



Column: Innovations in Libraries

Bringing Local History to the Classroom Through Creating Primary Resource Education Kits

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ABSTRACT

In early 2023, the archives at New Mexico State University (NMSU) received an institutional grant for a pilot project creating primary resource education kits available for checkout to NMSU and the surrounding communities. Containing facsimiles of archival materials, the kits will showcase the history of southern New Mexico through NMSU Archives and Special Collections materials. This will bring our unique history to learners in a special, hands-on way right in their own classroom. The kits and the educational materials within are meant to be used across many disciplines. These kits will be a new effort at meaningful community education and outreach that extends beyond the space of the university and the time of the archivists in the building. As a companion to the physical kits, a digital expansion pack will be built specifically for K12 classrooms in New Mexico, making it possible for students to have a hybrid experience with archival sources. This article will detail the creation of the kits over the summer, detailing how the digital expansion of the physical boxes can be used in coordination with the physical kits or as a standalone offering.

KEYWORDS

Local history, New Mexico, primary resources, education, communities, kits, cultural heritage

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In the spring of 2023, Wahl applied for a grant from the Southwest and Border Cultures Institute (SBCI) through New Mexico State University (NMSU). The grant application detailed a plan for a pilot educational project in the New Mexico State University Library Archives and Special Collections Department (NMSU ASC), creating primary resource education kits available for checkout to NMSU and the surrounding communities. Focused on expanding possibilities for primary resource education beyond the library space and constrictions of the time of archivists, these kits allow users to create unique learning opportunities for their students or other groups.

Background and Intent of the Grant Project

This educational project highlights the unique collections of the NMSU ASC and expands understanding of primary resource research and archival practices to the NMSU community and surrounding K12 schools. The kits can bring history and historical research of the region into classrooms in a fun, interactive way. The Southwest and Border Cultures Institute (SBCI, 2023) is aimed at funding:

acquisitions by the University Library and Museum, ... faculty and graduate student research on Southwestern and US-Mexico Border issues in the humanities, and ... on- and off-campus public programs that relate to humanities issues in the Southwest and US–Mexico Border region. (para. 1)

The SBCI has funded over 235 proposals totaling over \$458,000 since it began issuing awards in 2001.

The grant money Wahl received is funding four total boxes, or kits. These four kits are focused on NMSU Archives and Special Collections' (ASC) three focused collection areas, each also their own unit led by an archivist: Rio Grande Historical Collection, University Archives, and Political Papers Collections, and an unprocessed box to let learners try out basics of archival processing on their own. Each kit will contain:

- A selection of archival material facsimiles (such as original correspondence, diaries, business records, photographs, maps, oral history transcripts, period catalogs, etc.) packaged and prepared as if they were just pulled from the shelf in the NMSU Archives. The unprocessed box is intentionally left in a certain amount of disarray to simulate the archival processing experience of opening a box that has just been donated, and has no organization applied to it yet.
- Learning materials that include an introduction to the collection in the kit, ideas for lesson plans and activities with the materials for a variety of age groups, handout and worksheet master copies that can be reproduced for in-class work, and instructions for using the kit.

These kits are another sustainable way for the NMSU ASC to expand its reach to the university population and to other surrounding communities. Anyone with borrowing privileges at the NMSU Library or reciprocal borrowing privileges at the NMSU Library who can commit to the responsibilities of checking out and returning the box on time is eligible to check one out. We anticipate these kits will be used by faculty members on campus, and local teachers in Las Cruces, Deming, Hatch, Truth, or Consequences, and perhaps even further afield. This will bring our unique history to learners in a special, hands-on way right in their own classroom. The kits and the educational materials within are meant to be used across many disciplines, not just history (which is one of the first things people think about when they think about archival research); a truly interdisciplinary opportunity for learners.

Following the creation and launch of these kits and their digital counterparts, we anticipate expanding the digital components for classroom uses further afield than NMSU and its surrounding communities. Effectiveness of the kits will be measured via checkout statistics and feedback from users, which will be collected for a year after their launch. These metrics will inform future decisions regarding the physical kits.

