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TEACH and CARE: How Community-Centered Archival Practice May Transform Education, Archives, and Community History

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Cover Page Footnote

This paper and the development of TEACH and CARE stem from my long-term, joy-filled, and grounding collaborations with Audra Eagle Yun, Krystal Tribbett, Jimmy Zavala, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, and community organization partners who supported the Institute of Museum and Library Services-funded Transforming Knowledge, Transforming Libraries (TKTL) project. I thank them for teaching me to think and create in community. I thank Andrea Thomer, Jamie A. Lee, and faculty in the University of Arizona's Information School for their generosity, collegiality, and feedback as I presented an earlier draft of this paper at their 2024 colloquium.

TEACH AND CARE: HOW COMMUNITY-CENTERED ARCHIVAL PRACTICE MAY TRANSFORM EDUCATION, ARCHIVES, AND COMMUNITY HISTORY

Introduction

On a sweltering Southern California summer afternoon, I found myself engaged in an impassioned debate with friends visiting from Texas over the issue of whether we can teach empathy, particularly through building and activating archives of historically marginalized groups. Frustrated by the extreme polarization defining our generation's political landscape in the United States, my friend asked with a tone of skepticism, "can we *really* teach people to care—especially those with privilege and power?" I reflected on this question long after my friends' departure, thinking about the work I have been doing this past decade to transform education, archives, and community history—crucial work I refer to by the acronym *TEACH*. As a former archivist, librarian, and curator, I spent the whole of my career pushing for the transformation of principles and practices in the academic library setting to align with *TEACH* so that we may better serve communities missing, silenced, or maligned in public history and institutional archives. This work led to my colleagues and I developing an approach to this work based on collaboration, attention to inequities, responsiveness, and engagement with communities (*CARE*). *CARE* is a practice or methodology grounded in epistemic justice and building and sustaining historical records through partnerships between institutions and communities. Epistemic justice in library and information studies (LIS) seeks to dismantle knowledge systems based on colonial, elite, and heteronormative lenses and redress power imbalances in how information is created, preserved, and disseminated.¹ It calls for shifting from merely including underrepresented perspectives to changing the structures that determine whose knowledge counts in society. Our work builds upon archival theories and practices that foreground mutual aid, respect, reciprocity, and shared authority, advancing community archives through our strategic position within an academic library setting. This work is fundamentally about caring for people who are made vulnerable by records maintained by institutional archives—records that are often falsely represented as objective knowledge and incontrovertible evidence.

In this paper I connect my background as an ethnic studies-trained scholar with my archival stewardship experience to provide context for why I care and strive to transform education, archives, and community history. This background is necessary to situate the development of a distinct *CARE* approach for archival work. This approach is both specific and general in that it draws from a distinctive community-initiated archival collection based in an academic library but can be applied to libraries and archives of any scale. By providing the tenets of our *CARE* approach as well as ways we have engaged community partnerships, I show how this approach differs from prior *CARE* frameworks in LIS. I also provide some examples of grant-funded projects that enable the expansion of this methodology premised on caring. Woven throughout the paper are concepts drawn from critical race theory and critical refugee studies, demonstrating that the fields of ethnic studies and LIS are both grappling with the urgent issue of building and sustaining counternarratives in public history as a tool of liberation.²

¹ Campbell and Sich, "Library Curriculum as Epistemic Justice"; Patin, et al., "Toward Epistemic Justice."

² For discussions of critical race theory (CRT) in archival studies, see A. W. Dunbar, "Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse." For a discussion of CRT's role in ethnic studies praxis, see Aja Y. Martinez, "Why

Why I Care: Positionality, Power, and the Profession

Those of us who work in archives or archival education have witnessed a shift in how we think about care in the context of our profession over the past two decades. The attention and emphasis have shifted toward people rather than solely on the cultural objects in our custody. Moving away from the field's fixation with archival ethics and professional codes of conduct that center the physical preservation and conservation of archival materials as a form of care, our conceptualization of care has expanded to encompass broader moral and ethical concerns, relationships with communities, and the responsibilities of archivists towards historically minoritized groups.³ Similar to Jeannette Bastian, Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, Anne Gilliland, Jamie A. Lee, and others who employ a feminist ethics of care in their scholarly and applied approaches to archives, I suggest that archivists and educators enter into the work with transparency regarding their positionality and relationship to power structures that both enable and limit their engagement with the communities they serve. As Caswell insists in her seminal book *Urgent Archives* (2021), archivists must reject notions of passive preservation and regard archives as active instruments of social justice. By challenging linear temporality and institutional inertia and by embracing community-led memory work, archives can serve as sites of liberation—grounded not in the past or future but in urgent, present-day solidarity and resistance.⁴

