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Latinos in Rural America: Stories of Cultural Heritage, Value, and Aspirations

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Latinos in Rural America (LiRA)

Stories of Cultural Heritage, Values and Aspirations

6th Crossing Over Symposium

October 9-10, 2015

Cleveland State University

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Kenyon College

<http://www.kenyon.edu/academics/departments-programs/latinoa-studies/lira/>

Project Description

- *Latinos in Rural America (LiRA)* is a public humanities project designed to broaden knowledge, engagement and understanding of the Latino/a experience in rural Ohio.
- The project is rooted in oral history, interviews and direct personal interactions with members of the community who represent diverse economic conditions, stages of life and aspirations within the broad social fabric of Knox County.
- *LiRA* culminates in a public bilingual exhibition that will travel locally and throughout Ohio, December 2015 - April 2016.

Project Goals

- Increase knowledge, engagement and understanding of the Latino experience in rural Knox County;
- Develop intercultural exchange and relationships between the local Latino community and other Knox County and Ohio residents;
- Increase awareness of Latino contributions to the life of Ohio;
- Offer Latino youth new opportunities to interpret their past and articulate their future and, in this way, gain access to relevant educational and social goods;
- Establish partnerships with local and state organizations and researchers to support intercultural development between Latinos and other state residents.

Themes of the Exhibition

- History of the Latino population in Knox County
- Journey Stories (the past)
- What and where is home (the present)
- Values and Culture
- Personal and Community Aspirations
- Perceptions of Diversity and Inclusion

Content of the Exhibition

- Panels with text in both English and Spanish provide snapshots of Latino families in Knox County.
- A video presents the participants talking about their lives.
- A reflection piece where viewers can interact with the project by providing feedback on their thoughts and experiences after having seen the exhibit.

Content of the Exhibition

- A brochure with selected images and bibliographical information from the exhibition
- A primer, in pamphlet form, to provide background knowledge and information on cultural roots and communication norms for successful interactions with Latinos, including tips to better bridge cross-cultural gaps.

How do the humanities inform this project?

- The humanities enable interpretation of the past and envisioning of the future.
- They emphasize analysis and exchange of stories and ideas and, in doing so, help us to engage more thoughtfully with our surroundings, including diverse cultures.
- *LiRA*'s theme is intercultural development, a way of imagining a shared future that includes interaction of different ethnic, linguistic, and racial groups based around a shared appreciation of place—in this case, Knox County.

How do the humanities inform this project?

- In order for this work to be done effectively, it is important to tell the story of the place and the stories of its people, with the focus here on the small but growing Latino population.
- We need new models of intercultural development to ensure a rural sustainability that includes Latinos as valued community members.
- The public humanities can play an important and strategic role in cultural brokerage, by telling new stories of distinctive rural communities and the people who live there.

How do the humanities inform this project?

- *LiRA* extends the humanities goal of telling richer and more nuanced stories than those offered by mass media culture, which typically portrays Latinos in rural areas as migrant farm workers, unattached to place.
- While *LiRA* includes the migrant farm worker experience, it also gathers a wide range of personal stories from diverse individuals to offer a comprehensive view of the Latino population in Knox County.

Panel Objectives

- Process or how was the project put place
- Logistics
- Community-Engaged Learning Component
- Curation of Materials
- Design and Production
- Lessons and Outcomes
- Video

Process: *Funding*

- *LiRA* was made possible with support from
- Ohio Humanities + Matching Funds from KC
- The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Digital Scholarship program
- The Knox County Community Foundation
- The Kenyon College Summer Scholars program

Process: *Institutional Requirements*

- CITI Training For Research with Human Subjects
- Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- Consent Form - Interviews and Photos
- Release Form - Donation of the Interview
- Video Release
- Assent to Participate – For Youth

Process: *Community Aspect*

- Identification of social nodes to create connection to intended participants
- Identification of community leaders to bridge into the community
- Engagement with the local Latino community through forum and survey

Logistics: *Training*

- **Development of Expertise in Oral History –** Principal investigator and summer scholars participated in the *Ohio Humanities Oral History Institute* to enhance expertise on the production, dissemination and storage of oral history (June 2015)
- **Video Interview Capabilities -** Summer scholars were trained on the use of video cameras and key elements of video documentation (June 2015)

Enrollment of Participants and Intended Audience

- **Establish Interviewee Profile** - age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, economic condition, occupation).
- **Enrollment of Participants (PI)** – phone calls and setting appointments
- **Intended Audience** - Latinos, both rural and urban in Ohio and Knox County, organizations that interact with Latinos regularly (i.e. social services organizations, local schools with an emerging Latino population), and broader-based regional and/or national organizations with a common interest to bring visibility and cultural presence to Latinos in the United States.

Logistics: *Venues*

➤ Venues

- Kenyon College Olin Library (December 1-18, 2015)
- Mount Vernon Public Library (January 13-27, 2016)
- Global Gallery in Hagerty Hall, OSU (February 9-23, 2016)
- McMillan Hall Gallery, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio (March 30- April 12, 2016)

Logistics: *Interview Design*

- How to structure the interview time, and how to ask questions/follow-up questions
- The *abbreviated life story* interview model:
 - The introductory lead
 - Early life/context
 - The purposeful turn toward the theme
 - Depth questions
 - The reflective turn towards generalized meaning
 - The wrap-up

Logistics: *Interview Design*

- We went from specific questions to open-ended questions
- We had common questions and questions that were tailored to each participants.
- We met college professors, workers in the business sector, agricultural workers, an athlete, and youth of various ages, representing a range of experiences, cultural origins, and personal and family values. Questions reflected their context.

