# Digitizing the Archive: Historicizing Latinx Issues in Northwest Ohio

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## Abstract

This article explores how digital humanities (DH) projects, specifically the building of digital archives and digital exhibitions, can be implemented to preserve, reveal, and highlight previously invisibilized histories. This piece examines the construction of the Latino/a/x Issues Conference (LIC) archive at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), a public university in rural Northwest Ohio. This article, from the perspective of the archivist, explores the following research questions: How can DH archival projects reveal and preserve invisibilized histories of Latinx students at public universities against a series of constraints and serve as a means of (re)producing latinidad? This case study explores how to utilize the traditional form of the DH digital archive to document and preserve latinidad in institutional archives and advances the notion of digital archiving as a form of first-aid care to address the historical erasure of Latinx communities in institutional archival contexts. In doing so, this article critically examines the process of archiving the BGSU LIC as a means to consider the possibilities and limits of archival intervention, the production and preservation of memory, and the challenges and affordances of descriptive infrastructures that underlie archival work.

**Keywords:** archivization; digital archiving; digital humanities; latinidad; metadata

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## Introduction

T his article explores how digital humanities (DH) projects, specifically the building of digital archives and digital exhibitions, can be implemented to preserve, reveal, and highlight previously invisibilized histories of Latinx[1] students in higher educational institutions. I situate this process as a form of first-aid archival care, addressing histories in need of attention, care, and curation (Arroyo-Ramírez et al., 2022; Morello, 2020, p. 144), while also exploring how digital archival initiatives can produce memory. This piece examines the construction of the Latino/a/x Issues Conference (LIC) archive[2] at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), a public research university in rural Northwest Ohio, discussing the construction and exhibition of archival materials drawing together perspectives from critical archival studies and the field of DH. I argue that for communities whose histories have been strategically and structurally neglected in traditional archives (Villarroel & Baeza Ventura, 2019), digital archiving is a means through which to preserve materials at risk of immediate loss and to ensure memories and stories are available to communities for future engagement, analysis, and possibly (re)creation.

In situating the centrality of archives in the field of DH, Alexis Lothian and Amanda Philips have noted that digital archives are "the most legible form of digital humanities production" (2013, p. 6). A dynamic and growing field that frequently returns to the question of self-definition, early

DH practitioner Wendell Piez defined DH not only by its "study [of] digital media and the cultures and cultural impacts of digital media" but fundamentally by its scholarly processes of "designing and making" (2008, para. 9). As such, the construction of digital archives and practices of digital archiving has been deeply aligned with DH scholarly traditions of maker culture.

At the intersection of archival studies and DH, there has also been spirited discussion of the way in which traditional physical archives have perpetuated inequalities and elisions through the historical situation of "*the archive* as the all-encompassing site of knowledge" (Kim, 2015, p. ii). David J. Kim classifies the current period as distinguished by a "'digital archive fever'" among DH practitioners (2015, p. i), drawing attention to the mushrooming of digital archival projects across a variety of institutions. Critical DH scholars have long argued for the imperative to decolonize digital archives, centering previously historically marginalized narratives and indigenous experiences and subjectivities while reflecting upon the limits of digital technologies to "reshape the power dynamics that distinguish between center and periphery" within the space of the archive (Lothian & Phillips, 2013; Risam, 2019; Risam, 2014, p. 38; Cushman, 2013).

In specifically discussing the potentially productive overlap between DH archival initiatives, Latinx Studies, and histories of Latinx communities, Kelley Kreitz notes that digital "[a]rchival documents could become sources for rewiring nineteenth-century hemispheric notions of Latinidad" (2017, p. 311), and, I emphasize here, potentially sources for rewiring 20$^{th}$ and 21$^{st}$ century national and urban-centered notions of latinidad through the implementation of small-scale institutional archival projects. The concept of latinidad, like the term Latinx, has been contested, at times forwarding a uniting concept of an imagined cultural, socio-historical Latinx community extending beyond national geographic borders (Coronel-Molina, 2017). Alternatively, recent Latinx scholars have forwarded critiques of latinidad as not merely reductionist but reproductive of anti-Black erasures of Afro-Latinx communities (Flores, 2021; Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018), and thus not merely a theoretical concept that has outlived its usefulness but an exclusionary paradigm. Despite these critiques, I deploy and utilize the term latinidad situating Latinx identity, community, and latinidad as defined by "a post-regional and hemispheric configuration that includes US Latino and Latin American practices" (L'Hoeste & Rodríguez, 2020, p. 15). Specifically, DH practitioners Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Juan Carlos Rodríguez have noted when discussing Latinx DH approaches that "nation and the region do not simply vanish or go away [and we cannot] disregard material, economic, and sociopolitical differences" when invoking notions of latinidad and Latinx identities (2020, p. 16). I engage with both concepts here drawing on Kreitz's work (2017).

With the field of Latinx DH Studies actively growing (L'Hoeste & Rodríguez, 2020), there are a multitude of dynamic digital archival projects being developed to recover, preserve, and present Latinx histories and explore and contest concepts of Latinx identities. The University of Houston's Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage program, *Recovery*, which collects and preserves the written record of Latinx communities from the colonial period to 1980, is one such initiative that is currently facilitating the creation of the U.S. Latino Digital Humanities Center (USLDH), the first DH center for Latinx research (Arte Público Press., n.d.). Other digital archival projects include "The Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Project and Archive" (Cotera et al., n.d.), "Rhizomes: Mexican American Art Since 1848" (Davalos & Cortez, n.d.), and "Chicana Diasporic, A Nomadic Journey of the Activist Exiled" (García Merchant, n.d.). Pérez et al., in discussing the state of Latinx DH note that digital archival projects centering Latinx experiences and voices not only "demonstrate resistance to the university" but also "specifically the archive, as colonizing spaces that keep Latinx communities outside its gates" (2020, 6:20). Pérez et al. (2020) have

argued for the importance of constructing Latinx digital archives as forms of scholarly resistance particularly at institutions outside the R-1 scope, which refers to institutions characterized by high levels of research activity and spending.