For a decade, I worked at the intersection of ethnic studies, community archives, and academic library special collections. As curator of the University of California, Irvine (UCI), Libraries' Southeast Asian Archive (SEAA), my duties involved collection development, reference, instruction, and outreach for the archival and circulating monographs collections related to the Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese diasporas. UCI was built in the 1960s as a public land-grant university occupying the unceded ancestral lands of the Acjachemen/Juaneño peoples.⁵ The university's student population is diverse, reflecting much of Southern California's racial demographics.⁶ As a relatively new university, the archival collections within the library reflect mainstream institutional priorities: the university's records, faculty papers on critical theory, and regional history. The SEAA stands apart as a unique gem of a collection on refugee and immigrant communities from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. It was founded in 1987 in response to the rapid transformation of the regional landscape around the university as Cold War refugees from Southeast Asia settled in the community beginning in the 1970s, and community leaders

Critical Race Theory Matters.” Critical refugee studies is a subfield of ethnic studies, building on critical race theory and centering the figure of the refugee as a site of political and social critique of the nation-state apparatus.

³ Arroyo-Ramírez, et al., “Introduction to Radical Empathy in Archival Practice”; Bastian and Alexander, *Community Archives*; Caswell and Cifor, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics”; Caswell and Cifor, “Neither a Beginning nor an End”; Flinn, “Archival Activism”; Wright and Laurent, “Safety, Collaboration, and Empowerment.”

⁴ Caswell, *Urgent Archives*.

⁵ Although listed by the state of California as “Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation,” they are not a federally recognized tribe and are not afforded the benefits of such designation. For more information, see Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation, <https://www.jbmian.com/>.

⁶ UCI has federal designations as both a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institution (AANAPISI). The Public Policy Institute's 2022 report tracks the racial diversity of California's population of more than 39 million people as follows: 39% Latinx, 35% white, 15% AAPI, 5% Black, 4% multiracial, and fewer than 1% Native. Southern California's rapidly growing social and economic inequality has been tracked by the UCLA Civil Rights Project. See Mordechay, “Vast Changes and an Uneasy Future.”

approached UCI to document their history. Led by the efforts of librarian Anne Frank, it slowly evolved into a community-centered archival collection aided by advisors from within and outside the academy to become one of UCI's most important collections.

I was appointed to steward the SEAA long after Anne retired. A few years into this role, I also took on the duties of research librarian for Asian American studies based on my subject expertise. This new area of responsibility expanded my opportunities to foster close collaboration with a small ethnic studies department that serves students whose personal experiences and histories connect to the archival materials under my care. The department of Asian American studies, along with the other ethnic studies departments at UCI, was borne out of student activism in the early 1990s. This was an era of retrenchment by universities and budget cuts threatened the most vulnerable of departments, including ethnic studies. Trained as an ethnic studies scholar who reaped the benefits of the activism of those who came before, I entered the LIS profession with a strong commitment to antiracist principles and practices and to bridging the university and community divide.

My early days as a graduate student involved numerous visits to UCI for archival research in the SEAA. I conducted oral history and ethnographic research in the San Diego Vietnamese refugee community for my dissertation. Learning ethnic studies theories and learning from Vietnamese American elders revealed to me the gaps that exist in the scholarly literature and within the archives. "Your library doesn't have anything about me" was a charge uttered by one of the first narrators I interviewed for my field research in the early 2000s.⁷ This phrase would haunt me over the course of my career, serving as a reminder that I must keep addressing the gaps, erasures, silences, and distortions in the historical record. Back then, I started to see the SEAA as a place with potential to address questions about power and knowledge production. I did not know it yet, but I would eventually land in the LIS profession, centering questions about power in archival praxis.

The SEAA is often discussed in scholarly literature as a model of community archives.⁸ By the time I was appointed as its steward in 2013, however, the archive had already been firmly established as a distinctive collection within the small Special Collections and Archives department. As such, it did not exactly fit into definitions and descriptions proposed by archival studies scholars that define community archives as independent and/or grassroots. Over a decade ago, Anne Gilliland and Andrew Flinn proposed a way of thinking about community archives and their position beyond traditional archival contexts.

