Latino Communities & Library Services: An Overview

By Amanda Hirst

I. Introduction

Earlier this year the United States Census Bureau released its first detailed findings on race and ethnicity from the 2000 Census. The report indicates that Hispanics have replaced blacks as the largest minority group in the United States. It is estimated that "the Hispanic population is now roughly 37 million, while blacks number about 36.2 million" (Clemetson). Acknowledging the migration of Hispanics to various parts of the country, Clemetson goes on to state that the majority "of the Latino population remains concentrated in Texas, California, and New York."

In light of these developments, for my final project for LIS 598 – Diversity Seminar, I felt that the issue of public library services to Latino communities deserved exploring. This paper will:

Examine relevant literature regarding:

- demographic information of the Hispanic community in the United States
- the history of advocacy for the Hispanic community by librarians
- service areas that can be customized to the Hispanic community
- current programs and outreach efforts for the Hispanic community by public librarians

Survey:

- public library websites in New York, Texas, California, and Washington for evidence of public libraries addressing core service areas

By doing this, I hope to gain insight into the steps public libraries are taking to address the needs of the Hispanic community.

II. Demographic Information

The Pew Hispanic Center reports that in "the 2000 Census 35,306,000 persons living in the United States identified themselves as being Hispanics" (13). Currently, Hispanics make-up almost 13 percent of our population (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation). The 'Census 2000 Brief of the Hispanic population' reports that 13 percent over half are Mexican with Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and 'Other' roughly comprise the rest of the Latino population equally(Guzman 1). The 'Other' category was made-up of the rest of Central and South American countries (Guzman 1). Salvadorans and Columbians make-up the largest groups from Central and South America represented in the census (Guzman 1). "The relative youthfulness of the Hispanic population is reflected in its population under the age of 18 and in its median age" (Guzman 7). Thirty-five percent of all Hispanics were under the age of 18 compared to the national average of 25.7 percent (Guzman 7). The median age of the Hispanic population as a whole is 24.2 years compared to the national average of 35.3 years (Guzman 7).

In 2002 The Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a national survey of the attitudes of Hispanics on various demographic aspects as well as topics like identity, assimilation, behavior, values, religion, views on government, and views on discrimination.

In regard to income, they survey reports that Hispanics have on average the same income as blacks; which is less than the average income of whites. Fifty percent of

Latinos surveyed reported having an annual income under $30,000, 23 percent of Latinos earned between $30,000 - $50,000, and 17 percent reported earning more than $50,000 (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 14).

The survey further distinguishes Latinos by being foreign-born and native or U.S. born. It found that the Latino respondents "are more likely to be foreign-born (63 percent) than native-born" (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 14). The Pew Hispanic Center found that by making this distinction changed the results of the data significantly. For example, 61 percent of foreign-born Latinos speak Spanish as their primary language, while only 4 percent of native-born Latinos identify Spanish as their primary language (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 15). This split is also evident in the areas of educational attainment. Fifty-five percent of foreign-born Latinos surveyed reported not completing high school "compared to fewer than a quarter (23 percent) of native born Latinos" (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 15). Native-born Latinos also have higher rates of attainment of high school diplomas, college experience, college degrees, and graduate degrees.

When questioned in areas of identity, the respondents reported that they were equally as likely to refer to themselves by their country of origin (i.e. Mexican) as the term 'Latino' (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 9). The term 'Latino' is the preferred term of their racial category by 56 percent of the respondents (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 9). Although according to the authors "Hispanics seem to see themselves as having separate and distinct cultures based on country of origin rather than sharing a single culture as Hispanics or Latinos" (9). Latinos tend to be somewhat more conservative in their political views than whites, especially those born

outside of the United States (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 9).

Latinos are 35 percent (higher than both whites and blacks) more likely to have no health

insurance, and report challenges in paying medical bills Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser

Family Foundation 11). Latinos delay in seeking medical care, have difficulty in seeking

needed health services, and have difficulty in communicating with health care providers

(Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 11).   They reported a high incidence

of discrimination by other Latinos and many consider this type of discrimination a

problem (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 11). According to the report,

"31 percent of Hispanics report they or someone close to them has suffered

discrimination in the last five years because of their racial or ethnic background" (Pew

Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 11).