As such, my article explores how digital archival projects, when implemented in a targeted fashion in smaller institutions, can provide lasting memoric and historical interventions into existing university archival structures by assisting in (re)producing Latinx community memory and serving as a front-line intervention in addressing exclusion from the historical record, including latinidad within the institutional archive. Here, I consider archive in multiple contexts. Primarily, I focus on the digital archive, which may be understood as "'a conscious weaving together of different representational media'" (Owens, 2014, para. 11), generally, historical documents and materials that are digitized.

I also engage with the theoretical concepts of what archivist Dorothy Berry has termed *the archive* and *archives*, with the archives understood as nebulous and shifting, referring to any collection of materials reproductive of history, and archives as understood through the means by which institutions define "documentary history" (2021, p. 6). I situate the LIC archival initiative as a process of collection, (re)production, and reunification of Latinx histories through the construction of a digital archive that occurs against the backdrop of the larger institutional university archive (Cotera, 2015). The LIC archive, as I will explore, is both nebulous and shifting, a contingent collection, but also can be seen as a method by which latinidad was documented and became a more central part of BGSU's history.

In this article I investigate key questions: How can DH archival projects reveal and preserve invisibilized histories of Latinx students at public universities against the backdrop of structural and technological constraints, and how can DH archival projects facilitate the (re)production of latinidad? I do so by discussing the material and technical considerations of building a small-scale digital archive, outlining the acquisition of materials, exploring the descriptive digital infrastructure that underlies the project, and reflecting on the process of not merely preserving histories but presenting and engaging with the larger community. As such, this article takes the construction of the LIC archive and its exhibition as a case study to examine and reflect more broadly on the way in which digital memories from the Latinx community can be preserved and cared for within the technological and institutional boundaries of the traditional university archive.

Focusing on the LIC archive, I center a discussion of latinidad in the university archive, as one of a "complex range of *latinidades*" that makes up a larger "phenomenon of identity construction" of Latinx communities across space and history (Gerke & González Rodríguez, 2021, p. 3). As follows, I briefly discuss the context of the LIC digital archival initiative against the backdrop of the university archives, then review how digital archives have historically been applied as a method of DH scholarly production, also drawing attention to the limitations of digital archives, particularly how they have replicated exclusions comparable to the traditional archive. I then recount the construction of the archive and digital exhibition as the lead archivist and exhibition curator, reflecting on the limitations and affordances of digitally archiving historically marginalized stories, considering both traditional archival practices and descriptive infrastructures such as metadata. I bring together both DH and critical archival critique of these technological infrastructures. I then turn from the often-depoliticized technical processes of digitization, which are in fact (re)productive of memory, towards the question of exhibition of

materials and community engagement with archival materials, exploring opportunities and challenges in opening the archive.

Ultimately, I argue that small-scale digital archival projects such as the LIC archive, even when structured in normative archival formats, may enable a "greater democratization of knowledge" (Kreitz, 2017, p. 309). Revealing and preserving the histories of the LIC and Latinx students, scholars, activists, and cultural workers who participated in the LIC over many years centers Latinx subjectivities and latinidad in the university archives through memoric (re)production. Small-scale digital archival initiatives ultimately serve as a form of front-line archival first aid in preserving and protecting Latinx histories.

## Context and Review: The LIC Archival Initiative and Critical Digital Humanities Approaches to Archivization

To contextualize this case study, I provide some brief background regarding BGSU and its university archives as well as the details of this archival initiative that included a multi-phased approach to collecting and digitizing materials, curating an exhibition, and engaging in community outreach. Against this backdrop, I explore larger questions including the (re)production of the experiences and histories of Latinx students at BGSU and the limits of enacting first-aid care to previously invisibilized histories in university archival contexts at BGSU, even when attempting to center what critical archivists Arroyo-Ramírez et al. (2021) have discussed more broadly as radical empathy in archival practice.

BGSU is a public research university founded in 1910 as a teacher-training institution in Northwest Ohio (Overman, 1967). While located in a predominately white and rural area, the university has a rich tradition of Latinx and Black student activism and scholarship intimately connected with the founding of the Ethnic Studies Department at the University in 1970 (Scott, 2021) and the establishment of the La Unión de Estudiantes Latinos (LSU) founded in 1972 (Latino Student Union, LSU). While LSU has and continues to be a strong presence at BGSU, it has not been the only organization that represents Latinx students and issues at the institution. While these groups have evolved or concluded over the years, the vibrancy of the Latinx community is demonstrated by the Latino Cultural Arts Organization, the Latino Alumni Society, Juntos, a Latinx graduate student organization, La Comunidad, a Latinx living community, and the Latino Networking Community (The Center for Multicultural and Academic Initiatives, 2021e).

As such, while BGSU is distinguished by a strong tradition of Latinx activism, cultural activity, and scholarly production, this historical reality has not always resulted in comparable archival care for these records and stories. While LSU's records have been preserved by the University Archives (UA 096—Latino Student Union 2018), other aspects of BGSU Latinx student history have only been newly preserved. These materials include records of the LIC, founded in 1995 by the then Office of Multicultural Affairs and co-sponsored by LSU. Jeffrey Schnapp, in discussing archival decolonization and production in a digital age, compares archives to burial grounds, noted that "[e]very burial ground needs to be cared for continuously if it is to endure" (2016, p. 22). Comparatively, while Radhika Gajjala (2019) rightly questions the uncritical impulse of DH practitioners to archive, digitize, and datafy marginalized histories, I emphasize here the importance of thoughtful, slow preservation of Latinx histories at BGSU as a DH method and mode of scholarly care.

At BGSU, only recently has this care been extended to preserve the extensive memories and histories of Latinx students at the institution and the LIC specifically. In 1995, the LIC was founded with the theme of the "Inclusive Discourse of the 21st century" (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 2021). With its founding in 1995, the LIC has occurred for over 25 years at BGSU, bringing together faculty, staff, students, speakers, scholars, and community members to discuss institutional, local, national, and global Latinx issues and thus has served as a significant event around which Latinx student activity, activism, scholarship, and cultural expression has occurred at the university. In this sense, while the archival initiative focused on one particular event, the collection and presentation of materials serve as a particular window into the larger history of Latinx communities at BGSU and in Bowling Green, Ohio.