Developing a Checklist for Box Creation

Responsibility for choosing the contents of the primary resource kits is split amongst the archivists at NMSU. Archivists in charge of the Rio Grande Historical Collections (RGHC), University Archives, and Political Collections all get to guide their box's contents, while all the archivists contribute to the unprocessed primary resource kit. To help guide choices and maintain a similar strategy for each box, Wahl created the following checklist. The checklist in Table 1 has been filled out for the Rio Grande Historical Collections' box and in the next section, archivist Jennifer Olguin models the process of creating the boxes using the checklist and her knowledge of the depth and breadth of the collections in this unit of the archives.

Table 1

Sample Filled Primary Resource Education Kit Checklist

Primary Resource Education Kit Checklist	
Archives Area:	Rio Grande Historical Collections
Collection Name & MS Number:	Various manuscript collections
Value and purpose of this collection(s) as a primary resource kit:	Learn about the everyday experiences of ordinary people and marginalized groups within the Mesilla Valley and U.S. borderlands.

Introduction & Story the Kit Contents Tell:	Assist students to experience history and understand the past.
Revised Finding Aid included:	Yes
Types of Materials included:	Correspondence, photographs, diary, poster, and editorial cartoon drawing
Any Extra Supplies included:	Yes—magnifying glass
K-4 Activities included:	Activity 1 Compose a diary entry Activity 2 What do you see? Observe the photograph and study the past
Grades 5-8 Activities included:	Activity 1 Analyze the editorial cartoon Activity 2 Create your own cartoon
Grades 9-12 Activities included:	Activity 1 Teaching the concept of the past - analyze the letter Activity 2 Draft a letter to a family member
College Level Activities included:	Activity 1 Analyze the broadsides and make sense of the past Activity 2 Share your broadsides observations
Lesson Plan Template included:	Yes
Suggested Student Learning Outcomes included:	Yes
Box Contents Checklist (for return):	Yes

Note. This is the first iteration of the sample checklist. Future iterations will include changes informed by the process of creation and new user feedback.

Example Box Creation Process

The above checklist provides information for the first box, which contains a variety of materials that can be found in the RGHC repository. Again, for other upcoming kits, selected materials will vary, but for the RGHC box materials range from correspondence, photographs, and editorial cartoons to name a few selections. By observing the materials, individuals will be

able to interact and carry out activities to gauge their understanding of working with archival materials.

Rio Grande Historical Collections

The Rio Grande Historical Collections (RGHC) was founded in 1972 and is recognized as one of the premier repositories of the Southwest and U.S./Mexico borderlands. Archival collections housed in the RGHC highlight some of the diverse holdings and range from personal and family papers, literary manuscripts, and records of organizations and businesses. The bulk of the collection is paper-based records, but other formats include maps, microfilm collections, oral histories, photographs, scrapbooks, films, audiovisual recordings, electronic documents, and other unique materials relating to the region.

Selection of RGHC Materials

Selection of RGHC materials centered on social history. Social history is defined as “social structure and the attitudes, activities, and the daily lives of ordinary people” (Miller, 1981, p. 113). Social history guided the selection of RGHC materials because it is critical to ensure that the everyday experience of dominant and non-dominant voices are conveyed. New Mexico's social history is vast and rich, and many groups have contributed to the history and culture of the state. Many personal perspectives can be uncovered, and social history can be tapped by reviewing materials from impactful events, such as the Mexican Revolution, Bracero Program, and WWI involvement by borderland citizens. The concept of social history allows students to understand a versatile and inclusive history, and more importantly, allows students to connect to the past.

The RGHC box includes:

- Correspondence from the William J. Weatherby papers is composed of a two-page letter of personal nature and provides a glimpse into turn of the century ranch life in southern New Mexico dating from 1902.
- Wendell Phillip Thorpe papers document a white farmer from the Las Cruces area who was highly involved in the local farm bureau but also held critical state and national positions as an administrator of the Bracero Program. The Thorpe papers document living conditions, wages, and responses to farmers not adhering to national regulations concerning the Bracero Program dating from 1944-1958.
- Diary belonging to Joseph Quesenberry contains entries relating to his departure from Las Cruces to serve the United States military (Company K, 18th Infantry). The diary is Joe's firsthand account of his time serving in World War I, December 31, 1916, to March 1, 1918.