Despite the discrimination they may face, Latinos generally have a favorable

opinion of the government and are optimistic about their social and economic future in

the United States (Pew Hispanic Center / Kaiser Family Foundation 11).

III. Literature Review

In my review of the literature, three major themes were present. The first was an

historical approach to library services and advocacy of the Latino community. Another

major theme addressed service and policy areas that can impact the Latino community

and last were examples and evaluations of programs that public libraries offered in their

communities. In this literature review, I will touch on all three of these themes.

A Brief History of Libraries and Latinos

"The scarcity of professional literature on the early history of library services to the Spanish speaking prompts the assumption that, with few exceptions, library services to U.S. Latino populations are a relatively new development" (Guerna, Erazo). One of the early pioneers of service to the Latino community is Pura Belpre who is thought to be one of the first Latina librarians worked for the New York Public Library beginning in 1921 (Guerna, Erazo). In the article 'Latinos and Librarianship' Guerna and Erazo state that "There must have been others but, without further investigations, this may never be known due to the passage of time and fading memories."   In 1964, the Library Services and Construction Act was passed and federal funds became available to communities throughout the United States (Guerna, Erazo).   This enabled librarians to improve library service to Spanish speaking people "to barrios, to farm workers through bookmobiles, and various other forms of outreach" (Guerna, Erazo). From the mid-1970's until today there has been substantially more literature on serving the Latino community.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, librarians were concerned that the American Library Association's "efforts at addressing the needs of the Latino community lagged far behind those aimed at mainstream America" (Guerna, Erazo). A movement was growing for a national association to support:

- Development of Spanish-language and Latino-oriented library collections
- Recruitment of bilingual, multicultural library personnel
- Promotion of public awareness of libraries and librarianship among Latinos
- Advocacy on behalf of the information needs of the Latino community
- Liaison to other professional organizations

(from REFORMA's website)

REFORMA, a national association that advocates on behalf of the Latino communities, was created to serve these needs. Eventually, REFORMA became an affiliate of the ALA but continues to have its own governing body. REFORMA has worked closely with the ALA on a number of initiatives including 'Guidelines for Library Services to Hispanics' in 1988 (Guerna, Erazo).

Service and Policy Areas that can impact Latino Library Usage

In general there are service and policy areas that can have a large impact on library usage by the Latino community. I've organized them into five core areas:

- Informational
- Collection
- Technology
- Programs
- Outreach

Informational refers to areas of policy that can be modified to create a more inclusive environment for Latino library patrons. Areas like the library's mission statement should address the library's commitment to serving a multicultural community. Libraries can review the requirements for obtaining a library card, since the documentation requirement is often perceived negatively by the Latino community (Marglois). Also, libraries might consider offering amnesty periods for the return of overdue materials without charging fines and waiving overdue fines for children. Naturally, these types of policies do not need to be instituted only for Latinos, all socially and economically challenged families can benefit from these policies. A final informational area to be addressed is library publications like flyers, advertisements and card application. These publications should be in both Spanish and English. This has

many practical implications but the overall sentiment is that the library is trying to reach out to the Latino community.

Building a library collection of books, media, and periodicals can be the most challenging aspect of serving Latino communities. Librarians attempting to collect materials for Latinos "have the often daunting task of locating resources that meet these patrons' diverse language and educational needs" (Barrett). Since the Latino community has a diverse set of needs there it is difficult to focus on one subject area or print resource area. However, collection development librarians should seek out Latin and South American publishers to accompany materials published in the United States. Anecdotally, I noticed that libraries are more likely to carry periodicals from the U.S. that have been translated into Spanish rather than materials from Latin and South America.

The main areas of technology that libraries can enhance services to Latinos are electronic databases, the internet, and the library catalog. Several full-text Spanish language databases exist that were created by U.S., Latin and South American companies. Gale / Info Trac full-text Spanish language database Informe! is one example. OCLC Firstsearch also has a multi-lingual interface (Barrett). However, Latino library patrons are interested in materials produced by Latin and South American database producers (Barrett). These products can provide different viewpoints than those solely coming out of the U.S.