I began work on the LIC digital archive as the then-Graduate Student Research Assistant and member of the LIC Organizing Committee. As part of the 25th commemoration of the Conference, members of the committee which included students, faculty, staff, and alumni, sought to not only celebrate the conference's history through programming, but to ensure that there was a historical record of the conference available for future committees, the student body, and historians. The goal was to both digitally preserve documents and materials and to bequeath the physical materials to the university archives to ensure institutional posterity. The collection and construction of the archive was a collaborative effort including University Archivist, Mark Sprang; leading members of the organizing committee, Susana Peña and Luis Moreno; and myself as the digital archivist working directly with documents.

As I will discuss in the following sections, this archival initiative was composed of a multi-phased approach which changed over the course of the project as a result of emergent challenges related to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This archival initiative included physically collecting all LIC conference materials, digitizing all materials into a digital archival collection as part of the larger digital university archives, bequeathing physical materials to university archives, planning a pop-up archival exhibition at the conference, soliciting materials from the community, and finally producing a digital exhibition of select materials. Considering the material construction of the digital archive and exhibition as a case study illuminates larger challenges digital archivists and DH practitioners may face when working to preserve and digitize materials from Latinx communities, which is imperative to consider as new forms of archives and archivization are increasingly reimagined in what María Cotera has noted as the "digital turn" of archives, whereby DH practitioners increasingly deploy new digital tools and strategies to archive the past (2015, p. 789).

However, even before more recent critical archival interventions, DH practitioners and scholars have long emphasized one key facet of DH scholarship as the building of archives (Gossett, 2012; Wernimont & Losh, 2018). Some of the earliest DH archival work has included translating physical archival collections into digital forms. Text encoding documents and constructing digital archives, such as the early DH contributions of the Rossetti Archive and the Walt Whitman Archive (Risam, 2015), are landmark projects which were technologically transformative but served to reify a white, Western, canon, thereby reaffirming the normative notion of archives that Trevor Owens (2014) defines as "The Papers of So and So." Comparatively, some DH scholars have problematized an unreflexive approach to digital archiving and analysis, emphasizing the necessity of active scholarly interventions and intersectional critique in the context of an ever-proliferating landscape of digital texts, images, documents, and records.

As Roopika Risam has argued, the "digital cultural record exists in a media environment that is caught in a battle between corporate interest, academia and the cultural heritage sector;" as such, the "building [of] new archives" that center "politically, ethically, and social justice-minded approaches to digital knowledge production" is one such way to intervene in the digital cultural record and traditionally exclusive forms of archival practice (2019, p. 10, 4). The power of the digital archive lies in the ability to define the digital cultural record (Risam 2019), which relates to earlier discussions of the power of the archive in relation to both socially constructed practices and the articulation of collective narratives about material(s), spaces, and events (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995; Foucault, 1972). Here, the power of the LIC is to articulate a shared, collective narrative about past histories of the conference. I also emphasize the power of digital archives in their ability to make materials accessible for scholars and the public to perceive histories in new ways, whether through direct contact, which I discuss in this piece, or through the application of computational textual analysis techniques.

Today new digital archival initiatives focusing on Latinx, Black, queer, feminist, anticolonial, and Indigenous histories have served as historical re-visibilizations of previously masked histories (Cushman, 2013; McLeod et al., 2014; Baeza Ventura et al., 2019; Wernimont, 2013). However, indiscriminate archiving is not in and of itself transformative. As Radhika Gajjala has asked in relation to DH archival initiatives, "[i]s being consigned to a dataset doing justice to subaltern history?" (2019, p. 431). This impulse to save items is defined by a desire to have data work for us (Gajjala, 2019). The practice of digital archiving, even when implemented alongside critical and intersectional approaches, must be contextualized against contemporary and historic "complex politics and power relations" (Risam, 2014, p. 44). When archiving materials to construct a corpus of data, there is an expectation that these materials will be productive, in some sense, for scholars or for the community. Archives perform a particular labor; they assist in the (re)production of ideological projects and of collective narratives (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995). In this case, I seek to stress how the LIC digital archival initiative may be read as (re)productive of memories and stories at risk of loss.

## Working Within and Against the Archive and Informational Infrastructure

In this section, I discuss the material construction of the digital archive considering challenges in the collection and digitization of materials. As a small-scale digital archival initiative operating within the context and constraints of institutional archival practices, on the surface constructing the LIC was a relatively seamless and smooth process with buy-in and support from various institutional offices. However, in reflecting on this process and detailing the behind-the-scenes procedures of archivization on both a structural and technical level, I discuss how specific processes, including the identification of materials for community and institutional memorialization and practices of metadata entry, illuminate a series of both practical and ethical difficulties.

An immediate challenge in the construction of the archive was identifying and collecting documents that were spread across different offices and departments on campus. While the documents were contained within the same institution, personnel changes, student graduations, and office consolidations affected the way in which materials were preserved, with an array of items scattered about on various offices on campus. Illustrating this issue was the shift where the conference was housed. Initially, the event was produced and funded by the Center for Multicultural and Academic Initiatives, which was renamed later the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA); however, today, the School of Cultural and Critical Studies (SCCS) is the home of

the event. As a result of these shifts in sponsorship over the years, materials were housed both in the office of the SCCS director and the director of OMA, as well as in offices of faculty in the Ethnic Studies Department, which supported the conference over the years. These minor difficulties in document collection hint towards larger issues archivists may face when preserving histories of Latinx communities in educational contexts. This case study demonstrates a microcosm of this dynamic with the previous limited institutional care paid to the documents and materials of the LIC until its 25th anniversary.