Individuals and communities collecting materials which they deem to be significant in ways that are not necessarily subject to professional oversight or located in formal institutional settings, in some countries this practice has been recognized and described as "community archiving," in other countries different terms are used and in others still such activities have received little or no recognition.⁹

⁷ Vo Dang, "Anticommunism As Cultural Praxis."

⁸ Fujita-Rony and Frank, "Archiving Histories."

⁹ Gilliland and Flinn, "The Wonderful and Frightening World of Community Archives."

Gilliland and Flinn's description highlights the amorphous nature of community archiving, leaving room to imagine the multiple and even contradictory terms upon which historical and cultural heritage materials might be assembled, preserved, and made accessible. Community archives are distinct from traditional institutional archives in that they are driven by and serve specific, often minoritized groups. They are independently created and maintained by groups to document their own histories, experiences, and cultural heritage and often seek to counter the dominant narratives present in traditional archival institutions. This purposefulness and deliberate attention to silences, erasures, and distortions in dominant historical narratives align the work of community archives with ethnic studies. Despite its location in a mainstream archival institution, the SEAA nevertheless reflected an ethos and commitment to centering the perspectives of those on the margins of history, inviting community input and reference and outreach strategies that extended well beyond the walls of the university. Thus, I embraced wholeheartedly the fluid approaches to community archiving in my decade-long professional role as the SEAA's steward.

Archival work has always been more than a professional pursuit for me. Much like the popular slogan of second-wave feminists in the 1960s who insisted that the personal is political, my work in archival stewardship has always been political and personal as well as professional.¹⁰ The histories I helped to preserve and disseminate reflect some of my own history as a child refugee who resettled in the United States in the 1980s. Born after the Vietnam-American War officially ended, my life was nevertheless shaped by its prevailing narratives and legacies.¹¹

My family's silences around the Vietnam-American War and our refugee journey motivated me to pursue this history by means of collecting oral histories from community members starting in the early 2000s. This oral history work then led me to archival stewardship and the curation of community histories, rerouting my professional journey away from the professoriate to become an archives steward. This personal experience is important in contextualizing the relationships I fostered with community members as a representative of the SEAA. So, too, this personal experience colored my views of collection development, donor relations, archival appraisal, description, and curatorial practices. When looking at the records preserved in the SEAA, the absence of ordinary perspectives of refugees from Southeast Asia such as those I had gathered through my oral history research became very apparent. What also became very clear was how the records were generally assembled and donated by humanitarian aid workers and former state officials, demonstrating how the shadow of state-surveillance and hegemonic "truths" centering white saviors served to support narratives that render my community as war victims. I saw the ways my community became legible to researchers merely as objects of rescue.

Refugees from Southeast Asia were documented quite prolifically during the Cold War and in the postwar years.¹² The majority of the SEAA's earliest collections on refugees and immigrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam were compiled and donated mainly by white aid workers and

¹⁰ The slogan was popularized in an essay by feminist activist and writer Carol Hanisch. In her essay, Hanisch argued that personal experiences, particularly those related to gender and sexuality, are inherently political in nature because they are shaped by and reflect broader systemic issues. See Hanisch, "The Personal is Political."

¹¹ In my scholarship and public presentations, I intentionally use the phrase "Vietnam-American War" rather than "Vietnam War" to underscore the multiple perspectives often elided in the privileging of US perspectives. In Vietnam, the war is popularly referred to as the "American War."

¹² Espiritu, "Toward a Critical Refugee Study."

volunteers, educators, or former foreign service officers.¹³ This created a condition where the knowledge about a vulnerable population continued to be bolstered by archival documentation created about us by others in relative positions of authority and power. This reinforced how records about Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese refugee and immigrant communities privileged a colonial gaze, an affliction embedded in Western archival traditions.¹⁴

