

## CHAPTER 2

# In Their Own Words

## *Scholars and Coordinators Reflect on the Oregon State University Libraries' Diversity Scholars Program*

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Designing successful graduate student experiences in academic libraries can take many approaches. Our Diversity Scholars Program (DSP) within the Oregon State University Libraries (OSUL), offers MLIS graduate students of color a nine-month part-time position, salaried with full benefits, that can be renewed for a second appointment.<sup>1</sup> The OSUL established a DSP Committee in 2015 to research and develop the program, hiring our first Scholar in 2018.<sup>2</sup> The DSP incorporates key themes that help ensure graduate student success, including mentorship, funded professional development, and opportunities to apply MLIS theory to praxis.<sup>3</sup> The DSP is structured so Diversity Scholars have meaningful work experiences because they have



the agency to develop projects of their choice. They begin the program by rotating through every unit of the library in order to understand the full ecosystem of an academic library. To support career-preparedness for work in an academic environment, we make sure they have scholarship, service, and professional development opportunities. The DSP Committee helps Diversity Scholars navigate workplace dynamics, and the program offers a flexible work schedule to enable the balance of work responsibilities with coursework and life experiences.

The Diversity Scholars are expected to engage in the primary assignment duties of an academic librarian. As examples, the Scholars have worked with students in the library's undergraduate research and writing studio, taught library information sessions and workshops, tabled at campus and community events, worked the reference desk and online chat, compiled and analyzed library data, and participated in library-wide as well as relevant departmental meetings. As a part of developing their scholarship, the Scholars have attended and presented at local and national conferences and even one international conference. They have also served on a variety of library committees such as search committees, the Library Awards Committee, and the Library Employee Association. We make sure the Scholars know that their MLIS studies come first, and they are strongly encouraged to use their work experiences for class projects. Offering a flexible work schedule so they can best manage their time is a must. Scholars are given the opportunity to experience the full scope of an academic library, working in all of our departments and meeting with administrators. They are then able to determine their areas of focus. The flexibility in the schedule of their appointment timeline, as well as their weekly schedule, allows for support when and how they need it. Additionally, the DSP Committee mentors Scholars through the job search process.

Our chapter features the voices and perspectives of the program's first three Diversity Scholars, as well as the program managers, in order to provide a full story of the DSP. Each Scholar focuses on specific aspects of the program and how it impacts them: Marisol Moreno Ortiz discusses the overall structure of the program, including the pay, flexible schedule, and benefits; Bridgette Flamenco shares her thoughts on the professional development and mentorship opportunities offered, especially for her job search process; and Valeria Dávila reflects upon how the program is shaped to specifically cater to Scholars' career goals while also providing a well-rounded academic library experience. Beth Filar Williams and Natalia Fernández, DSP Committee members and program managers, share their recommendations on developing and managing a program like the DSP.

# Marisol Moreno Ortiz

## *OSU Libraries Diversity Scholar*

JANUARY 2018–JUNE 2019

My name is Marisol Moreno Ortiz, and I like it when people call me Mari. I am the youngest of three daughters, and I was born in Mexico. I moved with my family to Oregon in 2000. As the first one in my family to go to college, I worked hard to earn my bachelor of arts in English from Oregon State University in 2014, my master of arts in English from Portland State University in 2016, and my master of library and information science from Louisiana State University in 2019. Throughout my time in academia, I learned that word of mouth is a powerful thing, something that the DSP utilized in spreading the news of the program being developed. This is how knowledge of the program reached my ears through a conversation on an early morning in 2017 with one of my past OSU advisors. I had returned to OSU to do a term of service through AmeriCorps, as I was finishing my master of arts in English degree, and I had decided to take a year off before starting my MLIS program the next fall. Learning about the DSP got me very excited, and I could not wait to contact them to express my interest in the program. The email that I sent to the program to learn about the application process began my journey into becoming the first OSUL Diversity Scholar.

When my appointment as the first Diversity Scholar began in January 2018, I was just beginning my second semester of my MLIS program. My knowledge about librarianship was limited, and I needed a program that supplemented my online coursework, which the DSP did. Within my MLIS program, I had the control of what courses I wanted to take each semester. The DSP was similar in that I had the flexibility to decide what I wanted to learn and what departments in which to work. The DSP Committee also helped me to structure a work schedule that fit with my courses and bus schedules as I would be commuting to the library since I don't drive. I decided to work in the mornings to midafternoon, as this would allow me to get home and do some coursework for the day. I also did some of my coursework reading during the commute to and from the library. Being a Diversity Scholar meant working in a part-time position for twenty hours a week, with the agency to choose what days of the week I wanted to work. This flexibility helped me structure a schedule where I had a three-day weekend to focus on coursework, which in turn helped me balance my responsibilities and have a manageable stress level. This established a strong foundation for my first year, and it made me feel that I had control of my learning.