Carolina Villarroel and Gabriela Baeza Ventura have situated strategic archival neglect of Latinx histories as a structural issue:

> [d]uring nearly two centuries of anti-Latino propaganda and the creation of stereotypes and negative images in popular culture, it is no wonder that so much has been lost of the cultural history of Latinas/os in the United States. The official institutions of the country often did not collect and preserve the Hispanic community's intellectual and cultural documents. (2019, para. 4)

The presence of Latinx communities is often elided in institutional archives not merely from benign neglect but rather is related to a set of normative archival practices that privilege "provenance, original order, [and] collective control" (Berry, 2021, p. 2). Dorothy Berry (2021) has described the comparative erasure and neglect of Black histories in the context of institutional archiving as a similarly structural issue whereby emphasis on provenance of archival objects frequently recenters the archive and cataloguer rather than the communities to which materials belong. More broadly, Nancy Liliana Godoy, a Queer Latinx archivist, notes this particular experience of mourning the "loss of archival material and stories" of Latinx communities which have been historically marginalized by white archivists and institutional archives as a result of these practices (2021, pp. 1–2). Until the 2020 LIC archival initiative, these stories and materials related to the conference history were at risk of being lost.

In this larger archival context, when collections from Black and Latinx communities do enter the archive, normative archival practices of collecting and establishing provenance shifts the practice of preservation from "generative to the acquisitive," positioning community memory and cultural production as merely "ephemeral" until materials are transformed into an archival collection (Berry, 2021, p. 6). In this case, however, there *was* a desire to transfer these memories and stories into a permanent, fixed collection, but this process was spearheaded not by the university archives but by the LIC Organizing Committee composed of students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

This first step of archiving the LIC required the identification of historic conference materials from previous Organizing Committees and the OMA, typically previously tagged as "LIC materials" by year with team members Peña and Moreno assisting in the identification of relevant materials. The collection of raw materials included binders of documents, notes, paper, VHS tapes, and a range of promotional materials and other ephemera. Following this initial phase of collection and digitization, these physical materials were turned over to the university archives to be housed and preserved as a formal, singular, physical collection.

The scattering of LIC materials around BGSU's campus emphasizes the importance of small-scale, front-line archival initiatives to preserve Latinx histories that are at risk of being "underdocumented" (Grimm & Noriega, 2013, p. 107). While Villarroel and Baeza Ventura have

discussed structural neglect of Latinx histories in a nationalized sense, I emphasize the particular precarity of localized Latinx histories at institutions outside the R-1 scope. Rectifying this practice of under-documentation ensures the creation of a digital cultural record that guarantees future generations of students and scholars have the opportunity to access materials thereby facilitating the possibility of "writing back to dominant narratives" in the future (Risam, 2014, p. 44). Particularly, when through the process questions of cataloging, metadata entry, and description are critically interrogated and designed to ensure legibility of materials to students and the community for future engagement and use. This ensures the materials can be productive not for the university archives, but productive of memory for the community from which they were created.

In this part of the process, I worked with the digital archival software Omeka S (Li, 2020). Omeka is an open-source publishing platform and content management system (CMS) used to curate digital collections and exhibitions (Digital Scholar, n.da.); it is frequently used by libraries to create online exhibitions (Clement et al., 2013). Omeka S is specifically focused on institutional use to digitally present historical, cultural collections (Digital Scholar n.db.). In the case of this project, Omeka S served a variety of purposes including facilitating the production of a specific online exhibition but also as a CMS whereby I was able to enter archival objects into the larger university archives collection for discoverability, which presented a particular set of challenges that I will discuss. Despite the affordances of the system, it also presented a new set of concerns in terms of metadata entry, categorization, and identification, which also points towards a key issue in DH projects relating to workflows and labor arrangements. While DH projects at well-funded, R-1 institutions are typically more externally visible and involve large teams (McGrail et al., 2022), this small-scale project was undertaken as part of the normal working of the Organizing Committee.

Because of the targeted scope of the project, I was able to engage in the interpretive and creative work of building the digital exhibition alongside the technical aspects of archival construction, such as entering metadata, digitizing items, and building out a collection, while collaborating with Susana Peña, Luis Moreno, and Mark Sprang. Here, archival construction refers to the physical and technological transformative work of taking objects and commodifying them through digitization into a permanent, static collection (Berry, 2021). Despite the implementation of an equitable and collaborative working arrangement that enabled all parties to participate in generative knowledge construction, this type of project structure is not always standard. I want to draw attention to larger patterns of the devaluation of the computational, technical labor that undergirds DH projects, such as metadata entry, that is frequently performed by (graduate) students. This type of work is often isolated from prestigious aspects of projects when in fact it is deeply imbricated within both the technical and ideological framing of historical documents (Mann, 2019). This discussion of computational, technical labor sheds light on the way in which seemingly rote processes, specifically that of metadata entry, in fact directly shape, influence, and construct the narrative of the archive. This is particularly critical to consider in the case of the LIC.

Scholars working specifically on Latinx digital archival projects, while attending particularly to the structural importance of digitization and exhibition of materials, have framed digitizing and entry of materials as the "grunt work" that has been cobbled together by students, contingent faculty, and volunteers (Morello, 2020, p. 145). While these labor patterns are a result of structural financial disinvestment in these types of archival projects, it is important to address how this type of "grunt work" in fact tangibly affects the meaning of the archive (Morello, 2020,

p. 145). Archivist Itza A. Carbajal argues that metadata in traditional digital archival practice has often been treated as an "afterthought" in the production process (2021, p. 92), but in fact involves critical decision-making that can change how materials are contextualized against the larger archival structure as they become legible and searchable through metadata tags. Jacques Derrida presciently noted before the digital turn that "the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content…The archivization produces as much as it records the event" (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995, p.17).

Metadata schemas are not neutral, and as Kara Long et al. note, the way in which the individual archivist categorizes items, "…sometimes described as the 'power of the archivist,'—[can] change the ways users interact and understand objects in archival collections" (2016, p. 122). As such, the seemingly technical process of metadata entry thus not only has the potential to affect the larger historical and ideological narratives that archives present, but metadata entry can include anti-racist and anti-colonial practice that "unsettle[s] institutional archives," according to Carbajal, who has argued for the implementation of critical "post-custodial" metadata praxis in the archiving of materials of U.S. and Latin American organizations (2021, p. 91). Initially, post-custodial archival praxis was theorized in a technical sense, referring to the increasing necessity of archivists ceasing to take a custodial approach to materials and shifting the hosting, preservation, and maintenance of objects back towards the creator (Ham, 1981). Today, it refers to a more critical practice whereby creators or communities maintain archival records with assistance or support from archivists (Zanish-Belcher, 2019, pp. 14-15).

