

# OLAQ

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## Volume 22 Issue 4 Introduction

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# From the Guest Editor

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A native of Argentina, Martín Blasco has worked with underserved communities for many years. Before becoming a librarian, he carried out ethnographic and social research among drug users in New York City. Upon receiving his MLS from Long Island University, he began working in Peekskill, New York, where his outreach work began not as an official title, but by necessity to serve new immigrants. He is working now as an Outreach Librarian for Latino and Multicultural Services at Washington County Cooperative Library Services.

During the 2014 OLA Annual Conference in Salem, a group of librarians met informally for lunch to discuss the idea of creating a chapter of REFORMA (The National Association to Promote Library and Information to Latinos and Spanish Speaking) in Oregon.

In our second meeting at the end of 2014 in the Gresham branch of the Multnomah County Library (MCL), we formalized the creation of the REFORMA Oregon Chapter. By mid-2015, we became a Round Table in OLA. During this short period of time, we have increased in numbers, organized well-attended presentations during OLA conferences, held Mock Pura Belpré Awards, and scheduled quarterly meetings where participants have opportunities to share experiences and to network, as well as to present a different array of subjects related to our Latino and Spanish-speaking community.

Oregon is a state with its own characteristics. Some counties are diverse, others not. The Latino population in the state also has its own distinctiveness. As we work with this community, we become aware that there is a multitude of diverse stories, experiences, and traditions from both foreign and US-born Latinos.

We are half a million strong, make up 12 percent of the state population, and have the lowest median age. Almost one quarter of the Latino population consists of K–12 students; unfortunately a third of Latinos under the age of 17 live in poverty.

Of course, those Latinos who are foreign-born are more at risk due to the lack of knowledge of our country's customs. Immigrant families from south of the border use our libraries less, but they also appreciate them the most. What's preventing them from using libraries? They are definitely not averse to books and do not find libraries unhelpful, but the lack of information on what they can gain from the various libraries may be the issue.

In the current issue of *OLAQ*, five librarians coming from different cultural origins but with the same enthusiasm to serve our community are exploring some of the issues presented in this introduction. Their articles reflect two common tasks for every librarian working with Latinos: outreach and collaboration.

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In terms of outreach, we must first establish connections with our local community. Collaborations with public agencies and social organizations are key. Patty Lara, from the Hood River County Library District, brings her unique, unorthodox ways, what she calls “nontraditional outreach services,” to successfully promote her library services and programs. Lara has been thinking outside of the box, and now she is reaping the rewards.

Gabriela Martinez Mercier is a student with a challenging work-study job as a library assistant at a “small, rural, Pacific Northwest community college,” the Columbia Gorge Community College. She calls attention to how we define library patrons, as referred to in library mission statements. She also writes about the importance of making professional connections and finding useful resources, and how an organization like the REFORMA Oregon Chapter and Round Table is helping her to offer better services to her academic community.

Our chapter President, Natalia Fernández, curator of the Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA) at Oregon State University, is doing vital work to preserve individual and family stories with which we, as a diverse community, can identify. Her article emphasizes the importance of connections and collaborations between different libraries, in this case, an academic and a public one.

Keeping collaboration in mind, Deborah Gitlitz, Outreach Librarian at Wilsonville Public Library, has been working over the past year to establish connections in order to acquire quality materials in Spanish at the International Book Fair (Feria Internacional del Libro-FIL) in Guadalajara, Mexico. She focuses on the works of Latin American authors and illustrators which act as cultural mirrors or windows for library patrons, especially children. She began the Libros for Oregon project to help small and rural libraries develop collections which both reflect the lives of immigrants and/or U.S.-born Latinos, and open a whole new world to those who are not part of this diverse population. Gitlitz stresses the importance of reaching more library users by improving diversity in the library collections.

The demographic changes in recent years have been a reflection of many factors including an increase in the birth rate among so-called “minorities,” economic exclusion of immigrants in their original countries, and political destabilization which caused the migration of refugees affected, in most cases, by United States foreign policy. These events have caused the need for quality collections which reflect these changes. Patricia Morán, Youth Librarian at MCL, has been promoting Spanish language collections and connecting with professionals on both sides of the border between Mexico and the United States. Her contribution, again, is important to create more cultural mirrors or windows for Latino library patrons in our state.

These articles are just a fraction of stories by librarians working with and in this diverse population. The work of our chapter is an ongoing dialogue among us librarians as well as those who we serve. REFORMA Oregon, as a chapter of the national organization and as a round table of OLA, is open to anyone who works or would like to work with Latinos, or is interested in learning about this community. We know that our organization is crucial to Oregon — now more than ever. We have the responsibility to make sure that we are ready to serve our patrons as well as we can, especially in these uncertain times. REFORMA Oregon invites you to contact us or to come to our meetings. The doors are open to all.

We invite you to visit our website: <http://reformaoregon.weebly.com/> 

