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A Survey of the Library Resources and Services
in the El Paso/Juárez Border Region

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by Sally Quiroz

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Introduction

According to Michael Harris “a library is a collection of graphic materials arranged for relatively easy use, cared for by an individual or individuals familiar with that arrangement, and accessible to at least a limited number of persons” (3). Although it is difficult to trace the origins of libraries, it is almost certain that libraries have been in existence since the inception of the written word. Since the principle purpose of writing is to preserve human ideas in a form that will endure beyond the vocal expression of those ideas and preserve them for future generations, it is natural that these written ideas should be collected in such a way as to make them easily available for use (Harris 3).

Libraries became an important part of American society from the very early days of colonization, and the first public library was born in Boston almost 150 years ago. From the beginning the public library was considered an integral and necessary extension of education in our society and one of the most important and accessible venues for life-long learning. School libraries, academic libraries, and public libraries then share a common goal, education. This goal is achieved by providing access to a wide variety of resources that are organized in such a way to be easily located and retrieved by anyone who has an interest in learning. (Martin 2)

Today more than ever, libraries are the one place where there are no barriers to learning. School and academic libraries provide books and technological resources to students who otherwise cannot afford them, and many of them serve local communities as well. Public libraries are often the only source of information for people engaged in self-directed life-long learning. With the advancement of technology, even political boundaries, like our Mexican/American border, can be transcended and are no longer a barrier to who have a desire

to learn. The language barrier still represents a formidable obstacle for many people. However, even this hindrance is also being addressed through school and library services.

Libraries were in existence in México long before the Spanish conquest and contained “large collections of books on religious beliefs and ceremonies, history, economics and finances, and other topics” (Mattes 12). Unfortunately, the invading conquerors destroyed the majority of these libraries. There were many libraries established in México after the conquest and in the 1920’s the national government stressed the importance of libraries and their relationship to public education; the government recognized that libraries serve an important function in fulfilling the needs of diverse social and cultural groups in society. (Cortez 2)

Education is crucial for the development of the El Paso/Juarez border community, and academic and public libraries are an essential element of education in the region. This study will examine the academic libraries and public libraries of the El Paso/Juarez border region in an attempt to better understand what is currently available to the library patron and how El Paso libraries differ from those in Cd. Juárez. The study will also examine associations and organizations that have become a crucial avenue for support for these institutions to explore how these organizations affect libraries on both sides of the border. The librarians at eight academic and public libraries in both El Paso and Juárez were conducted for this study.

Academic Libraries

The El Paso Community College library system is comprised of five campus libraries with well over 150,000 total print items in their combined collections and access to 80 electronic databases, 8,000 e-books, as well as other materials that serve a community of approximately 18,000 students. (It should be noted that the collection at the Valle Verde Campus Library is not included in these figures.) These resources are available either as circulating collections or as on-site reference collections. The Valle Verde, Northwest, and Mission del Paso campuses are open for patrons Monday through Saturday, and the Rio Grande and Transmountain campuses offer access every day. Each campus library focuses its collection on the specific needs of the faculty and student body of the campus depending on the focus of courses offered. For example, the Rio Grande Campus curriculum centers on health occupational courses, and as a result the library has the largest collection of health occupational related materials in the system. The Northwest Campus emphasizes technical and vocational courses, while the Mission del Paso Campus houses the Law Enforcement Training Academy and the Professional Truck Drivers' Training Program. Because each campus also offers core curriculum courses, they each dedicate a portion of the collection to support the core curriculum.

Each campus has a section of computers specifically for catalog searches in addition to individual carrels with internet connected computers and computer labs for research, word processing, and other activities. There are provisions for disabled students with special work stations that are equipped with large screen monitors and desks that are wheelchair accessible. Other special equipment and services are provided to the disabled through EPCC central office. In addition, each campus facility has a classroom equipped with as many as 40 internet connected computers for orientation, classroom instruction, and special programs.