Over the course of this project, I was operating within a particular institutional context with limited abilities for archival intervention. As such, this project did not implement a post-custodial praxis; instead, I operated within a space Amanda Belantara and Emily Drabrinski (2022) have situated as the constant compromise and accommodation of the cataloguer, cataloging objects through a digital system, but attempting to engage in descriptive practice that would increase access to and legibility of the objects to the BGSU Latinx community. Berry has noted that while digital archiving and open searchable content may seem to idyllically open up the archive; in fact, these "descriptive systems are often the first interaction patrons have with our institutions" and frequently the "language and systems feel alienating" (2021, p. 10).

Berry (2021) and other scholars have increasingly advocated for practices of reparative description (Kempton, 2022) that seek to re-center subjects featured in the content rather than deploying linguistic description that "serves the systems, not the subjects" (Berry, 2021, p. 9). Other scholars have noted that normative archival practices have the power to "name, broadcast, normalize, oppress, and exclude" marginalized histories (Allison-Cassin & Seeman, 2022, p. 1). Archival workers within the constraints of such systems can seek to resist systems through forms of reparative description (Belantara & Drabinski, 2022). Despite the structural limits to reimagine and implement interventionist metadata praxis working within the context of Omeka, I want to draw attention to strategic choice involved in metadata entry and emphasize that there are new modes of critical metadata praxis emerging that could be applied in future projects. Particularly, as we see the implementation of not only new small-scale archival projects of Latinx histories but also increased practices of community-led archiving.

In this case, I worked with the digital archival software Omeka S which employed the Dublin Core Metadata classification schema. The Dublin Core metadata schema's fundamental principles include "simplicity, semantic interoperability, international consensus, and flexibility for Web resource description" (Greenberg, 2005, p. 28). However, despite the schema's flexible

structure, there were numerous actionable challenges in inputting information about LIC items within the classification structure. Other scholars have noted general difficulties in implementing the Dublin Core schema in the specific context of Omeka (Maron & Feinberg, 2018). K. J. Rawson has noted, "archival classification infrastructures come to bear on archival objects in ways that impact how those objects are organized, accessed, and, we can imagine, interpreted" (2018, p. 340). Not only are archived objects affected by the individual performing the metadata entry, but the very application of a schema fundamentally transforms the data.

Every object I collected, scanned, and uploaded into the Omeka system required a series of choices that would affect how users searched, accessed, and understood the digital object. For example, for each program, what was the appropriate entry for "publisher?" For many of the early conferences the then Center for Multicultural and Academic Initiatives funded and sponsored the conference, however, as time went on, co-sponsors were added. This category also glossed over the internal challenges, such as which internal entity funded the conference over the years, switching between the then Center for Multicultural and Academic Initiatives and later SCCS.

A more critical choice was labeling each object's subject. Which eventually, after much discussion amongst the team, was labeled "conference" and "Latino/a/x" to reflect both the type of programming and the subject matter. This was a choice to reflect the conference's change in title from Latino Issues Conference to include the "a" and "x" over the years. The change in title, from Latino to Latino/a/x represents the way in which, over 25 years, the organizing committee articulated and modified a version of latinidad. The investment in community reflection on naming was captured by a thematic session "LatinX: Interrogating the X" in 2019 involving students, community members, and BGSU faculty (School of Cultural and Critical Studies, 2021). As the cataloger of these objects, this notion of fixing subject within the collection, while seemingly technical, immediately called to larger debates of how to conceptualize, define, and fix Latinx identity within a technical descriptive system, to produce a particular narrative of the event through the fossilizing process of digitization.

Choices of metadata entry matter. In small-scale projects, unlike larger DH projects that involve, for example, crowd-sourced labor of metadata entry which may introduce generative or problematic "folksonomies" (Manzo et al., 2015), when implementing small-scale digital archival projects, metadata entry and the physical process of digitization cannot be conceptualized as remote from exhibition and analysis. It is critical, particularly for DH archival projects that seek to preserve and highlight Latinx histories, to strategically think through the metadata entry process to prevent further erosion or misrepresentation of archival objects. One such strategy, as carried out here, was to discuss and decide on practices of metadata entry collaboratively *before* the digitization and entry process began. Considering these questions, for example, retaining "Latino" as a tag to honor the historical titling of the conference or selecting "Latinx/a/o" to increase legibility of the topic for students searching the archive today, was an important step in the process. While in this case the central question centered on discoverability and community and student access to these materials, this issue is related to larger questions of the implications of normative or seemingly technologically neutral descriptive practice that may not merely reinscribe erasures but actively reproduce hegemonies (Belantara & Drabinski, 2022, p. 5).

In some cases, however, the metadata schema presented opportunities to make archival materials more legible through categories such as "alternative title." Throughout the data entry

process, we had lengthy conversations about the appropriate title for the conference, and the team decided to emphasize chronology in the resources over theme. However, each LIC had a particular theme; as such, inputting the thematic focus as an alternative title allowed not only for the community and alumni to search for materials according to relevant issues of interest, but revealed, throughout the process of digitization and uploading, the historic foci of the conference.

While there were many items within the collection, including photographs, committee notes, newspapers, advertisements, and other documents, the most complete items we amassed were programs and posters. Adding an alternative title provided insight into how the Organizing Committee of the LIC conceptualized the scope of the event and offered historical commentary on how the LIC imagined and articulated the boundaries of latinidad in a scholarly and social sense over the years at BGSU, all through a simple metadata category.

