

Paulita L. Aguilar

## University of New Mexico Libraries' Indigenous Nations Library Program (INLP)

### Reaching out and serving the UNM American Indian community and New Mexico American Indians

*"I didn't know Indian women could be librarians."*—Quote from an American Indian student from Zuni Pueblo after a library instruction session with the author.

**T**he quote above was from a young woman enrolled in an introductory Southwest Studies class. I think I know how she feels. I have always been an avid reader and spent many hours in the library from a young age. However, I do not recall ever speaking to a librarian, and none of the librarians at Santo Domingo Public School or Bernalillo High School were like me. It is no wonder that when American Indian students see me, an American Indian at the reference desk, they make a beeline towards me. I am someone they can relate to and a role model, as well. Given the high population of American Indians living in New Mexico and attending the University of New Mexico (UNM), the Senior Leadership Team at University Libraries created the Indigenous Nations Library Program (INLP) to serve the needs of American Indian students and communities.

#### **American Indians in New Mexico**

According to the 2000 Census, the American Indian population in New Mexico is 173,483, or 9.5 percent of the state's population, and encompasses 22 tribes.<sup>1</sup> In fall 2005, there were 1,526 American Indian students enrolled at UNM's main campus located in Albuquerque. Of that number, 144 were new freshmen with 89 percent coming from New

Mexico high schools.<sup>2</sup> UNM also has several degree-granting programs concentrating on American Indian or Indigenous studies. Degree programs include Native American Studies, Language Literacy and Sociocultural Studies, Native American Linguistics, and Community and Regional Planning. Due to UNM's emphasis on American Indian studies and high American Indian enrollment, the INLP officially started in July 2004 with seed money obtained through a bill sponsored by New Mexico State Senator Leonard Tsosie, who is also a member of the Navajo/Diné.

#### **The INLP team**

Before the creation of INLP, Mary Alice Tsosie, also Navajo/Diné, was the lone librarian serving UNM American Indian students and programs. She provided library instruction, conducted tours, developed outreach programming, and did collection development. She created a solid base and clientele, and discovered a need for a specific library program directed toward American Indians. Tsosie is currently the INLP liaison and outreach librarian. Her responsibilities include managing a lecture series, providing reference services at the university library's Center for Southwest Research, conducting library instruction and tours, and working with New Mexico tribal libraries and American Indian communities.

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I am from Santo Domingo Pueblo, a tribe located between Albuquerque and Santa Fe, and I joined INLP as its interim curator in July 2004. I became the program's curator after a national search in October 2005. Prior to working with INLP, I was a reference librarian at the Albuquerque TVI Community College and University Libraries' Zimmerman Library. My duties include collection development and management, providing reference services at Zimmerman Library, conducting library instruction and tours, and liaison to the Native American Studies Department.

Johann van Reenen, assistant dean for research and instruction services, is the administrator for INLP. van Reenen works with initiatives in Latin America that help indigenous peoples benefit from technological developments. His previous experience with indigenous peoples has been invaluable in identifying and implementing INLP programming.

Tsosie and I are also members of the American Indian Library Association, the New Mexico Library Association, and the Native American Libraries Special Interest Group (NALSIG), which is a New Mexico Library Association special interest group. Tsosie has served as NALSIG chair for many years and I am the current secretary. Participation in NALSIG gives Tsosie and me the opportunity to stay on top of issues facing American Indian libraries in New Mexico and in networking with tribal librarians. In addition to working with NALSIG, INLP has partnered with the New Mexico State Library's Tribal Libraries Program. I assist with workshops provided by NMSL and INLP team members who are currently involved in planning for the 2006 NMSL Leadership Institute on Cultural Preservation.

### **INLP projects**

INLP offers out of the classroom learning experiences through its lecture series. In 2005 lectures included topics on stereotypes and mascots, contemporary versus traditional pottery making, women in the military, traditional storytelling, and history of American

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Indian clubs at UNM. Lectures are open to all; are popular among undergraduates, faculty, and staff; and have an average attendance of 42 individuals. Some of the topics last semester were controversial, like women in the military, but created a conversation among different student groups on campus. Faculty on campus have stated that the lecture series supplements their curriculum, and they encourage students to attend the lectures.