Logistics: *Reflection Piece Design*

- We consulted with Dr. Sarah Murnen, professor of psychology at Kenyon College, for the design of the online / on-site reflection piece.
- The reflection piece aimed at developing innovating opportunities for community building and relationships among Ohioans, including Latinos.
- We were interested in measuring attitudes toward, and knowledge about, the Knox County Latino population as well as perceptions of diversity and inclusion.
- The questionnaire was bilingual (English and Spanish) and presented both online and on paper to accommodate visitor preferences.

Logistics:

How to publicize the project?

- **Social media/digital networks** - We leveraged Facebook, Twitter, email and the Kenyon College website, as well as digital capabilities of the exhibition venues to maximize awareness of the project.
- **Local/traditional media** - We proposed a small advertising budget to purchase print ads in local papers. In addition, press releases will be issued to newspapers, radio and television stations.
- **Relevant communication hubs for Latinos** - Popular local sites for the Latino community include the Mt. Vernon restaurant *Fiesta Mexicana*

Logistics: *Evaluation*

- **Forum Group Questionnaire** – Initial Stage group forum with the local Latino community (October 26, 2014).
- **On-site, Online Reflection Piece** - Aiming at community building through the sharing of stories, this tool will enable guests to reflect on the oral history they encounter at the exhibition. It will help us understand what Ohioans have learned and interpreted from the journey stories.

Logistics: *Evaluation*

- **Guest Books at Each Site.** These guest books will keep a record of community members who come to the exhibition and their comments and impressions.
- **Outside Evaluator.** Lilleana Cavanaugh, MBA, CPM and executive director of the Ohio Latino Affairs Commission, will serve as the outside evaluator of this project.
- **Course Evaluation and Student Reflections on CEL Experience**

What and Why Community-Engaged Learning ?

Community-Based Learning (CEL) is an empirically tested pedagogy that builds on partnerships between institutions of higher education and surrounding community organizations.

It is change-oriented. It finds research questions in the needs of the community.

It can prepare students for active civic engagement and their future public life by combining classroom learning objectives and skill development with social action, geared at empowering community groups.

SPAN 380, Introduction to Chicano/a Cultural Studies

- An important objective of this course is to offer students valuable opportunities to learn through community engagement.
- The class was divided in four groups to work on CEL projects identified in *LiRA* as important goals of the local Latino community.
- Students worked a minimum of 30 hours per semester in their CEL project, kept a short journal and gave a formal class presentation on outcomes.

SPAN 380: Introduction to Chicano/a Cultural Studies

- Archiving interviews in Digital Kenyon College (Kenyon summer scholars).
- Translating interviews (from Spanish to English).
- Creating a primer on Latino cultural norms to be disseminated in local schools and agencies.
- Creation and implementation of a college-prep course to support the local Salvation Army's *Latino Youth program*, targeting ACT and SAT prep.

CEL Journals

- **Journal 1** - description of the project including: the problem or community need, goals of the project and working plan to achieve those goals, time line and expected outcomes, and a short reflection about your personal response to the project.
- **Journal 2** - an overall reflection about the process of civic engagement including learning opportunities, challenges, benefits and value of the experience, as well as connections to the main learning objectives of the course.

CEL Projects: *Evaluation*

- The CEL projects are still on-going but will be evaluated using:
- CEL Journals
- Course Evaluations
- Assessment of student work and outcome (exit evaluation) by the Salvation Army
- *LiRA* guest books and surveys

Narrative of the Execution of *LiRA*

- Summer scholars reflect about the interview process and experience
- What, Where, How?
- Lights & Equipment
- Experience of the interactions with interviews
- High and low points of the process
- Benefits to summer scholars (how were you impacted by the process? Positively, negatively)

Curation of Materials

- Transcriptions and Translations
- Observation and Interpretation
- Coding the Texts for Recurring Themes
- Selections of Quotes
- Writing the Content for Panels

Curation of Materials

- Selection and Editing of Video
- Selection of Photographs & Captions
- Editing by Research Team & Professional Editor
- Proof Reading the Panels
- Archiving in Digital Kenyon

Design and Production of Panels and Webpage

- Designer Justin Bryant from *Think Brand Studio* designed the banners, brochure and primer.
- *Pip Printing* (Columbus, OH) will carry out printing and banner production.
- The Office of Public Affairs (Kenyon College) designed *LiRA* webpage and publicized the project.
- <http://www.kenyon.edu/academics/departments-programs/latinoa-studies/lira/>

Lessons and Outcomes

- Highlights of this oral histories
- Themes that emerged: journey stories, perceptions of inclusion/ exclusion, etc.
- # of interviewees and why we made that choice
- Creation of new friendships and relationships with local community
- Development of support networks (i.e. Salvation Army *Latino Youth Program*)

Video



María Esmeralda Villa, an agricultural worker and fulltime student, with Maureen Buchwald (right), owner of Glen Hill Orchards, whom Esmeralda has known all her life. The women talk about Esmeralda's plans for the future.

Venues & Schedule of the Exhibit

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Questions?



The Ávalos family of Mount Vernon maintains strong ties with family members still in Mexico (shown here). For teenager Vanessa Ávalos, her connection to Mexico was reinforced during time in school there.