All resources within this system are available to all the faculty and student body and can be obtained directly on each campus or through campus mail. Resources are further augmented through interlibrary loan. The databases can be accessed by faculty and students off campus with their valid ID and pin number.

Each of these libraries also offers services to the community. The public is welcome to use materials and technology on-site, and a limited number of books can be checked out with a community user card available on completion of an application for this purpose. However, most databases and other electronic resources are only available to the community user on-site. Students are given priority for use of computers and print materials.

The Rio Grande Campus houses the oldest collection in the EPCC library system. It includes the Lea collection of ESL books and materials and a fiction section donated by former faculty members. Due allied health focus of the collection in the library, it is crucial that the materials be updated to keep up with innovations in the field. Consequently, the main goal at this site is to weed out old materials and replace them with current literature. This is a challenge since the budget is inadequate for this task.

The Northwest Campus has some facilities that are unique in the EPCC library system since they are the newest facility. This library was originally housed in a small room in the main building of the campus with room for only three or four users at any given time. The new building has state of the art technology that includes hot wired carrels, laptops for students to check out and use at these carrels, and a distance learning facility with a smart- board. This is also the only campus with a children's section for community use that has been developed in collaboration with the El Paso Public Library and is staffed by a certified children's librarian. This section includes seven computer stations with internet access for the children's use under

parental supervision. The main goal for this library is to augment a collection that is inadequate for the community it serves.

There are several academic libraries in Cd. Juárez, the largest of which is the library system of the Universidad Autónoma de Cd. Juárez (the Autonomous University of Cd. Juárez). Serving over 13,000 students, this system is comprised of three campus sites: The Central Library, located on the campus of the Institute of Social Sciences and Administration; the Library of Biomedical Sciences, which serves the Institute of Biomedical Sciences; and the Otto Campbell Library on the combined campus of the Institute of Architecture, Design, and Art and the Institute of Engineering and Technology. These libraries have a combined collection of over 150,000 items including printed materials, periodicals, and audio/visuals both for loan and in reference collections. They offer over 400 data bases, data bases on CD-ROM, e-books, maps, vertical files and a virtual library web site with access on and off campus for faculty and students (Servicios). The resources available are further augmented by interlibrary loan agreements with El Colegio de México (College of México), the University of Texas at El Paso, the University of New Mexico in Las Cruces, La Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, and membership in Online Computer Library Center with access to the resources of over 21,000 libraries worldwide (Préstamo).

Like the El Paso County Community College, each of the campus libraries seeks to provide materials that support and enhance the individual curriculum of the campus. In order to achieve this goal there is a library committee that reviews requests from faculty, administration, and students to select and order resources for the libraries. The Central Library houses the Special Collections, which focuses mainly on local and national history. It is made up of books, documents on paper and microfilm. It also boasts a collection of 4,100 postcards dating from the

late 1800's and early 1900's. Many of these are photographs that document everyday life of the period.

The Central Library can accommodate 600 patrons in a spacious modern building with individual study carrels, group study rooms, classrooms equipped with on-line computers, an audio/visual viewing room, a computer lab, and several rooms for study and receptions. This facility is open seven days a week with the other locations open Monday through Saturday (Servicios). It serves as a community library and museum as well and is open to the public, although members of the community are required to register for a community user's card to enjoy borrowing privileges.

One of the principle efforts undertaken by the Library of the UACJ is teaching faculty, students, and library staff the efficient use of library resources and services particularly the use of electronic sources. An orientation class is mandatory for all incoming first year students. There are also on-going, multi-media workshops for all patrons. In addition there is a course called MADRID designed for teaching the management of information resources to faculty. (Mesa)

The Otto Campbell library has a collection of 15,000 items in the general collection and 1,700 in the reference collection. The core of this collection centers on engineering, architecture, design, and art. It also possesses a collection of maps for the architectural students. It has a lab of ten computers for internet use and word-processing, and an audio/visual room for classes and presentations. It also serves the public as a community library.