After decades of war followed by displacement from their homelands, refugees faced yet another type of violence and displacement in their lives in diaspora. Systematic erasure from state archives in Vietnam and top-down documentation in the West of refugees as “victims in need of rescue” engendered a form of epistemic violence that endures in our everyday meaning making, even inflecting the stories we tell about ourselves. The double consciousness that W. E. B. Du Bois described as a veil through which subjugated people, particularly Black people, view themselves can also describe the bind of refugee identity.¹⁵ Framed through a narrative of debt and gratitude owed to their “savior” nation-states, Vietnamese refugee identities are fraught politically and imbued with a kind of double consciousness. Performing the role of the good refugee has been a survival reflex for many Vietnamese Americans, but this adherence to being “good” and “guests” in the US has also disallowed certain forms of solidarity such as mobilizing for racial justice and even collectively supporting contemporary refugee populations.¹⁶ As this brief historical context on the Vietnamese refugee experience suggests, archiving community history requires attention to power, positionality, and ongoing negotiations of collective identity. How do archivists and memory workers address these complex issues and move toward redressing the “hurts of history?”¹⁷ I suggest we TEACH—that is, transform education, archives, and community history. In the following section I detail this decolonial approach to doing archival work in ways that are attentive to the erasures endemic in the Western archival tradition, particularly from locations within educational and archival institutions that were not built for communities of color.

TEACH: Transforming Education, Archives, and Community History

In the introduction to “Toward Person-Centred Archival Theory and Praxis,” a special issue of *Archivaria*, Jennifer Douglas, Mya Ballin, and Jessica Lapp outline the archival field’s shift away from a focus on records and toward “the people that create, keep, use and/or are represented in records.”¹⁸ Person-centered archival theory and praxis recognize that records are not merely static objects but are intimately tied to the people who create, keep, use, and are represented through them. This approach emphasizes the human element within the archival context and places people and their experiences at the forefront of archival considerations. By challenging archivists to

¹³ To access finding aids at UCI’s Southeast Asian Archive, see Southeast Asian Archive, <https://oac.cdlib.org/institutions/UC+Irvine::Southeast+Asian+Archive>.

¹⁴ For a critique of Western archival traditions grounded in Western colonial thinking, see Ghaddar and Caswell, “To Go Beyond.”

¹⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) introduced the concept of the dual self-perception that African Americans have, which results from always seeing oneself through a racist white lens.

¹⁶ In the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections, news media accounts focused on Vietnamese Americans as the most conservative, Republican, and Trump supporting of any Asian American group. Some of the historical reasons for this conservatism are tied to this concept of refugee debt and gratitude.

¹⁷ I borrow the phrase “hurts of history” from theorist George Lipsitz, my former professor. Lipsitz’s work, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998), contributed greatly to our understanding of white power and privilege.

¹⁸ Jennifer Douglas, et al., “Toward Person-Centred Archival Theory and Praxis.”

consider the social, cultural, and personal contexts that shape the creation, use, and meaning of records, we see how records are imbued with personal and social significance. There are several implications for archival theory and practice in taking seriously this person-centered approach. We call attention to the importance of community engagement and collaboration and recognize the expertise and authority of historically marginalized groups in shaping archival collections and historical narratives. This approach also calls for recognizing the multiple (sometimes conflicting) truths within the archives. We also emphasize the ethical responsibilities of archivists to ensure that the creation, preservation, and use of records are respectful, empathetic, and sensitive to the rights and well-being of the individuals and communities involved. It asks archivists to actively consider issues of privacy, consent, and cultural sensitivity in their work. A person-centered approach also fosters “archival legibility,” a concept borrowed from archival studies scholar Jamie Ann Lee.

Whenever community archives are situated at the intersections of university/institution, there are degrees of vulnerability that should be considered and addressed. What does it take for a community archives to be “legible”? How, then, does “legibility” play a role in “legitimacy”? Consider the role that community archives have played in non-dominant communities to legitimate lived and living histories that are often erased, obscured, and marginalized.¹⁹

There is no way to advance liberatory, antiracist principles and practices without centering people and communities. But this means we need to be intentional and, at times, very precise about what we mean when we use the word “community” in archival contexts. Who makes up the community, and who gets to decide its boundaries? When there are factions and disagreements about what should constitute community history, how should archivists respond? Choices we make when working with minoritized or vulnerable communities require an attentiveness to the politics and power relations that shape these communities. And sometimes archivists must take a side. For far too long, archival training has instilled notions of neutrality and objectivity as paramount principles for our work and many LIS scholars have already critiqued the problematic nature of such ideals.²⁰ Howard Zinn famously asserted that one cannot be neutral on a moving train, and the train of history is in constant motion.²¹

I created the acronym TEACH—transforming education, archives, and community history—as a framework for supporting marginalized communities in the work of preserving and providing access to their histories on their own terms. This framework or approach came about in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic while the team I worked with at UCI was wrapping up one grant project and grappling with the question that often accompanies term-limited and soft-funded projects: “What now?” TEACH helped define our team’s aim to empower educators and historians to further challenge dominant narratives and inspire an effect that would ripple outward toward a future where students are taught to interrogate the presentation of history as homage to great white men. We aspired to do this from our location within an academic institution with all the attendant

¹⁹ Lee, “Archival Legibility.”