For example, in the founding event in 1995, the committee declared the theme to be the "Inclusive Discourse of the 21st century" (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 2021). This theme remained the same for the first four conferences, appearing in all programs as an alternative title for the materials as a means to group together these objects across temporal boundaries. In this sense, as the conference matured, we also saw the organizing committee explicitly address the question of latinidad through alternative titles such as "Cornucopia of Voices" at the 6th Annual Conference or at the 10th annual conference "In and Out: Making Latino Sense" (The Center for Multicultural and Academic Initiatives, 2021d; The Center for Multicultural and Academic Initiatives, 2021a). It is through the preservation of these small details within the larger LIC archive and strategic metadata entry that we see not merely the particularities of the LIC as an event, but the preservation and (re)production of part of the story of Latinx students, alumni, and artists throughout BGSU's history.

Considerations of how to label the subject of materials or title not only related to student and community access, but to fixing these materials through the digitization and metadata entry process. As Amanda Belantara and Emily Drabinski note, choices by an "individual cataloger can reverberate across Library systems worldwide, sedimenting a particular point of view across cultures, time, and space" (2022, p. 1). As such, it is essential to think through the metadata model schema before digitizing and inputting objects. The inputting of documents and materials within the structure of Omeka and utilizing the Dublin Core Schemas, even before the process of articulating a digital exhibition, essentially (re)creates the event of the LIC in a particular way (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995).

Another key issue that arose in the process of digitizing materials and uploading them into the Omeka system was identification of individuals depicted in conferences' photographs and images. In the case of this archival project, I worked with both physical photographs and digital film, often with no context identifying who was depicted. To identify individuals, I relied upon the individual and personal memory of staff and faculty who had been at the institution for a long period of time. In archiving LIC materials in an institutional context, the very setting and structure of the university became a challenge as many key individuals had passed through the institution as a result of job changes, retirements, and graduations. As such, one strategy we found to overcome these gaps in identification and to build connection and solidarity among the community was through sharing items we had digitized on social media channels for the conference, including Twitter and Facebook, asking followers to "tag" themselves or people they knew, essentially crowdsourcing archival classification.

For example, we found the photograph in Figure 1 of the LIC from 2006, of the LIC committee, depicted here with an invitation for the 8th Annual Conference, with no context, and we struggled to identify every member in the photograph.

**Figure 1**

*Vintage Photograph and Ticket*



*Note. Source: (LICBGSU, 2020).*

Posting images like this to increase engagement and to identify subjects not only allowed us to market and connect with audiences for contemporary programming, but also to identify with greater accuracy the people depicted. Perhaps more importantly, current BGSU students, faculty, staff, and alumni were brought together by memorializing the conference in social media comments by (re)producing their own memories of the event. This strategy of crowdsourcing the metadata associated with archival objects has been applied in other contexts to engage LGBTQIA+ community members in the process of archiving (Blake, 2015). Thus, this method

facilitated an opening up of the archive to the (digital) community through strategic outreach and involved the knowledge of the community in the archiving process.

Ultimately, despite the structural challenges in collecting, digitizing, and archiving LIC materials, the process of constructing an LIC digital archive was a means of ensuring even a partial set of memories and stories surrounding the event and Latinx student community at BGSU were cared for and preserved and included as part of the broader BGSU institutional history. Despite this, Susana Peña, Luis Moreno, Mark Sprang, and I reflected upon whether the project constituted an intervention or a resistance to the university archival system, arriving at a position of ambivalence on the notion of transformative intervention (Peña et al., 2021), even as we affirmed the necessity and value of the project as a first step in preserving at-risk histories.

Even if the construction of the LIC digital archive and its digitization through descriptive systems was aligned with normative archival practices, I position the action of construction (re)constructive of memories of the event and interventionist in the sense that archiving these materials functioned as a form of first-aid care to address the wound or absence of these stories within the institution, with the hope that future archival initiatives surrounding the LIC have an initial collection to tend to and grow.

## Taking the Archive to the (Digital) Public

In this section, I outline how the LIC archival initiative functioned as a means to present materials, engage the community, and facilitate the articulation of latinidad among the BGSU student and alumni community. Opening the archive through engaging with additional digital platforms facilitated the construction of digital latinidad (Villa-Nicholas, 2019), detailing the challenges of exhibiting materials from the LIC archive in such a way that captured the history of the LIC and included various community stakeholders. I look particularly at the phase of exhibition and how our strategies changed over the course of the project because of the then ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that coincided with the physical conference and caused a pivot from a physical conference set for March 2020 to virtual programming and also necessitated a shift in our strategy of community outreach.

In addition to preserving all items related to the LIC conference as a digital archive and a specific digital exhibition, one initial key aim of the project was to exhibit materials in-person for conference attendees. As a complement to the digital archive, the committee planned to collaborate with university archives to present select materials at a station at the conference physically in the form of a pop-up archive for attendees to engage with the materials, a strategy to take the archive into the community and "disrupt normative archival power structures" (MacDonald, 2020, Abstract). Pop-ups, whereby archivists bring materials or host exhibits outside the physical institutional archive, can address a structural challenge of how frequently communities "don't see themselves using or situated in an archive" (MacDonald, 2020, p. 32), by providing a different point of entry into collections rather than either the physical institution or the "alienating" digital systems patrons may encounter (Berry, 2021, p. 10). Another goal of having physical materials present at the planned physical event was to encourage attendees to bring materials for the purpose of donation and/or scanning to be entered into the digital collection. However, as a result of the virtual shift of the event, physical exhibition was no longer possible due to deteriorating health conditions in March 2020, and the conference, an event that regularly drew hundreds of attendees, was shifted to an online format.

This shift in programming format meant that the digital exhibition, entitled, *25 Years of the Latino/a/x Issues Conference at BGSU*, became the primary medium through which the community could engage with the archived materials. In noting the distinction between a digital archive and exhibition, Mary Samouelian (2009) states that a digital archive may be understood as the broad repository of collected objects and a digital exhibit includes a curated display of select materials with detailed description. The digital exhibition was developed in close collaboration with Susana Peña and was designed to offer a retrospective of the conference and to highlight the most complete set of institutional records within the collection, in this case, an almost complete set of posters and programs from the conference, to demonstrate the historical continuity of the event and to allow audiences to potentially identify their own personal involvement in the conference. This digital exhibition thus represented a small portion of a larger archival collection of LIC materials.