Located in Albuquerque is the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI). SIPI is a tribal college that focuses on technology and offers a two-year associate's degree. SIPI students discovered University Libraries and have been using library resources to conduct research and as a place to study. I have regular reference desk hours at Zimmerman Library (social sciences, humanities, and education library), and noted the influx of SIPI students after assisting them with their research. I started a formal library bridge program with SIPI in fall 2005. Since then, more than 40 students from SIPI have visited Zimmerman Library, where they were given a tour and an introduction to library research. After the tours, several students expressed that they feel more a part of the UNM community, have an easier time using library resources, and know where to go when they need assistance. Although I have not obtained official statistics, SIPI faculty have noted that SIPI associate's degree graduates transfer to UNM. It is my opinion that University Libraries and a library bridge program could be a recruiting tool for UNM.

INLP sponsored a one-day forum in August 2005. University of New Mexico programs that serve American Indian students, tribal education coordinators, tribal librarians, and the New Mexico State Library were invited to participate, and about 45 individuals

participated. The forum was Tsosie's brain-child and helped INLP to determine the best way to serve its constituents. Outcomes of the forum included learning of other programs and their needs, coalition building, and goals and objectives. Two sets of goals and objectives were created: one specifically for INLP and the other for all forum participants. INLP goals include creating a welcoming environment for all American Indian users, expanding support for tribal libraries; and creating professional development opportunities for UNM American Indian students and tribal communities. All forum participants felt this was a successful undertaking, and because of that, INLP is committed to holding a forum once a year.

### **2006 goals**

In spring 2006, Tsosie and I will take part in the University Libraries' Satellite Library program at UNM's Mesa Vista Hall. Mesa Vista Hall houses the American Indian Student Services Center, African American Student Services Center, El Centro de la Raza, and the Women's Center. INLP provided funding to have the commons area of the centers installed with wireless technology in 2005. Librarians will have a wireless laptop and provide reference services to students 20 hours per week. This new program will increase the visibility of University Libraries and INLP among the student groups.

INLP will continue to increase the work started with tribal libraries. Tsosie and I will continue to participate in the Native American Special Interest Group activities, which include giving presentations at the New Mexico State Library Association conferences.

Tsosie, van Reenen, and I have started work with the State Library to plan a Tribal Leadership Conference in May 2006. The conference is a two-and-one-half-day event that will include topics on archives and records, museums, libraries, and historical and cultural preservation. INLP has also started looking for grants to fund a visit to the Newberry Library in Chicago so that tribal librarians can conduct research and create a

bibliography of their tribe's holdings in the Newberry collections.

Since my success with the SIPI students, I want to create a library orientation program just for American Indian students, especially incoming freshmen, undergraduates, and graduates. Currently I am working on obtaining information about Albuquerque TVI Community, which also has a high American Indian enrollment, and UNM actively recruits its associate degree graduates.<sup>3</sup> More than 37 percent of all undergraduate transfers come from TVI, and many are American Indian. TVI students are also regular users of university library's resources, but do not always feel comfortable in using these resources. Building a library orientation program will increase the number of well-informed American Indian student library users attending UNM. This could lead to other programs, like creating an information literacy program just for American Indian students.

### **Conclusion**

Like the young woman from Zuni, I did not know I could be a librarian either. Lotsee Patterson (Comanche) from the University of Oklahoma faculty recruited me to library school, and librarians at the UNM encouraged me to pursue a career in libraries. They have been my mentors and role models, and I would not be where I am today without them. It is now my turn to recruit the next generation of librarians from our American Indian students in New Mexico. I never again want to hear, "I didn't know Indian women could be librarians."

### **Notes**

1. "Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000," [censtats.census.gov/data/NM/04035.pdf](http://censtats.census.gov/data/NM/04035.pdf). Accessed February 3, 2006.
2. "Open Enrollment Report, Fall 2005" for the University of New Mexico, [www.unm.edu/~unmreg/statsinfo/OER053/Fall2005OER.pdf](http://www.unm.edu/~unmreg/statsinfo/OER053/Fall2005OER.pdf). Accessed February 3, 2006.
3. "How to Transfer to the University of New Mexico," [www.unm.edu/preview/tr\\_how.htm](http://www.unm.edu/preview/tr_how.htm). Accessed February 3, 2006. *ZZ*