The University of Texas at El Paso Library is the largest of the academic libraries in the area. It has a collection of over 950,000 books and bound journals, 2,843 periodicals and newspapers, over 2 million microforms, and 10,696 electronic titles. It is "a selective depository for government publications, collecting approximately 60% of the information distributed

through the Government Printing Office” (Phillips Faculty, 12). The map section contains over 100,000 maps including topographical maps, regional and historical maps of Mexico and the Southwest, and “road maps of the United States, Europe, and other areas of the world” (8). A portion of the Reference Section is a law library and served by a law librarian. Among the services offered at the UTEP library are:

- Reference/information service (in-person, mail, telephone)
- Circulation of books and other materials to faculty, student, staff, and the El Paso community
- Interlibrary loan
- Public-access electronic data bases
- Access to OCLC, FirstSearch, Carl Uncover, Internet & a wide-variety of electronic services (7)

The mission of the UTEP Library is to “provide excellent service and access to information resources for its unique multi-cultural university community and the U.S.-Mexico Border Region” (1). Consequently, in addition to serving the university by ensuring the availability of materials to support the curriculum of each college and department, it also provides a browsing collection of current popular fiction and nonfiction. The library has a multicultural children’s collection comprised of the classics in children’s literature and award winning children’s books with a focus on Latino and ethnic works to support the elementary education curriculum.

The library provides research computers for searching the “Nugget” which is the online catalog, the Internet, CD-ROM databases, and other electronic products. There is also a large computer lab, The Library Technology Center, with both IBM compatible and Macintosh computers. They are available to faculty, staff, and currently enrolled students with a variety of software programs for word-processing, designing spread sheets and databases, graphics design, multi-media presentations and many other functions. (184) Accessibility to technology is not

limited to the LTC as the library has wireless technology and laptop computers can access the network from anywhere in the building. The LTC also contains a collection of audio/visual resources that may be viewed by students on-site in the audio/video viewing stations. These resources are available to faculty for to check out for a period of five days. Other video items are available in the Special Collections.

Addition facilities and services in the UTEP Library include group study rooms, individual study carrels on all floors except Special Collections, and meeting rooms. Professional librarians provide instruction in partnership with professors to entering students, students in advanced courses, and graduate students in Library Electronic Classroom #204. Last year over 700 sessions were presented in this classroom. “Librarians at UTEP look forward to applying an Information Literacy Model to their instruction program in the near future” (keywords, 6). Other facilities include: the Blumberg Auditorium, located on the first floor of the library and reserved for use by university groups for conferences, presentations, workshops, and other activities; faculty carrels, and the Special Collections McNeely conference room which is restricted to use by University and Library Administration (Phillips, Faculty 182,183).

As in the case of the other academic libraries in this study, the UTEP Library is also a community library. The collections and services can be accessed on-site by the public, but priority for use is reserved for UTEP faculty and students. Community users who register for a community user card may check out books for an abbreviated length of time. Borrowing privileges are also available to the public through the TexShare program with a card provided by the El Paso Public Library. Some electronic resources are unavailable to community patrons due to licensing agreements. (Phillips, Faculty 161-163)

Public Libraries

The El Paso area is served by the El Paso Public Library system as well as by two county libraries. The public library system is comprised of the Main Library, nine branches, and a bookmobile with a total of 937,817 items in the combined collections and well over 80,000 circulation transactions per month. It employs 160 people including nine branch managers and public service librarians at the Burgess, Westside, Irving, and Clardy Fox branches. The services of the Main Library are available seven days a week. The branches offer their services either Tuesday through Sunday or Tuesday through Saturday.

The general collection of the library system is focused on the needs and interests of the El Paso community, such as the comprehensive collection of Chicano literature and the extensive ESL section. In addition, the collection at the Main Library includes the Southwest Collection housed in the Lea-Hertzog Room. The focus of this collection is the history and culture of El Paso. It contains many different kinds of unique materials specific to the border region. It includes books, periodicals, photographs, newspapers, a vertical file, city directories, architectural plans, archives and manuscripts, and historical maps.

