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Indigenous Nations Library Program, University of New Mexico (Diverse Cultures, Communities and Libraries)

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Indigenous Nations Library Program

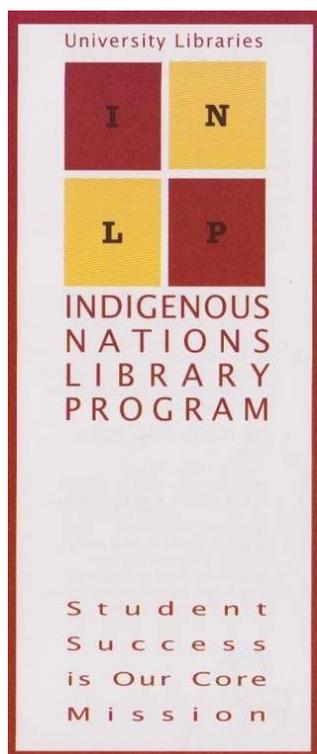
University of New Mexico

Diverse Cultures, Communities and Libraries

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The University of New Mexico (UNM) was founded in 1889 and is located in the heart of the city of Albuquerque. The campus occupies 600 acres along old Route 66. It is a campus full of old world charm boasting pueblo style buildings mixed with popular architecture of the 1960s through the turn of the 21st century. As with many university campuses there is abundance of concrete and brick, but in the middle of this campus is a peaceful and secluded duck pond surrounded by fragrant Ponderosa pine trees. Being a city campus it is an inviting spot for students, community members and school children.

Although this campus is in the heart of Albuquerque, many of its student population come from some of the most rural towns in the state of New Mexico, as well as the country. UNM is home to a diverse population of students, staff and faculty. The total student population as of the fall semester of 2006 was 25,817. The main group of students fall into the non-minority or Caucasian group at 49%; followed by Hispanic at 30.5%; American Indian 5.9%, which equated to 1525 students; Asian 3.6%, African-American 2.8%, and there is always the Unknown segment, those students who do not disclose their nationality, this group consists of about 8.2% of the student population.

As an undergrad at UNM in the Native American Studies program, I had the opportunity of getting to know many of the native students. I came to understand that the native population is one of the most diverse populations on campus within a diverse population. The Native American Studies program has students from as close as the pueblos of New Mexico, the Navajo Nation and Apache Nation and as far away as members of the Sioux Nation from the upper mid-

west; the Seminole Nation from the southern region of the country and the Iroquois Nation from the eastern United States. Many other Nations from across the country are represented as well.

It is because of this diverse group that I chose to investigate the Indigenous Nations Library Program (INLP). This program was established in July of 2004 under the guidance of Associate Dean of Research, Science and International Initiatives, Johann van Reenen. It is currently under the guidance of Associate Dean of Scholarly Resources, Special Collections, and the Center for Southwest Research, Mike Kelly. The program is run on a day-to-day basis by Curator and Assistant Professor, Paulita Aguilar, MLIS University of Oklahoma. Ms. Aguilar is a member of the Santo Domingo Pueblo. She also works in conjunction with Adjunct Professor and Program Manager, Mary Alice Tsosie. Ms. Tsosie is a member of the Navajo Nation. She is the Outreach and Liaison Librarian for the program.

History

Recently I had the opportunity to interview Johann van Reenen the Dean that started this program. Dean van Reenen became interested in Indigenous people when he was a librarian at the University of British Columbia, Canada. After coming to UNM he was able to spearhead a group of librarians and government officials that understood his vision of building one of the nation's largest and most prestigious Indigenous Peoples collections, along with building a student assistance program and a state-wide outreach program. In July of 2004 a bill to provide the money to start the program, sponsored by New Mexico State Senator Leonard Tsosie, was passed; approximately \$90,000. The long time vision of Dean van Reenen and Mary Alice Tsosie, then the American Indian Outreach Librarian, came to fruition.

So, what is the Indigenous Nations Library Program? It is a program that was established to "...provide Native American Library outreach and information literacy services to the UNM

community and New Mexico Native American communities.” (INLP Pamphlet, p.2) A summarization of its many goals is:

1. Create and maintain a welcoming environment for all Native American Students
2. Expand support for tribal libraries
3. Expand access to resources at libraries that serve Native American students
4. Expand the library outreach program for Native Americans...
5. Increase the number of Native American professional librarians by facilitating non-traditional arrangements with library schools offering ALA-accredited master's degree programs in Library and Information Studies.

