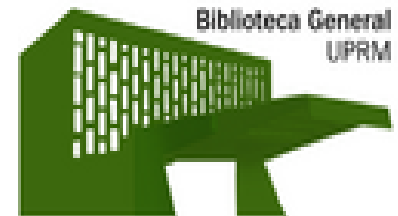


# Forging Future Access to Memory: Library Contributions to a Multi-Disciplinary Oral History Project

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# Session Objectives

- Discuss the potential academic libraries have to establish strategic alliances with faculty and contribute their unique skill sets to support the development of multi-disciplinary projects incorporating digital humanities outputs.
- Examine oral history methodology and how oral history projects can serve as vehicles of inclusion that preserve and disseminate perspectives from underrepresented groups.
- Discuss opportunities for libraries to create unique primary source collections that feature their local communities in order to achieve deeper engagement and offer resources that are highly relevant to those populations.

What is the  
OHL @UPRM?



**ORAL HISTORY LAB**  
Laboratorio de Historia Oral

# What is the OHL @UPRM?

The Oral History Lab is a space housed in UPRM Library dedicated to the collection, preservation, and dissemination of oral history interviews from community members across the Puerto Rican archipelago.

We primarily focus on oral histories addressing topics such as natural disasters, food insecurity, access to education, and the environmental and social impact of climate change.

The OHL is also dedicated to creating documentary films examining these topics and their effect on communities in Puerto Rico.

# What the OHL seeks to accomplish

Through our work, we intend to capture the perspectives, memories, and life experiences of community members as they navigate the challenges presented by these situations.

By bringing to the fore voices that have traditionally been ignored or silenced, we contribute to the creation of a historical record that is more inclusive and imbued with a very genuine element of humanity.

We also believe that people and communities are empowered through the act of telling their stories and constructing their own historical narratives.

# The OHL's multidisciplinary model

The OHL is based on a multidisciplinary collaboration model involving three UPRM campus components with different areas of expertise:

- The English Department
- The Film Certificate Program
- The University Library



Each component contributes a very particular set of skills and methodologies to the initiative. This has led to the production of a rich diversity of outputs.

# Background



# Background

- Hurricane María made landfall in the Puerto Rican archipelago on September 20, 2017, causing widespread destruction
- Classes at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez resumed approximately five weeks later
- Faculty in the Department of English developed two oral history courses to meet the new needs of our students
- These courses grew into the mass-listening project, "Mi María: Puerto Rico after the Hurricane" and was then adapted into "Sheltered in Place: Storytelling and Stratified Disaster"
- These two projects led to the development of the Oral History Lab @UPRM



# Course #1 – Intro to oral history

Students participating in the first course collected stories from people such as

- Nilda in Toa Baja, who describes her adrenaline “rising to a million” when her neighbor bursts into her home to warn of a rising storm surge at his heels;
- Luis in Juncos, who watches his father get sicker and sicker as they desperately pray for the dialysis clinic to reopen so that he can receive lifesaving treatment;
- and Miliana Ivelisse in Caguas, whose mother is sent home from the hospital—with her condition undiagnosed—only to die in her own bedroom.

## Course #2 – Oral history fieldwork

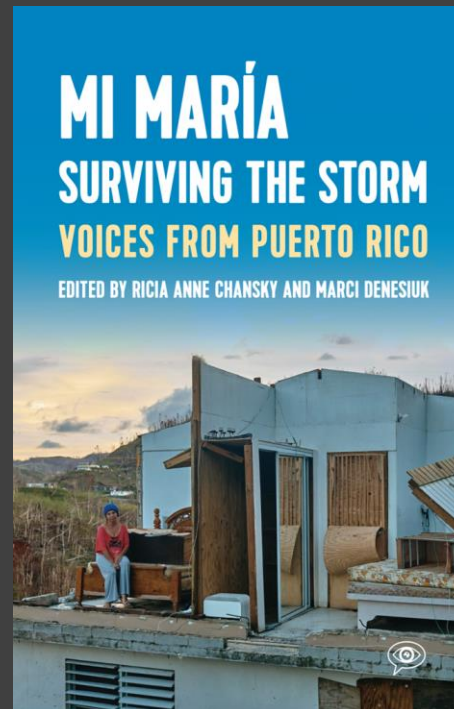
*"The boys, my sister, and I got sick from the water. We had abdominal pain, fever, diarrhea, and headaches. With no running water at our house, we were going to natural springs and filtering the water. But just because it's a natural spring doesn't mean it's crystal clear clean. Everybody was going to the springs, but a lot of people were getting really sick."*

Excerpt from the narrative of Vivienne Miranda











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# Background

- The lab is tied to oral history and documentary filmmaking courses that record life stories related to stratified disasters in the Puerto Rican archipelago
- We integrate high-tech, low-tech, and a no-tech dissemination strategies
- Our work is guided by decolonial and antiracist methodologies and employs a trauma-informed approach framed by the intent to uplift all narrators with dignity and equity





# **The Library's Role in the OHL**



# A Summary of the Library's Role

- **Building the collection** which will include the OHL's oral history interviews and documentaries
- Maximizing **dissemination and access** to the OHL's outputs through metadata creation and the incorporation of online platforms
- Working to assure the **long-term preservation** of the OHL's outputs so that they remain accessible for future researchers
- Providing **physical and virtual spaces** for the OHL's collections and activities

# Metadata Standards and Collection

## **Bilingual metadata**

The OHL is committed to the creation of bilingual metadata (English and Spanish). We believe this is fundamental to maximizing access.

