

Planning Collaborative Practices for Archiving Farmworker Communities' Histories

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Mother's Day by RWHP with migrant women. Photo credit: Beatriz Domínguez Alemán.

In August 2022, the Farmworker Association of Florida, the Rural Women's Health Project, UF's George A. Smathers Libraries, and the University of Miami Libraries obtained a planning grant to investigate best practices to include the stories of Florida farmworkers in historical archives. The "Archiving Farmworkers' Histories" project, made possible through an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership Grant, aims to create safe, cooperative spaces to archive and access community stories, including oral histories.

The project is part of the Latin American and Caribbean Diaspora Initiative, which documents the histories of migrants at UF's Latin

American and Caribbean Collection (LACC). The initiative includes two online exhibits: The Cuban American Dream (<https://exhibits.uflib.ufl.edu/cubanamericandream/>) and The Haitian American Dream (<https://exhibits.uflib.ufl.edu/HaitianAmericanDream/>). In 2020, the initiative continued with the effort to document the impact that COVID-19 had on Florida farmworkers. The UF Center for Arts, Migration, and Entrepreneurship and the UF Libraries funded the project which resulted in a collection of 32.1 gigabytes of digital content captured from websites, social media sites, newspapers, and documents from the UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences—



Photos from 40th Anniversary FWAF. Photo credit: Beatriz Domínguez Alemán.

(<https://findingaids.uflib.ufl.edu/repositories/2/resources/1776>). As part of the project, we created a database of Florida farmworkers' community-based organizations. For one year, we followed and captured their social media, but our funding ran out in July 2021, before the emergence of COVID-19. The timing was unfortunate, but it prompted us to recognize the importance of a continual documentation of organizational advocacy efforts.

We successfully submitted a proposal to the IMLS to form partnerships with two community-based organizations: the Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF) and the Rural Women's Health Project (RWHP). FWAF serves the broadest constituency with five offices that represent forty counties from north/central and southern Florida. Its mission is to empower agricultural communities in a broad range of justice issues. The second partner (RWHP), a health justice organization, was selected because it represents a vulnerable gender-specific group that is otherwise not singled out for services. The project team consists of UF and UM library specialists, a historian, one extension officer, and a Ph.D. student in agricultural education. In addition to our community partners, we have five consultants. Three are experts in community-driven archiving, and two are from other community-based organizations that work with migrants. The project goals are to build trust with the communities, to survey their archival needs, and to design archival and access strategies to ensure the safety of these communities. Among the methodologies employed, we sponsor and participate in FWAF and RWHP community events, conducting and sharing oral histories with organizers and their communities.

Hiring a coordinator became the project's first challenge. We were looking for a professional or recent graduate who was not only fully bilingual in Spanish but also possessed the cultural competency to work with farmworkers, who are mostly from rural areas in Mexico. In September 2022, the team hired Dr. Daniel J. Fernández Guevara. He had just completed his Ph.D. in Latin American History at UF with a dissertation on migration in the twentieth century. His professional background includes oral history, archival curation, and videography. Both his academic background and his professional experience have proven fundamental for the success of the grant.



Daniel Fernández Guevara

Photo credit: Beatriz Domínguez Alemán.

Hurricane Ian slowed down the launch of the project because it greatly affected communities in North Central Florida. The damage it caused on agricultural crops and the ensuing impact on farmworkers makes the documentation of their stories even more pressing. Despite the obstacles, we were able to solidify working relationships with both organizations. FWAF asked our sponsorship for their posada at their headquarters in Apopka. A posada is a traditional Christmas celebration in Mexico. The team will use this opportunity to get to know the community and introduce the project.

Engagement with our partners is conditioned by their proximity to the libraries. Since RWHP is located in Gainesville, it has been easier to meet with them in person. In October, the project coordinator and the



Taco heaven after volunteering on November 5th. Margarita Vargas-Betancourt (PI), Daniel J. Fernández Guevara (Project Coordinator), Anna Villagomez, Adriana Menendez, Giovana Perazzo (RWHP organizers). Photo by the authors.



Robin Lewy, RWHP director at Protest Stop SB1718. Photo credit Beatriz Domínguez Alemán.

PI, Margarita Vargas-Betancourt, visited their headquarters. During this visit, RWHP director Robin Lewy donated a sample of the fotonovelas they use for community education. In Latin America, fotonovelas are a traditional print medium similar in format to comic books or graphic novels. The difference with the latter, is that photos narrate the story. Fotonovelas effectively convey and educate because they follow traditional ways of transmitting knowledge: storytelling. On November 1st, RWHP's staff visited LACC to see the Day of the Dead offering that the Mexican association at UF installs

order" (the organization from the institution that produced the documents) and the use of acid-free boxes and folders for conservation.

After the visit, Robin Lewy thanked us for showing her team "the whole documentation experience." She expressed her appreciation to the "kind attention" given to RWHP materials and for our interest in providing a home for the thousands of stories of their constituents. As a condition of collaborating with RWHP, we had to volunteer alongside them. Thus, on November 5, 2022, the project coordinator and the PI volunteered at a vaccination event in Ocala.

Inspired by RWHP outreach methods, like the fotonovelas, we decided to invite farmworkers, organizers, and our own team to share their stories in a project titled, *Cuéntame tu historia* (Tell me your story). Conceived as a video adaption of the print fotonovela, the PI wrote a script based on her own family history of migration from Mexico and her desire to preserve her family's history. Conversely, the project coordinator used his professional videography and editing skills to produce the project's videonovela, an almost four-minute promotional video on how why and how to preserve these histories. You can see the video here: <https://youtu.be/O878LDMwyfk>



En Camino Hacia la Clínica <https://online.pubhtml5.com/rsys/hmdf/#p=1>

every year in our space. UF library specialists used the opportunity to give them a tour of LACC including its closed stacks, and to highlight our archival partnership with the Latina Women's League, showing them a finding aid, an archival box with documents, and the reading room where such documents are consulted. We also had a surprise for them: an archival box with the collection they had donated to us. The material was housed in archival free folders and arranged following RWHP's organization indicated with clips and rubber bands. We explained the archival principle of "original



Screenshot from the promotional video.