(INLP Pamphlet, p.3)

Besides my interview with Dean van Reenen, I also had the pleasure of interviewing Ms. Aguilar, who was able to provide me with information on the running of the program, specifically dealing with services on campus and state wide outreach.

Campus Services

When I met with Ms. Aguilar the first thing she did was apologize for the location of her office and the fact that there is no elevator. Her office is on the second floor of the original wing of Zimmerman library at UNM and the steps are small, with a steep incline. Although I was ready to ask about the services the program offered, I thought I would stay with this topic and ask about the location. Ms Aguilar was very candid, acknowledging that the location was not the best and that she hoped some day they would be in an easier to locate and more visible. She pointed out signs around the library indicating where the INLP office is located. There are also posters and pamphlets in the library and in Mesa Vista Hall, which is where the Native American Studies program has their offices and meeting rooms. With that done, we undertook the subject of services.

First off, this program is in place to support all Native American students on campus, as well as all other students, especially those in programs and classes related to or working on projects pertaining to Native Americans and Native American Studies. Ms. Aguilar stated that librarians work a satellite outreach reference desk at Mesa Vista Hall four days a week. She indicated that this “on the spot” librarian is much appreciated by the students, so that when they go to the library they already know how to look for and find the information needed. The librarian is also available for staff/faculty.

On campus there are a number of groups and organizations that Ms. Aguilar regularly joins in order to understand what the students need or want in library and on-campus services. The *Kiva Club* is one of the oldest and most influential student groups on campus. It is open to all UNM students, Native or not. This group is involved with Native American issues; hosts events on campus and in the surrounding community; and works to promote the achievement of higher education for all minorities. (Kiva webpage) Attending Kiva meetings give Ms. Aguilar the opportunity to not only understands the needs of the students, but to inform them of upcoming programs and events the INLP has scheduled.

Other groups, organizations, and services that Ms. Aguilar engage with at UNM on a regular basis are:

- Society for Native American Graduate Students
- Native American Faculty Council
- Native American Faculty Listserv
- Freshman Orientation

- Summer Bridge Program – high school graduates spend the summer before entering the university taking and participating in Engineering, Sciences and Math classes and events (UNM Home Page)

Ms. Aguilar also teaches library classes for students in Native America Studies, African American Studies, Women's Studies, Chicano Studies and English. All of which give the students the opportunity to get to know and understand the INLP program. But, more importantly these students have the chance to be informed about the Native American collection, which is available to them for papers and projects.

Outreach Programs

After campus services the Outreach program, which both Ms. Aguilar and Ms. Tsosie work on together, is the most important. The two librarians and, when appropriate, the Associate Dean work with Native American students and librarians throughout the state. The Outreach mission is two-fold. First, it is to educate Native American librarians about the programs and availability of information at UNM in order for them to educate their students.

In 2004 Ms. Tsosie took on the job of organizing the Tribal Leadership Institute on Cultural Preservation (see: <https://repository.unm.edu/dspace/handle/1928/2235>) for the purpose of teaching/training Pueblo librarians to archive their own artifacts and establish their own Nation's collections of information sources.

Second, is working with Native American Students. These UNM librarians have built an outreach program that could not easily be outdone. Their belief is that in order to have Native students believe that a college education at a four year institution is important and an achievable goal within their grasp, they must start educating them at an early age. Throughout the year both Ms. Aguilar and Ms. Tsosie visit Native American schools all over New Mexico, starting with

the mid-highs and high school and ending at the local Native American community college and the renowned Santa Fe Indian School. Their goal is to prepare these students for college outside of native boundaries. They also host on-campus events for high school seniors, giving them a taste of what life will be like in college. These events are perceived as giving the students a connection to UNM should they decide to attend. According to Dean van Reenen out of the 95 Santa Fe Indian School students who attended this event in 2006 (the first year of the event) 3 students enrolled at UNM. In 2008 over ½ of the students who attended the event (the exact number was not available, but was equal to or larger than 2006) stated that they intended to enroll at UNM. I would say this Outreach program is working.