## **Metadata manual for the OHL collection**

We created a bilingual metadata manual based on Dublin Core which provides guidance on how to complete each of the metadata fields we chose to use. It also establishes file naming conventions and rules for acceptable file formats.

## **Metadata intake form**

We created a form through which students can provide descriptive metadata for the oral history interviews they conducted.

# Checking and Uploading Metadata



- The metadata provided by students through the intake form is collected and checked by the library team.
- Minor edits are made. Keywords are added when necessary to better convey topics discussed in the interviews.
- The metadata is then organized in a specially formatted csv spreadsheet and uploaded in batch to Scholar@UPRM, our campus institutional repository.

# Recordings, Transcriptions, and Other Files

- Students turn in the audio or video recordings and transcriptions of their oral history interviews to their English professors. Photographs and permission slips are also turned in by the students. The professors then transfer these files to the library team.
- The library team conducts some processing actions on these files, such as adding standard prefaces to transcripts, file format conversions, and audio or video editing when necessary.
- The files are then uploaded to their respective repository entries, which were created when the batch metadata upload was carried out.

# An example of an oral history record in Scholar@UPRM

## Oral history interview with Lucy Serrano Gastón, October 1, 2021



Citations

Lucy Serrano Gastón, founder and lead of the Come Colegial project, talks about her childhood and family life. She describes her deep connection with food as well as strong family bonds which have influenced the project that feeds and cares for the university community. We learn about Lucy's professional development and the people who have supported the experiences she describes in this interview. Ranging from grade school stories, Christmas traditions, university life, and present relationships, this interview largely focuses on human connections. Additional topics in the interview are related to current events in the context of Puerto Rico, including life during COVID, protests and massive power outages.

Lucy Serrano Gastón, fundadora y líder del proyecto Come Colegial, habla sobre su infancia y vida familiar. Describe su profunda conexión con la comida así como fuertes lazos familiares que han influido en el proyecto que alimenta y cuida a la comunidad universitaria. Aprendemos sobre el desarrollo profesional de Lucy y las personas que han apoyado las experiencias que describe en esta entrevista. Desde historias de la escuela primaria, tradiciones navideñas, vida universitaria y relaciones actuales, esta entrevista se enfoca principalmente en las conexiones humanas. Los temas adicionales de la entrevista están relacionados con eventos actuales en el contexto de Puerto Rico, incluyendo la vida durante COVID, protestas y apagones masivos.

Download



[SerranoGastonL\\_Image\\_2022.png](#)  
(2.017Mb)



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[SerranoGastonL\\_Audio\\_20211001.wav](#)  
(989.6Mb)

Fecha

2021-10-01

Autor

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Estevez, Aleyshka (Interviewer)

URI

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11801/3035>

<https://scholar.uprm.edu/handle/20.500.11801/3035>



# Preservation of the OHL Collection

- Hiring of a digital preservation consultant for guidance on how to ensure long-term access to OHL outputs
- Needs assessment to determine what steps must be taken to protect the viability of the OHL collection
- Use of NDSA's Levels of Digital Preservation matrix to evaluate where we are at and what we need to improve
- Development of a digital preservation policy for the OHL collection in order to establish priorities, lay out clear strategies, and achieve consistency in terms of our preservation actions



# Additional Library Products

- A complementary Omeka website featuring OHL outputs
- Bilingual online guides on topics related to the OHL, such as oral history methodology
- A workshop series featuring experts on topics such as digital humanities, digital preservation, archival best practices, and development of community-based oral history collections