²⁰ See, for example, Gilliland, “Neutrality, Social Justice and the Obligations of Archival Education and Educator.”

²¹ Historian and activist Howard Zinn is best known for his book, *A People’s History of the United States* (1980). In his 1994 memoir, *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, he reflects on over thirty years of activism for progressive social change.

opportunities and limitations. This is an approach we solidified after completing the three-year research project, Transforming Knowledge, Transforming Libraries (TKTL), funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).²² Through this research project, Audra Eagle Yun, Krystal Tribbett, Jimmy Zavala, and I examined the intersection between ethnic studies and community archives, exploring how academic libraries might become key partners in providing undergraduate students with the tools and training to document, preserve, and disseminate community history. Witnessing a majority of funding going to graduate studies and training, we saw a need to diversify the LIS profession much earlier by working with undergraduate students.

Teaching at an earlier point in the collegiate experience makes students aware of the importance of libraries and archives, helps students understand the impact they can have in shaping their own narratives, and fosters critical thinking by empowering students to challenge the exclusion they might face in mainstream archival institutions and historical narratives.²³

From this research, we developed what we call community-centered archives practice/partnerships (C-CAP). C-CAP is a model of archival work based on several core tenets: collaboration with community stakeholders; critical interrogation of our collections and knowledge gaps; and shared authority and flexibility in how we work with diverse communities. C-CAP also involves teaching, outreach, archival practice, and curatorial work. At the core, it is about scaffolding support for the creation, preservation, and access to historical materials by and about groups that are marginalized in mainstream archives through partnership with faculty, students, and, most importantly, community-based organizations. We also expanded the field of engagement to include community-based organizations that are not necessarily defined as archives, cultural heritage, or memory organizations. They ranged from social services and health advocacy groups to churches and community garden collectives. To dismantle white supremacy and heteropatriarchy deeply embedded within traditional archives, it is essential to imagine possibilities not yet explored in the institutional setting.

The TKTL research data demonstrates a compelling connection between community archives and ethnic studies, particularly in the ways students express feelings of belonging, hope, inspiration, and motivation when they could see themselves or their communities reflected in the historical record.²⁴ One undergraduate student participant of the TKTL program asserted, “I learned that the documentation of histories from marginalized communities is important in creating new knowledges. In this way, it is even more powerful to have communities themselves document their own history on their own terms.”²⁵ This student’s reflection centers the values already expressed by activists fighting for ethnic studies since the 1960s, when ethnic studies arose from the student counter culture movement and the Third World Liberation Front’s demands for “relevant education” or education that reflected the perspectives and lived experiences of Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color (BIPOC).²⁶ Our TKTL project builds upon this legacy.

²² Yun, et al., *Transforming Knowledge, Transforming Libraries*.

²³ Yun, et al., *Transforming Knowledge, Transforming Libraries*.

²⁴ Yun, et al., *Transforming Knowledge, Transforming Libraries*.

²⁵ Yun, et al., *Transforming Knowledge, Transforming Libraries*.

²⁶ Haugan, “50 Years after Third World Liberation Strike at UC Berkeley.”

Both community-based archives and ethnic studies address the issue of communities being left out, removed, or underrepresented in the historical record. Each area empowers individuals and communities by directly engaging them in critical analysis (in the case of ethnic studies) or in the creation and distribution (in the case of community archives) of their own knowledge and information. Community-based archives and ethnic studies scholarship have a symbiotic relationship, building upon each other. Grassroots social movements and archiving marginalized histories are necessary conditions and methodologies to create and challenge historical knowledge.²⁷

TKTL also helped us articulate the importance of compensating students and community partner organizations for participating in the work of building up grassroots organizations' capacity for preserving community history. Paid student internships would offer a strategic avenue for engaging with community organizations that did not have the staff capacity to preserve their records or document their histories. Leveraging our location at a research university, we partnered with faculty to recruit undergraduate students into a ten-week training and internship program. Students were trained in community archives principles and practices, which included basic oral history methods. Students from historically disadvantaged groups in higher education cannot easily take on unpaid internships and university libraries are not course credit-granting units, so the most equitable approach we could think of was to ensure that students who participated in our program could be paid. Paying students and placing them with community organizations required that we navigate a bureaucratic academic library system that is slow to change its workflows in support of liberatory practices of community engagement.

