

Evaluating and Enhancing the Latino Literature Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill

by Karen Sobel

The increasing number of Latinos in North Carolina and throughout the United States has led to the creation of Latino Studies programs at a number of universities, including the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill). Dr. Patricia Buck Dominguez, the University Libraries' Humanities Bibliographer, had noted two main reasons why UNC-Chapel Hill needed to evaluate and enhance its collection of Latino materials. First, UNC-Chapel Hill had developed a minor in Latina/o Studies,¹ with small but increasing enrollment. Second, Chapel Hill and surrounding Orange County have experienced a significant increase in Latino population and immigration from Latin America since the early 1990s, so these materials are culturally relevant to the community. The 1990 census states that Latino citizens constituted 1.4% of the population.² By 2006, the county's population was 5.6% Latino.³

UNC-Chapel Hill's Latina/o Studies program is located in the Department of English and Comparative Literature but includes courses in several other departments. Although enrollments in the minor are small, they are increasing, as students of all ethnicities demonstrate their interest in Latino topics.⁴ These developments suggested the need to assess and strengthen the Libraries' holdings of Latino literature.

Researching Local Academic Programs to Assess Need

We began by identifying and researching the academic programs at UNC-Chapel Hill that included Latino topics. The Web site of the Carolina Hub for Latina/o Studies and Resources in the Southeast provided a list of all the University's courses with Latino themes and also a working definition of "Latino": people of Latin American or Iberian descent living primarily in the United States.⁵ The total number of courses identified in each department are listed in table one.

Based on the subjects of these courses, available funding, and major resources already available, we decided to concentrate on literature and related theory, history, the social sciences, and other relevant topics.

Literature Review

The next step was to find published lists or other recommendations on building a Latino or Chicano literature collection. I searched for articles on other

academic libraries' efforts to create collections of Latino literature. Incredibly, there was only one article on the topic in a major journal. "Selecting Latin American and Latino Library Materials in the Humanities," by Laura Gutiérrez-Witt (1997),⁶ provided some useful guidance on factors to consider while studying the collection. However, since the article was ten years old at the time and covered both Latin American and Latino literatures, it did not address all of our needs. I decided to search for recommendations for holdings in the humanities and social sciences in four types of sources: other universities' more established programs in Latino or Chicano studies, bibliographies published in monograph form, publishers and other commercial organizations, and non-profit organizations that support Latinos and their cultures in the United States.

Literature and Theory

Reading lists provided online by southwestern and California universities located in regions with historically large Latino populations proved the most productive sources of advice on collecting Latino literature and related theory. Programs at the University of California, Los Angeles; the University of New Mexico; and California State University, Chico; among others,⁷ provided particularly useful reading lists for Master of Arts and Ph.D. exams. These lists demonstrated a high degree of overlap, which increased our confidence in the method.

I created a spreadsheet detailing all the titles and authors of works of fiction, drama, poetry, and Latino-related literary criticism listed by these universities, and then searched UNC-Chapel Hill's library catalog to determine which titles the Libraries already owned. Roughly half of the individual titles on the list were already in the collections. Apparently the systematic use of Library of Congress proof slips over many decades, the American *belles lettres* authors list created locally, and the Yankee Book Peddler (YBP) approval plans had covered Latino literatures relatively well. I noted that many of these titles had been purchased in an edition other than the first. During the course of further research, I learned that quite a large proportion of Latino fiction and poetry is first published by small presses, then republished by larger mainstream publishers.

For titles the Libraries did not already own, I noted how many of the reading lists included them. I also examined authors whose works were not owned by UNC-Chapel Hill and identified their major works, using the reading lists and the Literature Resource Center database. I also identified several small presses that published significant amounts of Latino materials.

One of the commercial lists of Latino literature also turned out to be a productive resource. At the time I was working on my project, Latino Promo, a self-described "Latino educational resource,"⁸ provided

Table 1. Latino/a Studies courses offered at UNC-Chapel Hill, by department. Courses cross-listed in multiple departments are only counted once, in their primary department.

Department	Courses Offered
Anthropology and African-American Studies	5
Dramatic Arts	2
English	7
Geography	4
History	2
International Studies	1
Journalism and Mass Communication	1
Music	1
Public Policy	1
Romance Languages	3
Total courses:	27

a lengthy list of Latino materials in the humanities on its Web site. The list of works correlated strongly with those on the degree programs' lists, so I decided to consider additional works suggested by Latino Promo.