Some of the schools who are either visited or who attend the Outreach events at UNM are all Native American based schools, such as:

- Native American Charter School – Albuquerque
- Santa Fe Indian School
- Jemez Pueblo High School
- SIPI - Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, “a National Indian Community College and Land Grant Institution serving American Indian and Alaskan Native students.” (SIPI website)

A statement about Native American girls/women that Ms. Aguilar made during the interview stayed with me long after I had left her office. In many tribes the women do not have the right to speak out/voice their opinions and are not allowed to hold important council positions. They very much take a back seat to the men of the tribe. Some of this has changed in some tribes/pueblos, but it takes time. Ms. Aguilar pointed out the importance of these girls/women having female academic role models showing them that women can achieve what

they set their minds to and that it is important to have those ambitions. She believes this program along with role models such as Mary Alice Tsosie and herself helps with this.

A major part of the INLP program is the *Native Pathways Lecture series*.

Ms. Tsosie is in charge of selecting presenters. Throughout the academic school year she brings in artists, writers, and lecturers to speak to students, staff and faculty. These sessions are normally presented during the lunch hour and are commonly known as “Brown Bag” events.

Samples of presenters for this year are:

- Ryan Singer – Diñe Nation (Navajo Nation) artist. You can check out some of his work at <http://www.maniaverse.com/ryansinger/>
- Michael Shevahshe – A Native American writer. Mr. Shevahshe spoke on his book *Native Americans in comic books : a critical study*
- Steven T. Newcomb - Co-founder and Co-Director of the Indigenous Law Institute. Mr. Newcomb spoke about his interest in the subject and his book *The Religious Dimension of Federal Indian Law*

(INLP webpage)

Funding

Originally the funding for this program came from the state. Now it is split between state monies, grants and university library funding. When I asked about the state and national economic downturn and how it has affected the program, I was told that things are tight. Currently, they are working off the budget for the 2008-2009 fiscal year; no direct amount was disclosed. The money is used for collection building, which include books, database upgrades and database purchases, such as:

- North American Indian Drama

- North American Indian Culture
- American Indian History On-line
- American Indian Experience

Ms Aguilar hopes that whatever amount is cut by the state for the 2009-2010 fiscal year the Dean of Libraries will be able to cover from the overall library budget.

Future of the Program

Both Dean van Reenen and Ms. Aguilar are very optimistic about the future of this program. To date the program has done well and has served many students and community members in the five short years of its existence. I asked them both about what additions or changes they would like to see to the program. Dean van Reenen declined to answer stating his job description had recently changed and that he is no longer overseeing this program. He suggested that I speak with Dean Mike Kelly. Dean Kelly was not able to be reached for comment.

As for Ms. Aguilar, she gave me a list of six additions or changes she would like to see. First, she would like to move into larger and more visible quarters, hopefully on the first floor of the library, which would have easier student access.

Second, continue to grow the collection. Note: this program started in 2004 with a small collection that grew as she purchased books based on the “need” of the students and faculty at that time. In the spring of 2006 the library had a fire that destroyed many of the journals. Since that time she has been able to use money from insurance payments to not only replace the damaged and lost materials, but to purchase significant collections she perceives will be wanted or needed in the future.

Third, a better catalogue system is needed. Forth, she would like the opportunity to allow students to “tag” information on book lists for future student reference. Fifth, be able to offer the Native Pathways Lecture series in Podcasts. Sixth, Ms. Aguilar would like to add a third staff member, which would enable the program to continue to grow at a fast pace equal to or greater than that of the last five years.

Thoughts and Advocacy

Overall, I found this program to be exceptional. For the many years UNM has been an established institution of higher learning they have strove to provide the best for their students. This is not a statement I make without firsthand knowledge. As an undergrad and a non-traditional student, there was always a person, group or department to help me achieve my goals. The INLP program, established for the promotion of Native American students, is just one program at UNM in a long line of great student services.

To my knowledge there is no other program on the UNM campus that has undertaken such a vast amount of time, energy and money for the purpose of propelling students, or even a specific group of students, as in this case Native American students, forward in their academic quests. Even more, this program has branched out to communities, schools, pueblos and other Native nations within New Mexico with the expressed desire of helping to mold future college students, whether they attend UNM or not.

As an alumni and community member I would like to see the university and the State of New Mexico continue to fund this program. My hope is that this program with all of its many services succeeds and grows for many years to come.