El Paso Public Libraries have a strong emphasis on educational services to the community and, subsequently, offer many learning opportunities in addition to the lending library. Services for children include storytime, Summer Reading Club, presentations by the El Paso Fire and Police Departments, arts and craft classes, and a variety of other activities. Adults can participate in classes in citizenship, ESL, literacy classes in both English and Spanish, bilingual computer literacy classes, and literary and cultural events. The Armijo, Cielo Vista, and Ysleta branches offer access to computer labs with internet connected computers with a variety of utility and educational programs. (Calendar of Events 4)

The public library also promotes the Talking Book Program of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. Through this program patrons with visual, physical or learning disabilities can obtain recorded books and magazines and the equipment necessary to listen to them. There are resources available in both English and Spanish, and it is free of charge. (Texas)

The county of El Paso boasts two county libraries, one in Fabens and one in Clint. The library in Clint is unique in that it is a dual facility serving both Clint High School and the community. It is accessible to students through the school building and to the public through a separate entrance. CPR training, computer literacy classes, a children's corner, and a computer lab with internet access are some of the services that have been offered to the public. This library is staffed by one certified school librarian, one certified county librarian, and one full time aide, during the school year.

Library Associations and Organizations

There are many organizations that support libraries, such as the ALA, the TLA, SLA, REFORMA, SALALM, BRLA, IFLA, and the FORO Transfronterizo de Bibliotecas. Many of these organizations are affiliated with one another in order to share resources and avoid duplication of services. Most local librarians in the area belong to one or more of these organizations. The support these organizations provide is crucial to the effectiveness of libraries in the community. They provide essential funds through grants and other programs in addition to offering on-going professional development, sharing of resources, current news and information in the field, and contacts with other librarians and organizations. These organizations are even more crucial to libraries across the border where there is relatively little government and community support.

The premier library organization is the American Library Association, whose stated purpose is to “provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance and ensure access to information for all” (Welcome). This important organization promotes libraries and librarians in myriad ways. The El Paso Public Library receives many of the materials and guidelines for special programs it offers. Perhaps the most vital aid the ALA gives is the support to library professionals through professional development programs and advocacy.

An important local organization is the library consortium formed by seven area libraries and library systems called EPAL. The mission of this association as stated on their web site is “to provide access to regional information resources for the greater El Paso area communities”

(EPAL). EPAL is involved in two on-going projects that have impacted the El Paso community.

The first of these is the

Frontier of the Americas Community Networking Grant 2 ... Through this grant, computer labs have been added, and existing labs have been expanded in community locations such as the El Paso public libraries and certain El Paso housing authority locations. This grant has also made it possible to provide free, city-wide computer courses to the community.

The other project is a partnership with the GCF (Goodwill Community Foundation), which offers free on-line classes in both English and Spanish through their Global Learning Site. (EPAL)

Several library organizations focus their efforts on promoting the library and information needs of the large Hispanic community in the U. S., and are therefore particularly relevant to the border community. For example SALALM, the Seminar for the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials, founded in 1956, focuses on the development of special collections of Latin American materials to support academic research. However, SALALM has a two-fold emphasis: providing support for libraries in Latin America and the Caribbean and promoting the acquisition of library resources for the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking populations of the U.S. (SALALM 1)

On the other hand, REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking, promotes “improvement of the full spectrum of library and information services for the approximately 28 million Spanish-speaking and Hispanic People of the United States.” REFORMA has several ongoing initiatives including the local, annual Día del libro/Día del niño, an all day activity that provides free books for El

Paso/Juarez area children, and several library school scholarships it awards to students each year through an annual scholarship drive. (Latinos 12)

