University of Nebraska at Omaha

DigitalCommons@UNO

Criss Library Faculty Proceedings & Presentations

Dr. C.C. and Mabel L. Criss Library

10-5-2021

Oral Histories in the Archives

Wendy Guerra

HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM & OLLAS CHARLA

COVID–19 AND HUMAN RIGHTS: NARRATIVES OF LATINOS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Tuesday, October 5, 2021 | 1:00 – 2:00 PM

Zoom Registration Link: https://bit.ly/3EsKxkq

The current pandemic has had a disproportionate effect of minorities and particularly on Latinos. Besides the comparatively higher mortality levels among this population, other negative effects include the lack of—or reduced—access to health services, increased food insecurity, a decrease in educational opportunities, among others. Based on the ongoing *Voces of a Pandemic* collaborative project, consisting in collecting oral histories from Latino communities facing these impacts, this panel will discuss the complexities of accessing these basic services during COVID–19 from a perspective that centers the promotion and protection of human rights.

This event is organized as a collaboration between the UNO Libraries' Archives and Special Collections, the Goldstein Family Community Chair in Human Rights, and the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS). This event is funded in part by Humanities Nebraska and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

PANELISTS

DR. BEATRIX HOFFMAN	**DR. ISABELLE BEULAYGUE**	**WENDY GUERRA**	**CAROLINA RIPP GEORGE**
Department of History	OLLAS & Exploratory Studies	Archives & Special Collections	Behavioral Health Therapist
NIU	UNO	UNO	OneWorld Community Health Centers

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
THE GOLDSTEIN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

| UNO LIBRARIES
LIBRARY.UNOMAHA.EDU

OLLAS
OFFICE OF LATINO/LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska Omaha

Oral Histories in the Archives

Voces of a Pandemic

Wendy Guerra (she, her) Digital Initiatives Archivist, Assistant Professor
UNO Libraries' Archives and Special Collections
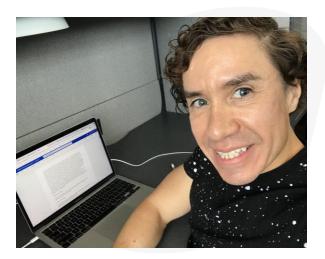
2021-10-05

University of Nebraska Omaha

Hello All, As Cristian said, my name is Wendy and I'm going to be speaking about the access and preservation aspect of oral histories.

As you can understand from those clips Dr. Hoffman shared, oral histories provide insight into the experiences of individuals and communities, sharing the stories of their triumphs and, as with the experience of COVID-19 survival. These recorded memories and stories are a legacy to future generations through the voices of people who lived in and made our communities. The stories Cristian and Isabelle have collected for Voces of a Pandemic are of lasting importance and need to be accessible to community members and researchers while being preserved for future generations. This is where UNO Libraries' Archives and Special Collections comes in. Our purpose is to acquire unique, rare, and specialized materials, such as the Voces Oral Histories collected by OLLAS, make the content as accessible as possible to the UNO community and beyond, and preserve the materials for generations to come. Collecting material related to human rights topics, such as Voces oral histories, is one of Archives and Special Collections' priority subject areas for new collections.

- **Eduardo transcribing and describing oral histories**
- **Ethical and equitable access**
- **Archives are FOREVER**

Archives and Special Collections is quite familiar with preserving and making available various oral histories. We knew from past experience with collections such as the LGBTQ+ Voices oral history project, among others, that to archive and make the Voces oral histories available online, we needed to hire additional staff to supplement my time and effort. With the financial assistance of a Humanities NE mini-grant and matching funds from the libraries' Eugene S. and Sunny M. Thomas Endowed Fund for Innovation, we hired Eduardo as our student employee to work on this project. You can see him here as he works on editing transcripts of the interviews. Eduardo is bi-lingual, which was a skill of utmost importance for this project.

Our intent is to preserve the Voces oral histories forever and provide access to them for as many people as possible. Hearing and reflecting on these stories 10 or 100 years from now could have an unimaginable impact on not only the Latinx population but many others in Omaha and beyond.

To ensure ethical, equitable access, written summaries and transcripts are needed for each oral history interview. Eduardo listened to each oral history and wrote a narrative summary of the interview in English, and then translated that into Spanish. The goal of bi-lingual summaries was to provide an easily skimmable description of the oral history interview for use in our digital collections platform for a wide audience in the language people feel most comfortable with.

Transcripts are a critical piece of ensuring accessibility to oral histories they are necessary to ensure those with hearing disabilities can access the content while having the added benefit of greater ease use for those without disabilities. Draft transcripts were generated using artificial intelligence software, but required a significant amount of Eduardo's time to clean up for easy reading. Machines are great for helping out, but this work still requires a significant amount of labor by people. Ideally we would have transcripts in both English and Spanish, but given our time and financial constraints we hope to make that goal a reality in the future.

Empower users through accessibility and usability

UNO Libraries' Archives and Special Collections

Eduardo is currently wrapping up the time-intensive work of creating transcripts and summaries, and starting next week he will begin work in the software OHMS, or oral history metadata synchronizer, to further enhance the accessibility of the Voces oral histories. Next, I'm going to share a bit about OHMS and how it dramatically improves accessibility to valuable oral histories.

OHMS provides users word-level search capability and a time-correlated transcript or indexed interview connecting the textual search term to the corresponding moment in the recorded interview online. The primary purpose for OHMS is to empower users to more effectively and efficiently discover information in an online oral history interview by connecting the user from a search result to the corresponding moment in an interview. Essentially, OHMS will connect the video to the written transcript with time-correlated tags, synching the two together and allowing word-level search throughout. This level of accessibility and usability will be a major benefit to all who wish to use or simply watch the Voces oral histories. To illustrate how it works, I'm going to give you a short behind the scenes look into OHMS.

Screen share to OHMS Projects Window

To start off with I'm showing you what we call the backend of OHMS. As you can see there are several oral history projects in the works. I'm going to select Conversaciones and give you a look at the work involved for a single interview. From here, you can

see where we add metadata, index, and sync the transcript for each oral history.

click metadata

When I refer to metadata I'm simply referring to the data that describes the oral history, including the title and file name, along with information about who the interviewer and interviewee were, the summary of the interview, a copyright statement, and subject terms that describe the interview, among a few other bits of information.

return to project view and click index

Here you can see where I have indexed the interview, essentially segmenting it into sections, assigning a title to each and writing a short synopsis of each segment. This will allow a user to get a very good idea of what the interview is about simply by skimming the index text.

return to project view and click sync

This image is showing the result of my transcription syncing; I've already told the program what is being said at the 1, 2, 3, minute marks and beyond through the end. This will allow a user to jump from section to section throughout the interview while they view the transcript.

Share screen to Islandora window

Once the work in OHMS is complete, the interview and its metadata are uploaded to UNO Libraries' online Digital Collections, which you can see here. This oral history isn't yet publicly available, but I wanted to show you how anyone with access to a web browser will be able to hear these powerful stories when the work is completed. When a user locates an oral history they would like to watch, the simply click the link to launch the OHMS viewer which displays the video, along with the synced index and transcript.

As you can imagine, getting an interview to this point is takes a fair bit of time. The amount of resources, including time, people, and technology required now and "forever" to share and preserve these primary resources and their description is extensive. Our current funding allows us to continue working with Eduardo through the fall before finishing up in January 2022. By that time, we hope to have at least 10 Voces OH completed and fully available to all who are interested in these stories.