As to changes or additions needed there are a few I wish to address, the first dealing with the issue of visibility and accessibility. One of the goals of this program is to provide a

welcoming environment. There is no better way than to be visible. Visibility of programs and services is a must. In order for students to take full advantage of what is being offered them, they must first know where to go and second remember that the service is available (out of sight – out of mind).

I agree with Ms. Aguilar as to the need to move the INLP office to a better location, preferably where the students cannot help but run into it. As important as visibility is, accessibility is even more important. As we progress well into the 21st century we have made it a priority for all entities to be available to all persons. In fact access to services is a federal law. As it now stands the INLP office is not completely accessible to all students, specifically the physically handicapped and visually impaired; as I mentioned earlier, the stairs are small and steep. I was told that there is an elevator for this section of the library, but it is quite a distance from the stairs that lead to the office. However, there are no signs indicating that an elevator is even available. And, if a handicapped or visually impaired person ever found the elevator they would find a sign stating “employees only”; another road block to access.

The wish to continue to build the collection was stressed by Ms. Aguilar. I fully agree that in order for this program to grow and continue to serve its students it must build a collection of Native American resources that can become known across the country. However, the purchases must not be just books. It is essential that the collection contains unique information by way of manuscripts, diaries, personal papers, film and music. UNM is home to the Center for Southwest Research (CSWR). This special library has major collections spread over many topics and issues pertaining to ALL that is southwest. Working together these two groups could build one of the most impressive, informative, and useful collections pertaining to Native Americans

in general and the Southwest specifically. It is important for library programs to work together in creating information collections that are fully accessible to students.

Another area the program needs to consider expanding is the *Native Pathways Lecture* series. More presenters covering more topics would be a definite advantage. Not all students interested in Native issues are interested in the same issues. As I checked out the lectures for this past year, I noticed there have been no presenters on Native music, Native women's issues, ethics in research and writing on Native issues, customs and traditions (those that can be known to "others") or repatriation just to name a few.

Also, the Native Pathways Lecture coordinator might want to consider having presenters from less well known Nations. Native issues expand beyond the Navajo, Apache, Sioux, Pueblos and Iroquois Nations. There are many smaller and less well known nations. It is important to understand the issues of both. I would like to see the lecture series present topics pertaining to a more diverse native population, many of which are represented within the student body, as well as, faculty and staff.

This area runs into another area I find to be very important; that of Podcasts. I asked Ms. Aguilar about making the lectures series available as Podcasts. She agreed that it was a good idea and even listed it as one of the six wishes she had for the program...eventually. I believe that this would be a great addition and advantage to the program. It is a way of bringing together students and issues. Many students feel the pressures of classes, reports, projects and papers. Often students feel that as much as they would like to attend a lecture there really is no time to do so. Podcasts help to unite students and issues by giving students the chance to listen and learn at their own pace. Furthermore, it gives the students the feeling of being a part of something, as well as the ability to have knowledge about issues when conversing with fellow students.

The last issue I would like to advocate for, is one of the program's goals, which according to Dean van Reenen, they have not been able to accomplish. The goal speaks to increasing the number of Native American librarians through obtaining non-traditional arrangements with Library schools offering master's degrees. As a proponent of higher education and with the knowledge of the need for minority librarians, specifically Native American librarians, I would like to see this program work at obtaining scholarships and grants for Native American students to attend master's programs in library and information science.

Overall, I was extremely impressed with this program, what it offers current UNM students and its Outreach abilities, all of which are aimed at the Native students throughout New Mexico. The librarians who started this program and the ones that run the program on a day to day basis are dedicated to its mission to help Native American students achieve their wishes and dreams of academic success. My wish is that this program continues and builds throughout future years. The university and the State of New Mexico need to work in conjunction with each other, the Dean and the librarians in keeping the program growing. To understand the importance and the purpose of the INLP program it is necessary to understand the number of possible students that could be assisted. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2005 the state of New Mexico had approximately 1.9 million people with the American Indian population being at 10%, which equates to 190,000. (UNM student demographics, slide 1)

I realize that all of Ms. Aguilar's future plans and the items that I advocate for, require funding that in the economic downturn the country is experiencing, have been crippled. However, this crisis will not last forever. Hopefully, the money to continue to grow the program, which in turn will grow the students, will be allocated. There is no greater need in this country than the education of our students. Even more important is the need to support our students in

achieving their goals. This program offers to the Native American students an opportunity to observe, live, and achieve academic success.

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