- Photographs of U.S. Army Refugee Camp at Columbus, New Mexico depict the Mexican population at the refugee camp during 1917.
- The Amador family papers include broadsides and printed ephemera consisting of printed material that includes event posters, advertisements, and other oversized items that depict social and cultural events in Las Cruces and the U.S./Mexico borderland area. The broadsides date from 1888–1947.
- Editorial cartoon drawings consist of current events relating to the Las Cruces area dating from 2006–2023.

Activities

The activities in the kits are centered on primary sources that reflect the region's unique history. Within the kits, the complexity of activities ranges according to grade levels.

Activities for K–8 include examining a photograph and extracting basic information such as who is represented in the photograph as well as where and when the picture was taken. The photograph activity will allow students to comprehend when the photograph was taken and how daily life has changed due to technology. The other format included is a diary, and students will be able to analyze and obtain a first-hand account of experiences and events as they happened in the past. At the end of the activity, individuals will be able to free-write to compose their own diary entry. Another activity asks students to analyze and create their own editorial cartoon. This activity will allow students to think about local political issues and express them in a drawing.

For grades 9–12, students will study a letter and focus on the structure to extract information such as the year it was written, daily/social life clues, information about the sender, etc. At the end of the letter activity, the students will use their understanding of how daily social life has changed and compose a letter to send to a family member. The other activity includes analyzing broadsides, asking students to see articulate how advertisements have evolved. After the broadside activity, students will discuss findings, helping them to develop skills such as critical thinking, historical analysis, and textual analysis.

After engaging with the various formats included in the RGHC kit, students will gain a deeper understanding of history, apply critical thinking skills to historical events, and obtain introductory training on carrying out historical research. Individuals will be interested in learning about various historical events that took place in close proximity to their classrooms. Students are often intrigued by viewing historical photographs and learning about their significance; there is always a story to tell. In addition, students are captivated by the notion of how one keeps all these archival historical materials.

The goal of the RGHC box is to engage students, personalize history through focusing on local collections that show how history was made around them, and allow them to interact and interpret the past utilizing archival materials. Ultimately, the students interacting with primary sources are often fascinated by the vast holdings of materials held within the archives, which will allow them to connect with their cultural heritage.

Digital Expansion of the Physical Boxes

The New Mexico Public Education Department has chosen the Canvas learning management system as the default system and is “[providing] Canvas licenses to all public district and charter schools” through their NM (New Mexico) Canvas Initiative (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2023, para. 2). Canvas is also used for teacher professional development and the state’s teacher evaluation program, Elevate New Mexico. The NMSU Library already develops basic library training modules and adds them to Canvas Commons where anyone can import them into their course for use (Wahl, 2022, pp. 103–104). These training modules include tutorials in formats such as video, Library Guides, text, etc. and include two optional assignments that professors can tweak to fit their class.

The modules for the primary resource education kits will follow the same basic structure as the other library modules, utilizing the Quality Matters rubric for online course content to make sure they are following good standards for online learning (Wahl & Schaub, 2021, p. 8). These corresponding modules will also be added to Canvas Commons, and instructions for pulling those modules into the teacher’s Canvas course will be included in the kits. Each of these modules will be focused on their corresponding kit’s content and can be used to create hybrid units that focus on physical resources and digital ones. Constructed so they can be used as a standalone lesson, classrooms further away can take advantage of the insight into archival research and New Mexico’s history. The priority for these modules is for them to serve as a tool for New Mexico’s university and K12 students. To accommodate use further afield and in spaces where Canvas is not an option, the library plans to investigate the use of Library Guides as an additional content medium.

Conclusion

These archival education kits have the potential for a long, sustainable reach that could be a model for other archives. Through creating the kits, the archives will be able to reach audiences across New Mexico, outside of the NMSU campus, particularly in southern New Mexico. We hope to see increased usage of material and greater community awareness and engagement with local history. We also hope that this project brings us stories from teachers and students about how students perceived value around their own history and its place in the larger narrative changes and expands. The metrics we collect will help us tell a story of the true impact these kits will have. Here at the beginning of this project, we hold hope for a longer-term

narrative shift, and a New Mexico population that is increasingly more active and engaged in its history.

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