Monograph-length bibliographies and non-profit organizations' lists turned out to be only a footnote in my work. The two book-length bibliographies owned by UNC-Chapel Hill had both been published in the 1980s. National organizations such as La Raza, as well as state- and local-level organizations did not provide applicable information.

History

Identifying materials on Latino history turned out to be one of the greatest challenges of this project. Existing reading lists generally did not have a specific section on history. In an even more confounding twist, I quickly learned that much of Latino history in the Southeast is so recent that it is not yet labeled as history. Rather, it is still discussed in terms of culture, current events, and so forth. I performed extensive searches of WorldCat, as well as catalogs of libraries that already had significant holdings in Latino history. However, as most of those libraries were in the Southwest and California, their holdings on regional Latino history did not meet our needs. General or national Latino history, as well as culture, turned out to be covered well in the Libraries' current holdings, particularly the reference collection. Thus, despite extensive research, we chose not to purchase many materials related to Latino history in the Southeast, the social sciences, and other relevant topics, because we were not successful in identifying them.

Ordering Titles

At this point, Dr. Dominguez and I looked through the lists of materials that appeared on multiple reading lists but were not yet owned by UNC-Chapel Hill. We decided that these materials appeared to be within our available budget. Since the University's Latino courses were focused on literature, purchasing these items would significantly

strengthen the collection's area of greatest need. I priced these works, ran the list by Dr. Dominguez, and submitted purchase orders for the items she had approved. We also created a list of the small presses that we had identified, and contacted YBP to request that they consider adding these to their publisher lists.

In the end, we decided not to create a collection development policy specific to Latino literature, primarily because of the difficulty of tracking down all the works that were published by small presses. The Libraries' current efforts were already collecting about half of the desired titles, as they showed up on major lists. We decided that with the titles we had purchased, the collection of current and retrospective Latino literature had been significantly strengthened, and that the easiest way to reach the small-press books would be to have another graduate student perform roughly the same research again in a few years. Meanwhile, we would rely on YBP to identify and send us titles from more of these presses.

Conclusion

Our collection development efforts in Latino literature provided us with several important lessons.

- 1) College and university degree programs' reading lists can provide excellent guidance for determining necessary holdings in academic subject areas. Commercial lists may also provide great advice, but should be interpreted with care.
- 2) Libraries' general purchasing plans may support a surprising number of future classics in new subject areas.
- 3) Creating a collection development policy may or may not be an appropriate step to take immediately after planning a new collection.

We hope that the lessons we have learned will help other libraries build new and innovative collections to support their institution's academic programs.

References

- ¹ "Carolina Hub for Latina/o Studies and Resources in the Southeast: The UNC-Chapel Hill Undergraduate Latina/o Studies Minor," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://english.unc.edu/latina-o/UNCLatResources.html> (February 18, 2008).
- ² North Carolina, State Data Center, "1990 Census of Population and Housing: Summary Tape File 1: County: Orange," Raleigh, 1990.
- ³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, "American FactFinder," Orange County, North Carolina, <http://factfinder.census.gov> (February 25, 2008). http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFPopulation?_sse=on&_submenuId=population_0&_ci_nbr=&qr_name=&ds_name=®=&industry= (18 February 2008).
- ⁴ "Carolina Hub for Latina/o Studies and Resources in the Southeast: The UNC-Chapel Hill Undergraduate Latina/o Studies Minor," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://english.unc.edu/latina-o/UNCLatResources.html> (February 18, 2008).
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Laura Gutiérrez-Witt, "Selecting Latin American and Latino Library Materials in the Humanities," *The Acquisitions Librarian* 17/18 (1997): 125-140.
- ⁷ California State University, Chico Center for Multicultural and Gender Studies, "Chicana/o Latina/o Studies Programs, Departments & Universities." California State University, Chico. <http://cnet.ucla.edu/cs/chicanostudies.html> (February 21, 2008).
- ⁸ "Latinopromo: Latino Educational Resource," Latino Promo. <http://www.latinopromo.com/> (February 21, 2008).

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Looking for help with collection development?

If you want to expand your library's collection of novels set in North Carolina, you should visit the Read North Carolina Novels blog hosted by the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (<http://www.lib.unc.edu/blogs/ncnovels/>).

If your interest in North Caroliniana is more general, both the North Carolina Collection at East Carolina University and the North Carolina Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill regularly post lists of new additions to their collections. The addresses for those sites are:

<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-lib/ncc/profs.cfm>

<http://www.lib.unc.edu/blogs/ncc/index.php/whats-new-in-the-north-carolina-collection/>