The digital exhibit was designed to represent a series of mediums: posters, programs, newspapers, and ephemera. If posters and programs served as the institutional and official record of the event, collecting and presenting press coverage of the conference allowed visitors to see the event in a broader context. Not only was coverage of the conference preserved from the student newspaper *The BG News*, but also from local papers such as the *Sentinel Tribune* ("BGSU's 12th Latino Issues Conference Thursday," 2006), and *La Prensa,* the oldest weekly newspaper covering the Latinx community in Michigan and Ohio (La Prensa, 2005).

Newspaper coverage of the conference, ranging from digitized newspapers to physical clippings, was a critical category that showed how the conference was advertised to different audiences, student populations, Bowling Green community members, and the larger Latinx community in Northwest Ohio and Michigan. Additionally, the newspaper coverage illustrated how reporters covered the event over the years and gave glimpses of other local and national political issues circulating at the time of the event. The category of ephemera served multiple purposes and allowed us to present photographs from years of the conference but also other items that did not fit in clear categories: ticket stubs, menus, floor plans, and committee documents. This category not only highlighted the students, staff, faculty, and community members involved in the event, but it personalized the conference and allowed us to document and present the labor that went into the programming and planning the event year after year.

While the digital exhibition was initially conceived of as one of two points of entry into the archival collection, the modification to a virtual conference meant that the digital exhibition lost its unique digitality as all conference programming now occurred in virtual conference space. However, rather than simply publicizing the digital exhibition as a resource available for attendees to examine on their own, we developed a virtual session that introduced the exhibition and included a demonstration of how to access and interact with materials for attendees to ensure deeper engagement. Illustrating how to engage with the digital exhibition interface and look at the materials more closely was particularly important. Featuring myself, Susana Peña, Luis Moreno, and Mark Sprang, the virtual session included a discussion of the impetus behind the project, technical aspects of the project including its hosting on Omeka, and a demonstration I led on how to navigate the exhibition and examine each object individually and its associated metadata so that attendees could then search themselves for materials of interest. In this session, attendees, including alumni, shared their stories of participating in LIC when they were students prompted by the presentation of various digital items.

Fundamentally, the roundtable was an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, community members, and alumni to engage not only with the archival materials, but to share their experiences and memories of the conference. This roundtable thus facilitated a moment of constructing through the demonstration of archival materials and discussion of "digital Latinx memory," which Melissa Villa-Nicholas has discussed in the context of social media platforms as a "culmination of collective memory, mediated memories, and personal cultural memory" that can involve "remembrance, nostalgia, and revision around Latinidad" (2019, pp. 3, 2). Rather than simply a static digital exhibit that solitary individuals might engage with on their own, having a devoted roundtable, demonstration, and discussion via Zoom facilitated greater community engagement and collapsed the geographical boundaries that previously prevented both alumni and former committee members, now spatially dispersed from Bowling Green, Ohio to come together, memorialize the event, and articulate a sense of shared digital latinidad. Here, the digital LIC archive transformed from a static collection to a form of living memory, illustrating both the necessity of traditional curation, digitization, and preservation of materials but also the value of opening up space for the community to engage with the archive in a collaborative and generative sense where the focus is not necessarily on archival acquirement of more materials or the educative presentation of materials, but on community-led dialogue.

However, despite the affordances of having a digital exhibition and a virtual roundtable, as scholars have noted in the context of the shift to virtual connection in a pandemic age, simply pivoting to a digital format does not inherently produce digital inclusivity, as issues of access, privacy, and equitable engagement must be directly addressed (Kelly et al., 2020). Additionally, overemphasizing the value of digital exhibitions, archives, and related virtual programming runs the risk of excluding a key part of the community we sought to connect and engage with through this archival initiative: older alumni and former faculty members, staff, and community members who had moved on from the institution and may be geographically dispersed. As Alexander Siefert has noted, "[i]f inclusion…means active participation in the digital world, then older adults who are not online or not active on the internet are at risk of social exclusion" (2020, p. 675). Thus, as was initially planned but not fully executed, having multiple avenues of engagement with digital archival materials including physical pop-up exhibitions and digital exhibits and hybrid forms of connection (Kelly et al., 2020) is critical for digital archivists to consider as they engage in community-informed collection and exhibition practices.

However, in tracking individual visitor metrics post-conference, in a single month the exhibition reached 76 unique visitors and 703 total page views thus evidencing a strong form of engagement with the exhibition even after the planned programming concluded (Edwards, personal communication, April 2, 2020).
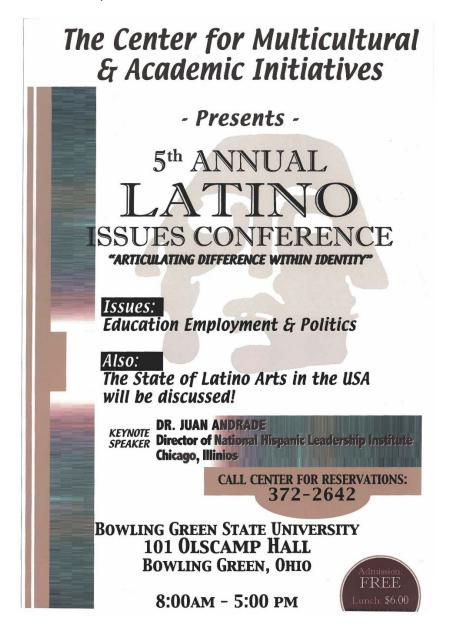
Ultimately, both digitally and in-person focused forms of exhibition and community engagement have benefits and drawbacks. Particularly with the digital shift, the acquisition of archival materials from alumni essentially put the onus on the community to reach out, digitize or physically send in copies of their materials. In addition to seeking out community help in identifying individuals in archival materials, we also attempted to crowdsource collection of materials through social media channels and promote discussion of materials we had digitized. While crowdsourcing of submitted materials remained a challenge, the sharing of LIC archival documents via social media such as Facebook and Twitter for the digital community to engage with was more successful. Bypassing digital archival infrastructure all together and taking archival objects out of the context of the digital exhibition on Omeka to social media platforms presented LIC materials as objects to be shared and engaged with rather than examined. One

such example of this strategy of engagement was combining archival objects with social media trends such as the "10-year challenge" to connect with alumni and other community members; in Figure 2, we shared an archival object from 20 years ago.

