



Making History by Hand: Zine Making as Pedagogy in Chicano History

EDITORIAL

Laura Semrau
Sha Towers

Baylor University

Challenging AI with creativity

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In an environment saturated by generative AI, some professors are returning to bluebooks in an effort to ensure their students’ work is original. While this is one solution, perhaps the challenges presented by generative AI might prompt instructors to consider some creative alternatives. Zine creation presents a viable option for students to synthesize and present their research. Students must identify a topic of interest, conduct original research, and integrate their analysis into a final product. This article will detail one academic library’s engagement with an upper-level history class in creating zines for their culminating class project.

The Baylor libraries serve the faculty, staff, and more than 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students at Baylor University. Situated in Waco, Texas, Baylor is unique in being one of the few R1 institutions with a Christian mission. The libraries

are uniquely positioned to enrich the student experience through resources offered in their Experiential Learning Commons, Special Collections, and a newly opened Book Arts and Letterpress Lab.

At Baylor, library support for history classes is usually centered on collections and occasional bibliographic instruction. Last spring, however, history professor Dr. Felipe Hinojosa approached the Humanities Librarian, Laura Semrau, asking how the library could support his new upper-level history class on the Chicano Movement in designing zines for their final project. Semrau contacted several library colleagues, including Sha Towers, Associate Dean of Research and Engagement, and together they designed a multi-faceted approach to working with the class. This type of collaboration is central to their liaison team’s mission of intentional outreach and engagement.

For context, the Chicano Movement refers to the efforts of Mexican Americans seeking equal rights and representation in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s (Garcia, 2018). Major figures within the movement included César Chavez and José Angel Gutiérrez. Chavez led the United Farm Workers union and campaigned for the rights of farm workers. Gutiérrez helped establish a Chicano political party, La Raza Unida; unfortunately, the group failed to gain traction on a national scale (Garcia, 2018). There are many aspects of the Chicano Movement yet to be explored, so students find it intriguing—and challenging—to research this relatively contemporary subject.

The Chicano Movement class visited the library early in the semester for an introduction to the world of zines and artists’ books. Many students were unfamiliar with these formats, so it was helpful for them to engage with examples from the library collection. In this session, students learned about possible zine designs and created samples. They then explored the zine collection, encountering other layouts and materials. Students also investigated

other selections from the book arts collection, focusing specifically on relevant social and thematic content.

Zines are reproducible, self-published, pamphlet-style works that present the author's views or experiences on a focused topic. Popularized in the 1960s, zines have roots in underground, countercultural movements, so they are well-suited for telling stories of the Chicano Movement. An adjacent art form, known as artists' books, includes one-of-a-kind or small-edition works that use the book itself—or concepts of the book, such as intimate viewer interaction and a reader-controlled experience—as the artistic medium. Artists' books and zines often showcase originality in storytelling, making them appropriate to share in this context. In preparation for their own work, students explored examples of zines and artists' books in Baylor's Book Arts Collection.

This introductory library session included instruction in making a simple zine format, which helped students realize how straightforward construction could be. Following this introduction, students toured the library's Makerspace. Library staff shared the many options available to students that might assist in zine creation, including painting, sewing, and laminating. Many of the students had not seen the Makerspace before and were excited to learn they could use its resources for both academic and personal projects, as well as visit in the evenings and on weekends.

The Makerspace in Baylor's Moody Library engages the university community by providing resources for a broad range of creative projects. The space is divided into four spaces defined by activity type: digital fabrication, textiles space, messy making, and crafting. Popular options include 3D printing, laser printing, and sticker making. Library staff members run the Makerspace, but it is largely staffed by student workers. Students oversee the training of their fellow student workers and manage inventory. This student-

centered approach has been very successful, contributing to traffic of 70 to 100 visitors per week.

Later in the semester, Semrau designed a LibGuide and met with the Chicano Movement class again to share library resources relevant to their research (Semrau, 2024). Newspapers proved fruitful as primary sources for this topic. Local sources were also helpful, such as searching for United Farm Workers in [The Portal to Texas](#)

[History](#). EBSCO's America: History and Life and Readex's Hispanic American Newspapers were also useful, but some topics were especially hard to research. In one case, a student found a reference to an archive in Houston that might have resources on her topic, but it was not feasible for her to travel there.

Figure 1. Chicano Movement class presentations, May 2024.



Note: Photo by Dr. Felipe Hinojosa

Noticing this gap in our collection, the librarians later decided to invest in Gale's Latino Social and Political Culture and History: Perspectives on the Chicano Movement, to expand support for future sections of the Chicano Movement class and other related research.

At the end of the semester, Towers and Semrau were delighted to be invited to the Chicano Movement's final class presentations. It was clear that the class had developed strong bonds with each other, evidenced by Dr. Hinojosa's delivery of homemade tamales to celebrate their last meeting. Each of the 17 students presented their zine and explained the research behind it, which they had also detailed in essays.

The variety of zine topics and formats was wide-ranging. Some students embraced the small, folded pamphlet style that could be easily reproduced. Others developed their own formats, more akin to artists' books. One memorable project took shape in an archival box, using file folders to tell the story. Another focused on the poetry of Rodolfo Gonzales, an important poet within the Chicano Movement.

Towers invited the class to submit their zine projects for inclusion in the library collection, and the entire class chose to donate their work. This collective gesture of generosity—combined with Dr. Hinojosa's invitation to the final presentations—illustrates the impact of library outreach and engagement. Not only did the students directly benefit from the collaboration but the Baylor community also benefits through their scholarship living on in the library collection. For example, Towers worked with the library's exhibit manager to showcase the class's work in a centrally located exhibit case. The items were accompanied by exhibit descriptions that provided context for the student work.

Overall, the library collaboration in support of the Chicano Movement class was stimulating and successful. Dr. Hinojosa reflected over email, "None of this could have been possible without the great support and direction we received from ... everyone at the library! Thank you all, so, so much! I look forward to doing more collaborative projects like this in the future!" (personal communication, May 12, 2024). We do hope to work with future Chicano Movement classes and other classes that incorporate zine creation.

Reflecting on library involvement in this class, it is important to consider how we could improve the experience in the future. While we would again highlight our zine and artists' books collections, next time we might focus more on zines, since some of the final projects were closer to artists' books. If a stricter zine format were required, the works could be duplicated and shared more broadly. We might also schedule the Makerspace tour later in the semester, since offering it early on likely made it harder for the students to connect its resources to their project. Additionally, working with the Chicano Movement class highlighted

Figure 2. A few zines from the Chicano Movement class



Note: Photo by Laura Semrau

the library's gap in relevant resources, so we will continue building our collections in this area.

There are also some potential downsides to this project. This type of zine assignment might be challenging for students who have less experience doing historical research, since the project requires research, synthesis, and a creative product. A zine project might also prove a challenge to professors who are less familiar with grading creative projects. However, this class also highlighted the accessibility of zine making. Baylor's Book Arts & Letterpress Lab has recently started hosting zine workshops, which will help increase students' familiarity and facility with zines.

Dr. Hinojosa's creative approach to the final project opened new avenues for students to present their research, serving as a model for other humanities classes. By inviting the library to participate, Dr. Hinojosa enriched his students' course experience—connecting them with people and resources that offered innovative possibilities beyond a traditional final paper assignment. And in turn, their zines now enrich the library's collection and stand as a resource for future students.

References

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- Semrau, L. (2024). HIS 434 The Chicano Movement (LibGuide). *Baylor University Libraries*. <https://libguides.baylor.edu/Chicano>