Another source of support our C-CAP team received was for a project crafted in partnership with UCI Asian American Studies and the Humanities Center, funded by ten thousand dollars from the Anteater Grant Initiative. This grant enabled our team to recruit and train six students for C-CAP. Due to the great interest among student applicants, our faculty partner Professor Judy Tzu-Chun Wu raised additional funds to hire four more for a total of ten students. We matched students with the LGBT Center OC, VietRISE, and Pacific Islander Health Partnership (PIHP). None of these Orange County-based organizations are archives, libraries, museums, or cultural heritage organizations. The LGBT Center and PIHP are both social services nonprofit organizations and VietRISE is an immigrant rights group less than five years old at the time of our partnership initiation.

Academic libraries, as extensions of academic institutions, often refer to their work as “community engagement” and benefit from the prestige and legitimacy that label can provide. But their surveillance couched under institutional compliance, policies, and procedures are ever-present challenges to enacting liberatory memory work. For example, cameras, recorders, scanners, and other equipment is essential for documentation and digital preservation, and community partners often look to institutional representatives to navigate the confusing selection of technology. Our interns would typically use this equipment for their community archiving projects. When working with small organizations with few staff and limited resources, even the purchasing of equipment might present an insurmountable barrier as universities cannot gift equipment to community organization partners that has been purchased by the university. If we are not even allowed to help alleviate burdens through purchasing equipment for our community partners, how do we navigate

²⁷ Yun, et al., “Fostering Transformation.”

larger bureaucratic hurdles like paying community partners for their time and labor? This example might sound like the most mundane issue imaginable for archivists, but it is a situation that many will likely encounter if they attempt to TEACH. This is exactly what we mean when we argue that the institution is not built for us when its operations are premised on Western, colonial principles of property and ownership claims rather than trust and relationship building.

By the time I started thinking about actionable steps towards transforming education, archives, and community history, I was already two-decades deep in volunteer work with nonprofit community-based organizations in Southern California. I considered how community partnerships built on respect, shared authority and expertise, and mutual aid might present a roadmap for us to push our institutions to center people and communities rather than the accumulation of collections and prestige. TEACH is an aspiration grounded in practical strategies we can enact toward liberatory memory work at the level of our educational and archival institutions. What would it look like to transform these institutions that were not built for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ people, and people who live with disabilities? How might a person-centered approach be adapted by archivists at institutions of various sizes and capacities? And what framework might archivists use to advocate for more ethical and responsive partnerships between institutions and communities?

A New Approach to Archival CARE

I am introducing a new definition of the acronym CARE, developed in response to its prior use by other scholars and practitioners.²⁸ In particular, I am responding to the CARE framework presented by Gilliland in her and Andrew Flinn's joint keynote at the Community Informatics Research Network conference in Prato, Italy, in 2013.²⁹ Gilliland's concept of CARE—which stands for culturally aware, respectful, and ethical—provides an approach that is global in its outlook and attends to the shifting landscape of archival and recordkeeping relationships between institutions and communities. Gilliland's CARE was also based more specifically on her concept known as VIA—or voice, identity, and activism—which advocates for community archival practice to center community interests; move toward collaboration and away from the model where institutions collect from communities; and reimagine mainstream archival practices.

In our research project TKTL, our conceptualization of CARE was created in response to both Gilliland's CARE and VIA frameworks, and it was grounded in our practical experiences working with diverse regional organizations that are not necessarily only cultural heritage or archival organizations. In archival practice based on community-centered partnerships or C-CAPs, we have found that representatives of archival institutions may benefit from enacting a CARE approach based on the following tenets:

- **Collaboration through shared authority with community members.** In a community-centered archives approach, the institution focuses on shared authority, making decisions

²⁸ Among the skills I bring to collaborative work is a penchant for creating acronyms, and the sheer number of acronyms in this paper is the most obvious indicator. For those who are overwhelmed by the many acronyms to keep track of in this paper: I was likewise overwhelmed at the start of my career in an academic library faced with the strangest acronyms that were neither creative nor memorable.

²⁹ Gilliland and Flinn, "Community Archives."

together and respecting the values, expertise, and perspectives brought to the partnership by community members whether they have archival training or not.

