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Change is the only Constant:

Serving the Latinx Community With Help From REFORMA Oregon

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Gabriela is a Library Assistant at Columbia Gorge Community College. She earned her B.A. in Latin American Studies and, more recently, her MLS. She did not know growing up that she wanted to become a librarian. But then she did. Now she works every day to become a better one than she was the day before.

Part of the reason “change is the only constant” is cliché is because it holds true in many different contexts. Libraries are not what they were one hundred years ago. One could argue they are not even what they were fifty years ago. Societies evolve, populations fluctuate, and norms shift. As librarians, we are called to meet the needs of our patrons, though who or what falls under the umbrella term of “patrons” often depends on the library’s mission statement.

For the last few decades, the Latinx community has been seen as flourishing. Even with the recent decline in the growth rate following the recession discussed by Stepler and Lopez at the Pew Research Center (2016), the Latinx population continues to factor greatly into the changing social outlook of the United States. While not a perfect comparison, Columbia Gorge Community College Library (CGCC Library) has elements reflective of the phenomenon as a whole, though the evidence is more pronounced in the larger U.S. population. Compared to institutions in the Southwestern and Northeastern states, the Pacific Northwest, and rural Oregon in particular, appear to be taking longer to feel the fluctuations in Latinx demographics. This seems evident because public libraries in general have had a lengthier history of working with Latinxs than a very small, rural, Pacific Northwest, community college’s academic library like CGCC. Consequently, librarians like myself have an excellent opportunity to reflect more closely on what other libraries have accomplished so far and how it can be translated to institutions like ours.

The REFORMA tagline is “the national association to promote library and information services to Latinxs and the Spanish-speaking,” and its five primary goals include activities like “advocacy on behalf of the information needs of the Latino community” and “development of Spanish-language and Latino-oriented library collections” (“About REFORMA,” n.d.). REFORMA OR is one chapter of this larger organization. The people that make up REFORMA OR represent many types, sizes, and populations of Oregon libraries; their workplaces run the gamut from tiny county libraries to large public research university libraries and everything in between. This characteristic of the chapter and organization — the variation in the libraries that REFORMA OR represents — is one of the primary benefits.

People and Resources

With only three library staff members — the library director, an IT liaison, and myself — at this rural, academic library, there is a lot of library work distributed between the staff. As one might imagine, being part of such a small team comes with obstacles, one of which is undoubtedly time and duty management. Forming and fostering symbiotic, collaborative relationships is one way professionals can manage workload and streamline processes. By



participating in REFORMA OR, and thereby gaining and cultivating connections as well as resources from the wide assortment of participating libraries, I am more effective at my job. While this sentiment is likely true for any number of library associations, official and unofficial, I have found REFORMA OR to be particularly rewarding and necessary. Since REFORMA OR has a growing social media presence and website, as well as official meetings several times per year, it allows me opportunities for sustainable official and unofficial social interactions with colleagues. Importantly, the chapter works to disseminate directories and resource lists (particularly in terms of grants, collection development from publishers abroad, community organizations, and best-practices), all of which are shared publically on their website. Additionally, the national association has an active listserv full of enthusiastic and knowledgeable people constantly sharing, supporting, and reflecting on their work and how it serves their patrons. In short, these resources and people provide a wealth of information, experience, and ideas, all involved in and insightful about Latinx and Spanish-speaking patrons and what their needs might be.

Professional Development

I'm a new professional, and this is my first career. As such, I am particularly interested in areas in which I can expand upon and improve my professional and personal growth. REFORMA OR presents me one such opportunity. I have not found it to be unwelcoming or reluctant to accept newcomers. In fact, as a relatively new chapter, REFORMA OR has space for expansion and is always looking for new voices, interests, and best-practices. With several committees, annual events, workshops, and many on-going projects, there is room for broadening one's professional experience and network. To be blunt, not every member of REFORMA OR has a home institution with the capacity to provide a robust professional development budget. When one considers the potential for time and workflow interruptions, such as an absent team member, it becomes even more important that any "outside" time be relevant and full of opportunities to give back. In addition to volunteering and serving, REFORMA OR members are encouraged to publish, present, and do poster sessions. And because REFORMA OR strives to connect all types of library staff, working to assuage the disparity in professional development opportunities is something we work to improve constantly.

Institutional Shifts

As CGCC's student demographics continue to diversify, our administration has worked to have the college and institutional culture better reflect the shifting norms. One way the administration hopes to do this is by continuing to sustain the designation of a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). It is a competitive process, and as of this writing, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) lists CGCC as one of only two HSI designated colleges in Oregon, with four others well on their way to earning the designation ("Previous Lists of HSIs," n.d.). As CGCC makes strides to better align the institutional culture with its student body, the library has an amazing opportunity to avail itself as a leader in this effort. In connecting more closely with the REFORMA OR Chapter and REFORMA National, the CGCC Library has partnerships and resources with which it can better engage the needs and expectations of addressing the institution's culture shift and the



maintenance of the HSI label. Setting itself up as a co-leader and bridge between the larger student affairs and curriculum sides of the institution would keep the library staff at the forefront of the conversation.

Conclusion

In short, joining REFORMA OR for its people and resources, professional development opportunities, and platform in discourse about Latinxs in libraries is sensible and can also be extremely invigorating. I encourage you all to marry those practical and refreshing reasons and take part in this great library association. ¡Bienvenido! 🐼

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