Particularly relevant to the El Paso/Juarez area is the BRLA, the Border Regional Library Association. Founded in 1966 its purpose is to promote “library service and librarianship in the El Paso/Las Cruces/Ciudad Juarez metroplex. Current membership includes over 100 librarians, paraprofessionals, media specialists, and the library friends and trustees from all types of libraries in the tri-state area of Trans-Pecos West Texas, Southern New Mexico, and Northern Chihuahua, México.” (About) Efforts by the BRLA to promote libraries and librarianship on both sides of the border include: participation in the Sister Libraries program, an initiative of the U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science; a library school scholarship; and an annual fall workshop with some presentations in Spanish. Topics at the fall workshop in 2002 were related to better salaries for librarians, the illustration and design of children’s bilingual books and the use of Census Bureau data in the library for a variety of purposes. In addition the BRLA quarterly newsletter offers information regarding conferences, seminars, and activities offered by other library organizations that are pertinent to local professionals.

As a participant of the Sister Libraries program, the BRLA arranged an opportunity for several staff members of Juarez libraries to visit both school libraries and public libraries in El Paso for the day to spend time with their counterparts here to gain insight into new ways of conducting library business. On another occasion librarians from Juarez were able to spend three days of observation at the Main Branch of the El Paso Public Library and exchange ideas and information regarding the profession.

In addition to the BRLA, other organizations support library programs that promote cooperation between Mexican and American libraries and librarians. One such organization is

the Transborder Library Forum/Foro Transfronterizo de Bibliotecas, a grass roots effort to provide librarians in both México and the U.S. with an avenue to participate in the cooperative exchange of ideas and experiences to enhance library services between the border regions of the U.S. and México. There has been an effort to include Canada in this FORO as well. The FORO has been conducted annually for the past 12 years.

This organization's objectives, as stated on their web site, are:

- strengthening links between librarians interested in building information bridges along international borders;
- planning and implementing cooperative projects between libraries across geographic borders;
- introducing librarians to the most recent commercial library products and services;
- sharing cultural heritage. (Foro)

The FORO has achieved its goals in several different ways over the past 12 years including the establishment of an "interlibrary loan agreement ... by librarians of the University of Texas at El Paso, the United States Information Agency's Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin in México City, and the Instituto Tecnológico Autónoma de México." Other efforts to fulfill the FORO's goals focus on collection development, development of cataloging standards, reciprocal staff training between professionals in both countries, and staff exchanges for the purpose of broadening the experience of staff members of each country.

There are several obstacles that inhibit exchanges between librarians in the U.S. and México. One is the economical challenge to Mexican librarians who simply cannot afford the dues of many professional organizations. The FORO has addressed this situation by offering dues free membership in the organization. It is supported in part by vendors who put on a trade show at the annual conference and by library organizations, such as the Special Libraries Association, and other foundations in both countries. Another challenge is the language barrier

which has been addressed by offering presentations in both English and Spanish at the conferences. Simultaneous translation is provided at each of these virtually doing away with the language barrier. (Baldwin)

The IFLA, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, is another organization dedicated to the promotion of libraries world wide. According to their web site:

IFLA is an independent, international, non-governmental, not-for-profit organization. Our aims are to:

- Promote high standards of provision and delivery of library and information services
- Encourage widespread understanding of the value of good library & information services
- Represent the interests of our members throughout the world. (More)

This organization has a direct impact on the border area through its programs. For example, the UACJ in Juarez is affiliated with the IFLA and promotes one of its major initiatives among the students there. This initiative is the Mesa redonda de formación de usuarios (Round Table for User Education). The principle objective of this Round Table is to teach the necessary skills patrons require to access information through programs, workshops, and projects in conjunction with the IFLA and other organizations. (More)

Perhaps the most important of the organizations that support libraries in El Paso are the Friends of the Library groups. There are Friends of the Library groups affiliated with all but one of the branches of the public library and one Friends of the Library associated with the UTEP Library. The impact of these grassroots groups on both the quality and quantity of libraries in our area would be difficult to calculate. For example, the Friends of the Library was the main impetus for the creation of the Westside Branch of the public library. They acquired a donation of land for the building and actually raised the funds for the construction of the current Westside

library building at a time when the city government refused to consider the need for such a facility.

