Emerging LIS Professionals:
Organization of Culture in Diverse Community Archives

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FOCAS

Faculty Organizing for Community Archives Support

Faculty Organizing for Community Archives Support (FOCAS), a collaborative of faculty from nine universities in the U.S. and Canada formed to support paid internships at community archives. The three-year program, funded by Mellon's Public Knowledge program, will see MLIS students placed in over 40 archives. The project will also support curricular development, offsets costs for community archives, and fund student participation in conferences and professional associations.

Movin' Legacy | Chicago

Academic Partner: Black Metropolis Research Consortium
by Cheryl Y. Muhammad



Movin' Legacy's Regina Perry-Carr participating in a dance workshop.



Regina Perry-Carr participating in a dance workshop.

One of the most meaningful aspects of the internship was witnessing **the power of dance to connect Black communities across generations and geography.** Through oral history work with Regina and Black dance educators in Chicago, I gained a deeper appreciation for the personal journeys behind movement, including how individuals discovered dance, what it signified in their lives, and **how those narratives were shaped by identity and collective experience.**

The interviews were intimate and deeply moving, which reiterated for me that **dance is more than performance, but also an instrument that carries memory and cultivates healing.** As the project evolved to include Jeffrey Page's audiovisual work, I was able to explore yet another dimension of this shared heritage.

Jeffrey's time in West Africa spanned Senegal, Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, and Cabo Verde, and the majority of the expedition was spent **documenting traditional dances and collecting stories** that represent foundational knowledge about movement and culture. Since his return, we've been working **through an expansive archive to organize metadata and to help shape a cohesive story** from the images and videos that reflects the essence of the journey. This shift from spoken testimony to visual storytelling emphasized the many ways in which Black cultural memory is preserved and shared.

Both oral and visual formats offer their own distinct perspective, which **elevates the narrative and deepens our understanding of movement as a form of art and as an expression of legacy.**



Bril Barrett, founder of M.A.D.D. Rhythms, founder of the Chicago Tap Summit, and founder of M.A.D.D. Rhythms Tap Academy, Cheryl Muhammad, Regina Perry-Carr, after the oral history interview was conducted.



Robin Edwards, Executive Director of the Chicago Multicultural Dance Center, Homer Bryant Founder and Director of CMDC, and Cheryl Muhammad conducting oral history interview preparation

The Dunbar Pavilion, an African American Arts & Culture Center

Academic Partner: College of Information Science, Univeristy of Arizona
by Olivia Carmen Otero

During my internship, I closely collaborated with community members to create an exhibit detailing the history of Dunbar as the first school to be segregated by race, with a focus on sharing the history and the experience of students, faculty, and staff who have been omitted from traditional archival spaces

Moreover, I worked with **cataloging and archival description, and participated in organizing and moving the collection.**

The power of sharing lived experiences plays a critical role in conversations around preservation and archival practices. This collection symbolizes the collaboration between the under-represented history of Dunbar, as **a crucial informational exchange, vital to the preservation of the community's collective memory**.



The Dunbar Pavilion building as it stands today.



Dunbar Coimmunity Archives collection to be processed.



Dunbar School as it appeared in 1921, north elevation.
Image courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson.

This experience has influenced my approach as a scholar, leading me to adopt a more **multidisciplinary approach to critical archival work** and continue to work with community archives.

The June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives | West Hollywood, CA

Academic Partner: University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
by Sam Stroud

Through my experience as the archival intern at the Mazer, I gained archival skills such as **processing collections**, **writing finding aids**, **creating descriptive metadata**, and **digitizing AV materials**. The collection I've spent the most time on is the **Mazer's Button Collection**– which was already my favorite collection prior to becoming an intern. I'm working on re-processing the button collection and I've **created a metadata schema** to enhance the current digital button collection.



Refiling materials into the Mazer's subject files

Most importantly, the internship provided me with connection to community– both my **lesbian community** and my **IS community**. I've connected with other lesbians, queer folks, and elders through the Mazer's community events. One of my proudest accomplishments as an intern was planning a volunteer event where over a dozen **MLIS student volunteers** came to the Mazer to help us move collections and catalog books.

I'm looking forward to continuing my metadata work with the Mazer in a new position starting September 2025!



Reprocessing the Mazer's button collection



Creating Mazer buttons



MLIS student volunteers at the Mazer

The Mexican American Heritage and History Museum | Tucson

Academic Partner: College of Information Science, Univeristy of Arizona
by Jesus Villalobos

As the Oral History and Archival Processing Intern, I contributed to two parallel goals: **launching a digital oral history collection** and laying the groundwork for the Museum's physical archive. Located in the historic Sosa Carrillo House, the Museum preserves the histories of Tucson's Mexican American community, **stories often overlooked or erased in the wake of urban renewal projects.**

For the digital collection, I used CollectionBuilder to create an online exhibit. I generated **descriptive metadata, transcribed interviews, edited site configuration files, and coordinated temporary hosting solutions**. These steps produced the Mexican American Oral Histories site, an open and discoverable resource for the community and researchers alike. At the same time, I supported the early development of the physical archive by **organizing materials, assessing preservation needs, drafting processing plans, and creating bilingual documentation.**



Digital Exhibit Built with CollectionBuilder



Briefcase of photographs dating from a donated collection

This work required collaboration with community leaders and archivists to ensure practices aligned with the Museum's **mission of cultural stewardship**. This experience showed how archives grow through relationships as much as systems. **Processing materials mattered**, as did listening closely, asking good questions, and learning how to move at the pace of the community.