**Figure 2**

*5th Annual Conference Poster*

The Center for Multicultural & Academic Initiatives

- Presents -

5th ANNUAL

LATINO

ISSUES CONFERENCE

*"ARTICULATING DIFFERENCE WITHIN IDENTITY"*

Issues:
Education Employment & Politics

Also:
The State of Latino Arts in the USA will be discussed!

KEYNOTE SPEAKER **DR. JUAN ANDRADE** Director of National Hispanic Leadership Institute Chicago, Illinios

CALL CENTER FOR RESERVATIONS:
372-2642

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY
101 OLSCAMP HALL
BOWLING GREEN, OHIO

8:00AM – 5:00 PM

Admission:
FREE
Lunch: $6.00

*Note*. Source: (LICBGSU, 2019).

This mode of sharing materials with the community, even if we only reached a small audience who were active on social media platforms, served our goal of engagement and presenting materials outside the traditional model of a digital exhibition, thereby mediating a form of digital latinidad (Villa-Nicholas, 2019).

However, even as we aimed to share materials, we did hope to acquire objects to add to the collection, but to do so in a way that was not acquisitive, rather by drawing on a post-custodial ethos. We hoped to allow community members to share materials for digitization and then retain ownership and possession of their physical materials. A potential model that mitigates this concern has been undertaken by the BGSU University Archives as part of their collaborative effort with the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo to digitize items related to the Muslim community in the Northwest Ohio region, whereby archivists physically traveled to the Islamic Center with digitization equipment and digitized materials from members, essentially taking the archive outside the university to the community. To fully connect with alumni and all community partners, it is necessary to implement multiple forms of engagement and to build trust that materials will be preserved and cared for. Extending care to archival materials is critical. While Jeffrey Schnapp has spoken of treating archives as burial grounds (Schnapp, 2016), perhaps we can imagine a different model of extending slow and methodological care. As Radhika Gajjala has argued for, to "build caring DH projects—much deeper groundwork is needed" (2019, p. 432). Building small-scale projects like the LIC is but a first step to lay deeper groundwork towards future, more transformative archival interventions.

## Tending Archival Burial Grounds or First-Aid Care in Preserving Latinx Digital Histories

Digital archives are not only a powerful form of DH scholarly production, but they also have the ability to assist in the (re)construction of latinidad across space and time. In a period where the field of DH continues to undergo necessary interrogations concerning its possible (re)production of not only racial hegemonies but neoliberal forms of knowledge (Allington et al., 2016; Gajjala, 2019; McPherson, 2012; Risam, 2019), considering how to harness the affordances of digital archival initiatives to not merely "add" Latinx voices to the digital cultural record (Risam, 2019), but to preserve and recreate locally and institutionally specific forms of latinidad through the digital archival process is imperative (Kreitz, 2017).

Digital archival projects such as the LIC archive and its exhibition are forms of interventionist DH scholarship in so far as they seek to tangibly preserve and share with a local public the long and rich history of Latinx students, scholars, and community members at BGSU, even if such projects do not reform the archive itself. Even when working within a set of constraints, whether informational infrastructures or the external challenges of presenting materials in a digital environment with unequal levels of access, there are opportunities for archivists to engage in empathetic and thoughtful curatorial practice (Arroyo-Ramírez et al., 2022).

In this article, I have sought to emphasize the value of small-scale archival projects in the larger context of DH digital archival production while also highlighting challenges in terms of preservation and exhibition of digital archival initiatives of Latinx histories. The construction of the LIC archive at BGSU actively sought to re-visibilize and preserve Latinx histories, and this DH project achieved that goal. However, this project is still ensconced with the logics and structures of the institutional university archive. I situate this DH project as a form of frontline archival first-aid care to immediately and critically address a historical absence or wound in BGSU's

university archive. Yet, this is not to say after the application of first-aid archival care historical scars do not remain.

Through the preservation of the history of the LIC, now students and scholars have access to a historical record and memory of a quarter century of inclusive Latinx scholarly discourse that can serve as both inspiration and evidence with which to address the current historical moment. Extending this care is thus a critical act that is aligned with the historic spirit of the LIC, to work to "edify a less exclusive universe of [archival] discourse" (The Center for Multicultural and Academic Initiatives, 2021c, para. 1). This archival initiative, operating in conditions of historical emergency, has thus laid the groundwork for future historical (re)construction and growth as archivists tend to this collection and the community and students are able to engage with materials to (re)build new histories and stories.

## Endnotes

[1] There has been considerable discussion of the term Latinx to refer to Latino/Latina communities. Some scholars have been critical of the term as a form of linguistic imperialism that is divorced from material realities (Guerra & Orbea, 2015). However, others have argued for the generative usage of the term. Christine Garcia has suggested that the "conceptualization of the 'x' is rooted in the decolonization of the terms Latina/Latino on two levels: first, confronting and challenging the gender binary, and second, rejecting the silencing and erasure of AfroLatinx and indigenous languages" (2017, p. 210). However imperfect the term I deploy it in this article in accordance with Salvador Vidal-Ortiz and Juliana Martínez's argument that using the term "Latinx foregrounds tensions among self-naming practices and terms that encompass all members of a diverse and complex ethnoracial group: Latinx acts as a new frame of inclusion, while also posing a challenge for those used to having androcentric terms serve as collective representational proxies" (2018, p. 384), which I attempt to do here, localizing and articulating the archival representation of the Latinx community at BGSU.
[2] The total BGSU LIC archive is still being processed, however, some items in the archive are available for view as part of a digital exhibition, *25 Years of the Latino/a/x Issues Conference at BGSU.* I discuss the differences between these two mediums in following sections. https://digitalgallery.bgsu.edu/exhibits/show/latinxconference/licintroduction

## Acknowledgements

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