higginbottom (LDC member and Interlibrary Loan Librarian), and Dr. Vickie Krenz (Cherokee) (Professor, Department of Public Health and Chair of the American Indian Faculty and Staff Association). The three co-PIs wrote the competitive grant proposal to bring the exhibit to Fresno State. They were awarded the grant. Julie Moore became the Committee Chair of the Native Voices Planning Committee to work through the details of the installation and programming surrounding the primary Native Voices exhibition, which was on display at the Henry Madden Library from September 19 to October 23, 2016. The

diversity of the planning committee was key to the success of this exhibition and the programming. Of particular importance were members of the Native American community.

Library Planning Committee Members:

Julie Renee Moore (Committee Chair and PI) (LDC), Special Collections Catalog Librarian
Gretchen Higginbottom (PI) (LDC), Interlibrary Loan Librarian
Tammy Lau, Head, Special Collections Research Center (SCRC)
Vang Vang (LDC), Instructional Technology Librarian, Research Services
Adam Wallace, Special Collections and Archives Specialist, SCRC
Gregory Megee, Special Collections and Archives Assistant, SCRC

Community Planning Committee Members:

Brandy Jaramillo, President, Fresno State First Nations Indigenous Student Organization
Mandy Marine (Western Mono/Maidu), Community Partner
Jennifer Ruiz (Chukchansi), Executive Director, Fresno American Indian Health Project
Carly Tex (Western Mono), Community Member
Julie Dick Tex (Western Mono), Community Member
Dr. Vickie Krenz (Cherokee), (PI and Panelist), Professor, Department of Public Health

The LDC co-sponsored this program by promoting the exhibit, supporting administrative duties, and creating additional events, book displays, and activities to engage with the larger community.

Native Voices Opening Reception and Panel Discussion

The Opening Reception and Panel Discussion began with a Blessing Ceremony by spiritual leader, Mr. Keith Turner (Dumna, Paiute, Mono, Cherokee). The Blessing Ceremony took place in the Native Garden, which consists of Native American grasses and plants used in regional basket weaving. Following the opening ceremony was traditional Native American flute music by Martin Gonzalez. The reception and panel discussion was conducted following the Opening Ceremony.

Julie Moore, Co-PI, welcomed visitors to the Native Voices Exhibition, and introduced our speakers, and thanked our many contributors and sponsors that made the event possible. Dr. Rudy Sanchez, VP, Faculty Affairs, welcomed our guests to campus and provided an overview of the exhibit. The panel speakers consisted of Vang Vang (Moderator, Librarian), Dr. Vickie Krenz (Cherokee, Professor), Jennifer Ruiz (Chukchansi, Executive Director, Fresno American Indian Health Project), and Keith Turner (Dumna, Paiute, Mono, Cherokee) (spiritual leader and teacher of traditional culture). The panel discussed questions surrounding Native American beliefs about illness and healing, beliefs about wellness and mental well-being, and personal experiences. Light refreshments were provided for guests at the Opening Reception. (The reception food was thoughtfully planned out, incorporating ingredients traditionally used by our local Native American Tribes.) The opening reception also introduced the *Native Voices from the San Joaquin Valley* exhibition in the Special Collections Research Center.

Native Voices from the San Joaquin Valley Exhibition - Special Collections Research Center

Carly Tex (Western Mono), Mandy Marine (Maidu/Western Mono), Julie Tex (Western Mono), Julie Moore (PI, SCRC), and Adam Wallace (SCRC) curated a local complementary exhibition to the primary Native Voices exhibition. This elegant exhibition featured the tribal cultures of the San Joaquin Valley and Sierra foothills. The exhibit showcased plants used in foods and medicines, basketry, beadwork, jewelry, toys, miniatures, games, every-day tools, drawings, photographs, social activities, health resources and educational references and literature. This exhibition of regional works and plants was a wonderful complementary exhibition that was extremely meaningful to many local community members, faculty, staff, and students. This exhibition ran from 9/23/16-12/9/16 in the Special Collections Research Center.