# Space, Equipment, and Services

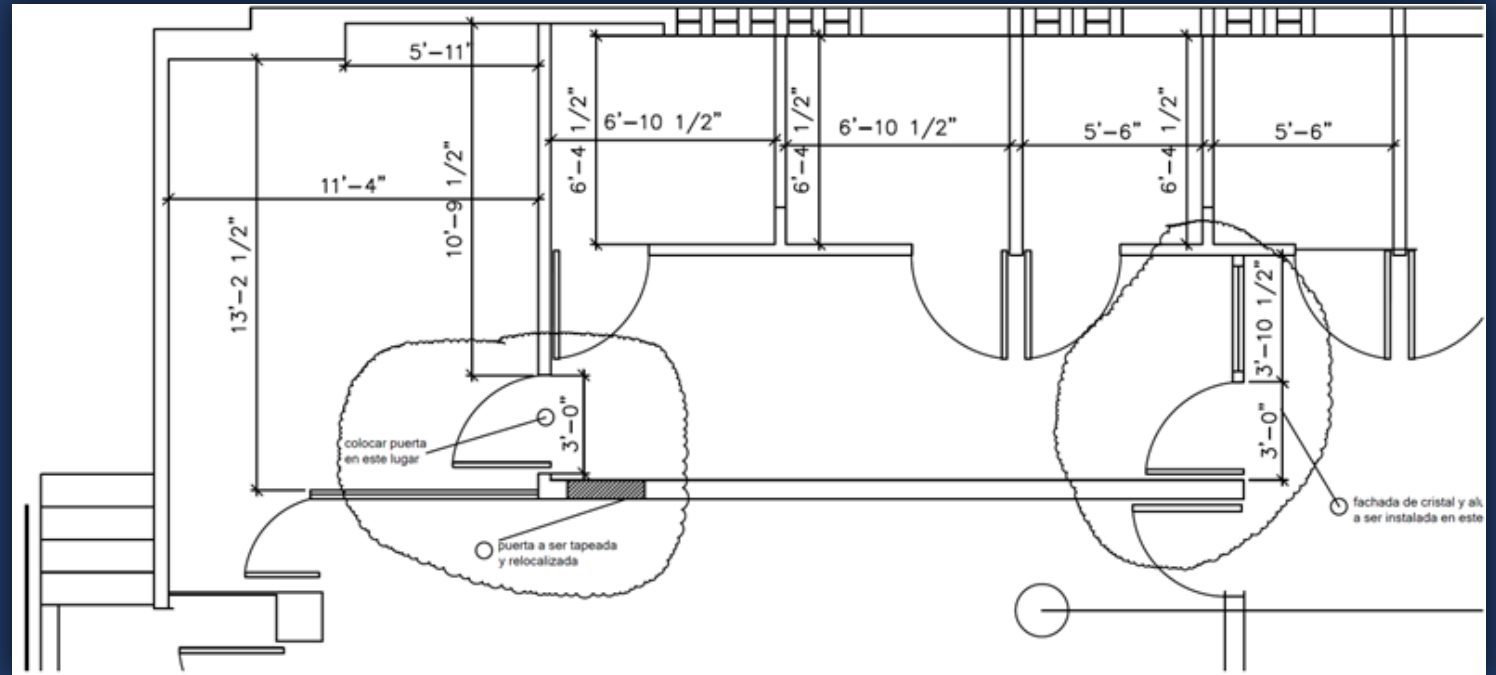
# Physical space

- Perform internal needs assessment to establish priorities and understand workflows of faculty and students from all components
- Work with library administration to identify available spaces



# Physical space

- Conceptualize design with campus architect and physical plant personnel
- Request designs from various furniture companies based on the identified requirements





# Physical space

- Consolidated equipment available in three different locations
- Created an inventory
- Added to the circulation system
- Acquired new equipment and software





# Spaces Equipment Services

Integrated library services, spaces, and equipment to facilitate the collection of oral history interviews and creation of documentaries

- Comfortable and safe spaces
- Leverage existing library services such as circulation
- Room and equipment booking
- Specialized editing software
- Checking out of equipment for field work





# Interview and Editing Rooms





# Filming of oral history interviews and documentaries





# Visiting communities





# Visiting communities





# Visiting communities





# The Impact of the OHL

# Students as knowledge generators



- Students develop as people who critically question their social environment and produce new ideas and knowledge.
- They see themselves as people who can generate impact in their communities by applying what they learn in their courses in real-life scenarios.
- They learn by doing and establish deeper connections with their home communities.
- They see their work, as well as the perspectives and experiences of their communities, as something valuable and worthy of being preserved and shared with audiences everywhere.

# Development of 21st century skills

Students sharpen critical thinking skills and develop abilities that allow them to be agents of change in current society.

- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- Communication skills
- Project management
- Processes of co-creation



## Other areas of impact

- Reimagining library spaces to meet new needs and allow for innovative educational experiences
- Enriching/complicating the historical record through the integration of voices that have been traditionally marginalized
- Opening pathways towards greater collaboration between academia and the community

# Next Steps

# Next Steps for the OHL

- Embarking on our new project, "Speaking into Silences: Building Community Archives across the Puerto Rican Archipelago"
- Focusing on the sustainability of the OHL and its collection
- Implementation of digital preservation strategies
- Establishing new partnerships

# Conclusion

# Closing Thoughts

- We consider that the OHL has been an example of a successful multidisciplinary collaboration.
- We are happy to have expanded library services in creative and impactful ways.
- Three campus components with vulnerabilities have become stronger by coming together and combining diverse skill sets and approaches.
- This initiative has generated tangible benefit for UPRM students.

# Acknowledgment



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*Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this presentation, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*



# Thank you!



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