The Friends of the Library participate in on-going fund raising through used bookstores and book sales. The funds from these sales contribute in many ways to the libraries as they provide substantial resources for collection development and special events and projects. These groups also serve as advocates for the library. According to Carol Brey, the director of the Main Library, there were several members of the Friends of the Library in attendance at the recent budget hearing to speak in favor of the public library (Brey). She indicates that the Friends of the Library groups are indispensable to the welfare of the public libraries in El Paso.

Dr. Patricia Phillips, director of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, also states that the Friends of the University Library provide essential support to the library. Friends provides volunteers for special projects, identifies potential sources for acquisitions, and informs the public of programs and services. (Friends) An example of the important special projects created and sponsored by the Friends is the Carl Hertzog Book Design Award. This competition is held biennially in honor of the late Carl Hertzog (1902-1984) and is designed to encourage excellence in book design. The most recent initiative of the Friends of the University Library was a response to recent budget cuts that will force the library to discontinue subscriptions to relevant major journals. Friends developed and implemented the “Adopt-a-Journal” program to encourage individuals and groups to contribute directly to the acquisition of journal subscriptions that are necessary to support the teaching and research objectives of the University. (Adopt-a-Journal)

The Mexican equivalent of the ALA is AMBAC, La Asociación Mexicana de Bibliotecarios, Asociación Civil (the Mexican Association of Librarians, a Civil Association).

This association was organized in 1924 under the name Asociación Mexicana de Bibliotecarias (Mexican Librarian's Association). It is a national organization with over 600 members formed to provide professional development for the membership and to promote libraries and librarianship (Socios). AMBAC publishes professional journals and newsletters, organizes regular meetings and conventions, and provides workshops and conferences for on-going professional development. (Actividades) Carol Brey, director of the El Paso Public Libraries, recognizes the importance of collaborating with this library association in México and has presented at several of these meetings on the theme of library promotion and advocacy (Brey).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that there are numerous libraries and considerable resources available to patrons in El Paso. Students who are actively engaged in academic pursuit have many sources of information available to them. The UTEP Library has a substantial in house collection, electronic sources available on-site and of campus, and computer technology for research. The El Paso Community College has several campuses in different parts of town that offer materials and computer technology, and The El Paso Public Library System also has many different locations available in different parts of town with sizeable collections. The resources available are augmented by interlibrary loans and electronic sources available at any of these facilities. The general public can also take advantage of many of the resources at any of the academic libraries; although in some cases users must access the printed materials and electronic resources on-site. On the other hand, the public library offers free access to its resources and services to anyone without cost.

The resources available to users in Juárez are more limited both in the size of collections and number of facilities. The collections at academic libraries are smaller. However, their collections are also augmented by electronic sources, internet access, and interlibrary loans. The academic libraries are open to the community as well as to students, but as in the case of the academic libraries in El Paso, community users have limited access to materials. There are fewer libraries, which necessarily means that users may have to travel some distance to access the resources available. More research is needed to determine what resources and services might be available to users through public libraries in Juárez.

It is encouraging to note that American and international library organizations are concerned with addressing the needs of libraries regardless of political boundaries. On all levels

there are initiatives supported by these associations to encourage sharing of expertise, resources, and advocacy that will benefit libraries and promote librarianship in the El Paso/Juárez border region. It is crucial that librarians in both cities take full advantage of the support available through these organizations for the benefit of these two rapidly expanding populations.

As in any study of this kind, many questions have been raised. Are the resources and services used to their fullest potential? How are they promoted to the public? Perhaps most important of all, how can libraries be improved in both cities in order to achieve the ultimate goal of professionals in the field, which is to promote freedom of expression and free access to information for all?

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