- **Attention to inequities reflected in archives.** Institutional actors should seek to understand how communities have been misrepresented, absent, or maligned in historical documentation to frame their approach to partnership. This requires a willingness to do the necessary research.
- **Responsiveness to the community's needs.** An institution must be flexible, adaptable, and take an iterative and ethical approach to responding to how community memory and evidence is preserved, described, and made accessible. This might involve a willingness to bend and stretch how archival work is defined to reflect what matters to the community.
- **Engagement with the diverse priorities of the community.** Community-institution partnerships must vary depending on the needs of each community. There is no “one size fits all” model.

My colleagues at the UCI Libraries Special Collections and Archives continue the work of C-CAP and TEACH through a Mellon Foundation Public Knowledge grant. Their work with academic libraries involves “cultivating commitment among higher education institutions . . . to community-centered archives approaches [and] solidifying the[ir] ability and responsibility . . . to engage critically and contribute to social justice-focused scholarship, training, pedagogy, and partnerships in their communities.”³⁰ This type of work takes time and involves many moving parts, particularly in the commitment to directing resources to community organizations who are in the best position to understand documentation, record-keeping, and preservation priorities for their communities. Therefore, institutional representatives should consider seeking and directing funding, labor, and technical training, to name key areas of need, to these partners rather than taking on all the archival work alone. One crucial strategy that helps to reaffirm the social justice paradigm of this work is training students, be they graduate students in formal MLIS programs, undergraduates of all majors and backgrounds, or even K–12 students who are exploring cultural heritage.

While UCI does not have an MLIS program, we took some creative approaches to partnering with faculty across the Schools of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Social Ecology on various student-driven research and documentation projects that introduced a CARE approach. For example, my colleagues and I worked on a project using this approach called Records of Resistance and Resilience (RoRR), which was funded by a Confronting Extremism grant from UCI's Office of Inclusive Excellence to center the records creation of historically marginalized groups in the Orange County region of Southern California. Designed with CARE, we recognized the opportunity for including graduate students across different disciplinary training as thought partners and archives activators. These students showed keen investment in transforming education and community history alongside faculty, librarians, and archivists. One graduate student involved in this project, Josef Robles, wrote a reflection that captures the ethos of community-archives partnerships we advance.

We undertake a novel approach that shifts power dynamics from a bottom-to-top hierarchy to one of lateral recognition in community archives. In other words, the goal is not devolution but rather partnership. At the core of this worldview is the acknowledgement that both institutional actors and community members bring unique skills and identities to

³⁰ “Community-Centered Archives Practice,” <https://sites.uci.edu/ccap/>.

the construction of history. We do not impose or bestow historical knowledge; we recognize and appreciate it, together.³¹

Robles is calling out this notion of shared authority that should be the basis of community archiving as well as community-engaged research. Visualizing the relationship between community organization partners and institutions (universities, libraries, archives, museums) as lateral could mean that we come together to cocreate documentation where none existed, each partner with a set of assets that will make the project stronger. This asset-based approach to archival work reflects the idea of “contributive justice” that takes the labor and skills of individuals voluntarily contributing toward a collective good.³² Contributive justice is not a replacement but a complement to distributive justice, where wealth and tangible resources are distributed more equitably in society. This type of justice recognizes the talent, knowledge, and time contributions that members of a collective can be invited to bring. Archivists can build person-centered practices that recognize these assets in the communities they serve, taking care to build relationships grounded in mutual aid. Most importantly, TEACH takes time and cannot be hurriedly configured into grant deliverables. The slowness of building relationships and trust should be part of how archivists plan for archival work, just as they would plan for the long-term preservation of a collection under their care.³³

Reflection and Conclusion: Transformation Is Possible

Returning to my skeptical friend’s question, “can we *really* teach people to care, especially those with privilege and power?”—my answer is a hopeful and emphatic, “yes!” Archivists can work with community organizations to keep their stories front and center, prioritize care for their safety and wellness, and be willing to pivot when the contexts shift. Through modeling care, naming the work we do in preserving and providing access to marginalized histories as care work, and using our positions of relative privilege within academic institutions to advocate for ethical partnerships, we are teaching people to care. We are teaching our institutions’ leadership to care.