American Indians in Children's Literature

Dr. Debbie Reese (Nambe Pueblo, New Mexico) is a founding member of the Native American House and American Indian Studies program at the University of Illinois. She is on the Literature Advisory Board for Reading is Fundamental. She is well-known for her blog, "American Indians in Children's Literature." Jennifer Crow, Curator of the Henry Madden Library's Arne Nixon Center for the Study of Children's Literature (ANC) (and LDC Co-Chair) arranged for, organized, and sponsored two separate lectures by Dr. Debbie Reese. Dr. Reese's first presentation focused on teaching credentials and informed Fresno State students on concepts of sovereignty and federally recognized tribes. Her presentation, "Teaching Children about American Indians," was very well-attended with over 300 people. The second presentation which was free and open to the public was entitled, "American Indians of the 21st Century: Still Here, Still Fighting." She provided both presentations on October 13, 2016.

Native American Talk Story

To further support Native Voices, Raymond Pun (LDC member) applied for and received a grant from the American Indian Library Association (AILA). Talk story: Sharing stories, sharing culture is a "literacy program that reaches out to Asian Pacific American (APA) and American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) children and their families. The program celebrates and explores their stories through books, oral traditions, and art to provide an interactive, enriching experience. Children and their families can connect to rich cultural activities through Talk Story in their homes, libraries, and communities."

This grant allowed the library to invite two storytellers from the Chochenyo people of Northern California. On October 1, 2016, Fresno State's Cross Cultural and Gender Center and the library collaborated to promote this public program to the community. Julian Agredano and Nicole Agredano, are experienced as educators, linguists and storytellers in the San Joaquin Valley. They shared a series of stories and tales and enchanted the audience with their commentaries from childhood experiences in Chochenyo language. There was a short Q&A session at the end of the program and attendees were curious on their methods for preserving their Chochenyo language and oral traditions. This event was free and open to the public. Part of the grant fund allowed the library to purchase books for its collections. These books were purchased for the Arne Nixon Center for the Study of Children's Literature at

Fresno State. This event promoted the exhibit on Native Voices as well but most importantly shared the academic library's interest in showcasing its resources and services aligned to community interests in Native and indigenous cultures.

One of the best approaches for a successful program is through collaboration and partnership. From academic to community groups, the academic library can play an incredible role in promoting community issues that are both global and local – to engage with all patrons beyond the library and to demonstrate that the library is not a neutral space but rather a safe and brave space for solidarity, diversity, inclusivity and multiculturalism.

International Coffee Hour

One of the Library Diversity Committee's most important outreach collaborations is with International Student Services and Programs (ISSP) services. Together, we co-host a weekly "International Coffee Hour," which encourages our international students to share their history, customs, economy, culture, and current situations of their countries.

During the period of the exhibit, one International Coffee Hour was focused on Native Americans. Representatives from the First Nations Indigenous Student Organization covered a wide range of topics, including the Dakota Access Pipelines and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota. This event was well-attended by faculty, students and the public, and largely informed the community about what was happening in these regions. As with each International Coffee Hour, the LDC assembled a series of resources such as books, maps, and movies concerning these themes and topics so patrons can borrow them after the program as well. This kind of collaboration with International Student Services and the library at Fresno State makes an effective public program to engage with the communities and to promote the library's services and resources.

Conclusion

From our experiences, Native Voices provided an opportunity for academic librarians to engage with the community through important topics related to Native Americans and other indigenous peoples. Academic librarians are often focused on supporting the research, learning and teaching needs of the university. This kind of opportunity to engage with the students, faculty and the community promoted the academic library further. By focusing on the local and global issues and challenges that affect Native Americans and other indigenous peoples, academic librarians are addressing societal concerns, particularly those students and faculty of Native American heritage on campus and in the community.

Academic librarians from the Library Diversity Committee at Fresno State are focused on promoting diversity awareness, multiculturalism and inclusivity on campus and beyond. The Native Voices exhibitions along with its programming, such as the panel session at the opening of Native Voices, presentations by Dr. Debbie Reese, Native American Talk Story, the presentation at International Coffee Hour, and the Global Education Conference webinar promote the library's solidarity efforts with issues concerning Native Americans. This case study is meant to encourage and inspire others to engage with their communities-at-large through public programming and special exhibits. Academic libraries have many opportunities to present their services and resources that are aligned with the university's mission in diversity and inclusivity.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Fresno State's Library Diversity Committee and our colleagues for being supportive. We are grateful to the Native Americans from the Central Valley who were willing to take part in this and to tell their stories, for that is what made this Native Voices exhibition and its supportive events so meaningful to all.