Public library websites are an increasingly important tool in marketing library services and providing information. This is another area where libraries can attract the Latino community by having some pages with core information (open hours, for example) in Spanish. Public libraries websites usually offer links pages of recommended

websites and search engines. Public libraries hoping to serve Latino patrons should also provide links to online materials such as Spanish language search engines or news sites that may be of interest to them. Some library catalogs have multi-lingual interfaces. While it may not be possible to have the bibliographic records in a multi-lingual format some local cataloging practices can enhance the use of the catalog by collocating by call numbers of materials in the same language. For example, a call number of a cookbook in Spanish would look like '*Spanish 641.563*'

The types of programming libraries offer to Latinos might be much the same as programs offered to the community at large. In my review of the literature, it recommended hiring a translator for programs offered to the community at large. For example, if the library is offering a income tax clinic have someone there that can speak Spanish too (Alire, Archbique). Also, include both Spanish and English on any marketing for library programs. Bilingual storytimes, bibliographic instruction, and basic skills computer classes are the most common types of library programs offered to the Latino community.

Outreach to the Latino community presents many challenges to the librarian but can be the most rewarding. Most librarians use elementary schools as their main area of outreach however community and cultural events might be excellent ways for librarians to meet the Latino community. Outreach beyond the walls of the library also provides the possibility for partnerships especially if the library is struggling to gain credibility with the Latino population. Partnerships can provide an excellent means of collaborating and networking within the Latino community (Alire, Archbique).

Current Programs and Strategies of Service to the Latino Community

In my review of the literature of public library programs and services geared toward the Latino population, I found libraries were addressing their needs in many ways. Libraries were sponsoring cultural events like the program called 'El Dio de los Ninos / El Dio de los Libros' by the Pierce County Library in Washington. Which is 'a spin-off from a traditional Mexican festival honoring children, and will feature a day of books, bilingual storytelling, puppet shows, and multiethinic crafts" (Bell). The Pierce County Library has incorporated bilingual signage and has found the Latino community to "understand, respect, and appreciate our efforts" (Bell). Irania Patterson of the Charlotte Public Library began a bilingual storytime group in home daycares within the Latino community. As the group grew in size and popularity the storytime was moved back to the library (Patterson). The families were using the library more so Patterson began teaching basic computer skills and bibliographic instruction. She realized "that many organizations that assist low income Hispanics are resolving their emergency problems, but forget that they also need to become self-sufficient" (Patterson). The Henry H. Terrazzas Branch of the Austin Public library instituted a 'four pronged strategy – instituting a library amnesty period, slashing materials fines, abolishing standard ID requirements, and establishing a school wide library card sign-up campaign" to increase Latino usage of the branch (Margolis). And the King County Library System established a Hispanic / Latino Library Advocacy group called HoLA. They translated library documents to Spanish, created a mailing list to Latinos within the community, participated in Cinco de Mayo events in White Center, and created bilingual storytimes and basic skills computer classes in Spanish (Zelter). In my review of the literature the

examples mentioned are representative of activities taking place all over the country as public libraries try to serve Latino Communities.

IV. Surveying Library Websites

Examining library websites has proven fruitful in determining the types of services to Latino communities. My methodology was basic pick five public library websites at random for each state (New York, Texas, California, and Washington) and try to identify ways they are serving their Latino community. I chose to look at California, New York, and Texas public library websites since these states have the highest population of Latinos in the country and then Washington for curiosity's sake. The main things I looked for were:

- Is there any Spanish on the libraries main page?
- Is there Spanish language on any pages of the website?
- Are Spanish language books and periodicals represented in their catalog?
- Is there a Spanish language interface for their catalog?
- Do they subscribe to any foreign language databases?
- Are there any links or online resource lists that might be of interest to the Latino community?
- Do they offer instructional or cultural programs to adults, young adults, or children?

My intention in doing this is to not judge or compare services but rather identify the variation of services as represented on the library's website. If 'Library A's' website has no information on services and programs on their website that does not necessarily mean they are neglecting their Latino community.