TEACH—transforming education, archives, and community history—is an aspiration that led me to my current role as an LIS educator, facilitating the learning experiences of MLIS and PhD students in the University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Information Studies. Every project, partnership, or pedagogical opportunity I have had in my professional career is predicated on the belief that another university is possible. This slogan emerged in the late 1990s when universities were defunding ethnic studies programs and student activists sounded the alarm to mobilize for higher education that could challenge existing power structures, promote social justice, and seek to create more inclusive, equitable, and transformative learning environments. It reflects the aspirations of activists who believe in the potential of universities to foster progressive change in society. We must believe that transformation is possible to keep doing this work. But how do we keep moving forward when we encounter roadblocks in the shape of our institution’s bureaucracies whilst we also navigate the complexities of working with vulnerable communities? How do we sustain our energies and commitments for the long haul?

³¹ Robles, “Changing Directions.”

³² Gomberg, “Why Distributive Justice Is Impossible.”

³³ Christen and Anderson argue for slowness in archival work as a means of decolonization. See Christen and Anderson, “Toward Slow Archives.”

Flexibility is paramount in community-centered archival work. In my decade of working in an academic library, I have found that archivists and library administrators are not typically the most flexible people. They like workflows, standards, controlled vocabularies—elements of an orderly and organized regime of information. “Intellectual control” was a phrase introduced to me in my early days of on-the-ground archival training. While its applied meaning in the archival context is to arrive at a workable understanding of the scope and content of a collection, it also suggests that we can somehow fully grasp the meaning of what lies inside the record cartons. With archival research as their main method, historians may be the first to say it is nearly impossible to do so. How do we gain intellectual control over the messiness of human experience as expressed in the archives? In answer, the challenge I propose for our profession is to acknowledge the impossibility of intellectual control, embrace the *unknowingness*, and lead with flexibility.

The way forward is not always clear for transforming education, archives, and community history in this current national context of precarity and threats to education and heritage sectors. Reflecting on the second Trump presidential term is beyond the scope of this paper, and I fear it may open a well of rage I cannot yet process in concise ways. As federal funding cuts place education and cultural heritage institutions in ever more precarious positions, it is important to acknowledge how archives that work with and for communities at risk are made even more vulnerable. To keep on with this work, we have to be nimble and turn to mutual aid and private giving while strengthening relationships with foundations committed to social justice. I believe marginalized groups’ agility and resolve are remarkable and should not be underestimated. While I do not have all the answers for navigating every roadblock or convincing every naysayer to TEACH, I most assuredly would not have continued this journey to become an LIS educator at a public university if I did not believe there are always ways to sustain ourselves in this work. First, self-care and community care should be systematically built into the work we do inside the institution and with communities. Second, we can and should strategize with values-aligned colleagues on a regular basis, because no one should do any of this work in silos. We need to work together on ways to hold leaders accountable to the community engagement mandates of our public institutions. This might mean working with media outlets when situations arise that call for public accountability. Third, I often share the strategy of acting first and apologizing later. When an idea comes from community but is not immediately supported by institutions, find other partners and try out the idea until there is some semblance of success to share with the institution. Success is sometimes a matter of perspective and changing the perspectives of those in leadership is half the work we do when we are committed to community-centered practices.

This paper has argued for the necessity of transforming education, archives, and community history (TEACH) through a methodology based on collaboration, attention to inequities, responsiveness, and engagement (CARE). This approach requires LIS professionals work from inside our academic institutions to partner in community engagement work with students, faculty, and community organizations. A CARE-centered approach can assist academic institutions in learning to yield power and authority and invest in slow and steady partnerships with communities long neglected by these sites of knowledge production. And all of this can benefit the archival field by attracting MLIS students and future LIS practitioners from underrepresented groups and

helping diversify our field which badly needs it.³⁴ We can engage students at multiple levels of education, and we can do this whether there is an MLIS program on our campus or not. As ethnic studies gained traction in K–12 education in parts of the United States this last decade, I suggest that archival studies education might also move in this direction, reaching students at formative moments in their lives. In this next chapter of my career as an LIS educator, I aim to teach younger learners to care through engaging them in the cocreation of a more diverse historical record. In this way, I might fulfill a promise to that refugee girl in the past who did not know she could be an archivist or a professor—she only figured some of this out in community with others who showed her how to TEACH and CARE.

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³⁴ Drawing from US Census data, the Department for Professional Employees indicates “the librarian profession suffers from a persistent lack of racial and ethnic diversity that has not changed significantly over the past two decades.” See “2025 Fact Sheet,” <https://www.dpeaflcio.org/factsheets/library-professionals-facts-and-figures>.

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