New York State – 2,867,583 or 15 percent Latino / Hispanic Population

I reviewed the New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, Schenectady County Public Library, Mid-Hudson Library System, and Onondaga County Public Library. Of all the New York libraries surveyed, Brooklyn Public Library was the most impressive by meeting all the listed criteria. New York Public library followed with an extensive Spanish language section on its website. The other three library systems did not meet most of my criteria.

Texas – 6,669,666 or 32 percent Latino / Hispanic Population

I reviewed the Fort Worth Public Library, San Antonio Public Library, Lubbock City – County Public Library, Austin Public Library, and Seguin - Guadalupe Public Library. Austin and San Antonio Public Libraries websites met many if not all of my criteria. Austin Public library was one of the few advertising cultural programming called Chaski: penas pequenas – an interactive bilingual family concert of Latin American folk music. All the catalogs except for the Lubbock Public Library had the option of a Spanish Language interface.

California – 10,966,556 or 32.4 percent Latino / Hispanic Population

I reviewed the Los Angeles Public Library, Fresno County Public Library, San Jose Public Library, Ventura County Library, and Monterey Public Library. None of the websites I reviewed met all of my criteria however the Los Angeles County Public Library by far had the most comprehensive information in Spanish. Despite that, all the libraries met the collection and database criteria. Interestingly, the Monterey Public Library was the only library website of all the states that I reviewed that had the bookmobile schedule listed.

Washington – 441,509 or 7.5 percent Latino / Hispanic Population

Even though Washington's Latino / Hispanic population is less than the national average,

I found that in urban areas, public libraries were making progress into expanding services

to Latinos. One reason for this might be the number of migrant and / or undocumented

workers in Washington. I reviewed the websites of the King County Library System,

Seattle Public Library System, Walla Walla Public Library, Spokane Public Library, and

Puyallup Public Library. None of the libraries had Spanish sections of their website.

King County Library System was the only library to subscribe to a full text Spanish

language database, and the Walla Walla Public Library was the only to offer web links of

interest to Spanish speakers. I could only find instructional and children's bilingual

programming on the Seattle Public Library and King County Library websites. Clearly,

Washington libraries have started the process of reaching out to the Latino communities.

V. Conclusion

The task of creating new or enhanced services to the Latino communities may

seem daunting considering the variety of needs of the Latino population. After exploring

the literature and reviewing public library websites it is clear that when a librarian,

branch library, or library system attempts to expand their service to the Latino

Community they must do an in-depth community analysis and needs assessment. This

can provide them with direct and tangible information that can be turned into programs

that achieve a maximum benefit to the Latino community.   The book *Serving Latino*

Communities: a how to do it manual, provides many sample analysis tools that can be

implemented in any community.

Currently, libraries find themselves serving an ever-increasingly plural society. Librarians, despite shrinking budgets, have worked hard to create an inclusive environment for the patrons they serve. Librarians continue to come up with innovative solutions when they have been faced with the challenges of expanding services to the Latino community.

Appendix I: Listing of Public Library Websites Surveyed

Austin Public Library	http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/library/
Brooklyn Public Library	http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/
Fort Worth Public Library	http://www.fortworthlibrary.org/
Fresno County Public Library	http://www.fresnolibrary.org/
King County Library System	http://www.kcls.org/
Los Angeles Public Library	http://www.lapl.org/
Lubbock City – County Public Library	http://library.ci.lubbock.tx.us/
Mid-Hudson Library System	http://www.midhudson.org/default.htm
Monterey Public Library	http://www.monterey.org/library/
New York Public Library	http://www.nypl.org/
Onondaga County Public Library	http://www.ocpl.lib.ny.us/
Puyallup Public Library	http://www.ci.puyallup.wa.us/library.htm
San Antonio Public Library	http://www.sanantonio.gov/library
San Jose Public Library	http://www.sjpl.lib.ca.us/
Schenectady County Public Library	http://www.scpl.org/
Seattle Public Library System	http://www.spl.lib.wa.us/

Seguin - Guadalupe Public Library   http://library.ci.lubbock.tx.us/

Spokane Public Library   http://splnet.spokpl.lib.wa.us/

Ventura County Library   http://www.vencolibrary.org/

Walla Walla Public Library   http://www.walnet.walla-

                                           walla.wa.us/walpub/Default.html

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