The structure of the first term of the program included a lot of onboarding to establish that strong foundation, as well as giving me time to decide on which areas of OSUL I wanted to focus as part of my position. Along with

my MLIS coursework, I aligned my library experiential learning to include book mending, cataloging, literacy instruction, circulation, and reference. These areas of librarianship were the areas that matched my temperament and goals. I spent each term working on projects, as well as attending conferences, including presenting at an international conference, with the professional development funds provided by the program, opportunities similar to those of the full-time permanent librarians. Another important element of the program that was very valuable to me was the weekly meetings scheduled between me and the chair of the DSP Committee, my supervisor, as a check-in of how the previous week went. This was also a time where I had the opportunity to ask for any assistance that I might have needed. Having this weekly meeting really helped to incorporate the DSP Committee as part of my support team and not a separate entity.

During this time, I was fortunate to still live at home and received a graduate tuition award from my MLIS program that covered tuition and out-of-state fees. This and the stipend provided by DSP was enough for me to provide some rent and grocery money to my parents and successfully complete my DSP appointment. The stipend also helped me pay for the internet I needed to do my MLIS program, lunch money during DSP work, textbooks, and spending money when traveling for conferences. Other Diversity Scholars who do not receive extra assistance from their program or external scholarships may need to work another part-time job to supplement the DSP stipend. Even though the program didn't provide a big stipend, it did provide a health plan that matched the health plan given to other OSU graduate teaching assistants. The program covered medical, vision, and dental with only a small co-pay. For me, the health plan provided was extremely beneficial as it provided me with the opportunity to finally take sessions with a psychologist who specializes in anxiety disorders since, at the time I began my appointment in DSP, I was struggling with my obsessive-compulsive disorder. I also used some of my stipend money for transportation to attend my treatment appointments. The stipend is not much, but along with the other benefits of the program, like its professional development budget, I didn't mind it. My goal going into the Diversity Scholar Program was not to make money but to get the experience and increase my knowledge to be much more prepared to apply for library positions after finishing my MLIS, which the program indeed helped me accomplish through experiential learning and increasing my confidence by helping me develop my academic librarian identity.

# **Bridgette Flamenco**

## ***OSU Libraries Diversity Scholar***

### **OCTOBER 2018–MARCH 2020**

My name is Bridgette Flamenco, and I'm a first-generation Mexican American who grew up in Los Angeles, California. I am currently enrolled in San José State University's master of library and information science program; I started my first semester in August of 2018. I have always had an interest in serving diverse and underrepresented communities, and I applied to the Diversity Scholars Program because I wanted to work and learn in an environment that engaged in creating a diverse and inclusive library sciences field.

During my DSP appointment, I engaged in a multitude of professional development opportunities that allowed me to travel, network, and identify areas of interest within my professional career. As a master's degree student with limited funds, I never dreamed that I would have the opportunity to travel as much as I did during this program. During my eighteen-month appointment, I was able to attend conferences both regionally and nationally. These included presenting on the DSP at the 2019 Oregon Library Association-Washington Library Association conference in Vancouver, Washington; attending the 2019 American Library Association (ALA) annual conference in Washington, DC; presenting at the 2019 Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) WA/OR Joint Conference in Eatonville, Washington; and attending the 2020 ALA Midwinter Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Sprinkled in between these conferences were workshops and seminars, which all served to expand my understanding of how librarians can work to better the lives of their academic communities and also increased my knowledge and interest in instruction and outreach. I am particularly fond of the 2019 ACRL WA-OR Joint Fall Conference "Whiteness and Racism in Academic Libraries: Dismantling Structures of Oppression," wherein I was accepted to give a presentation. The conference was focused on openly acknowledging the ways that whiteness and racism are supported in libraries and strategies for practicing anti-racism across the breadth of our work. My presentation focused on the work I had been doing with OSU's underrepresented Latinx students and their diverse information needs and cultural perspectives. The presentation advocated the need for diverse academic librarians to create connections with diverse students and their families in order to increase the library's overall approachability. It also touched upon how diversity residencies such as the DSP can help make this possible. This presentation allowed me to integrate my MLIS coursework to better understand and reflect on the importance of the work I was doing at OSU while also networking with professionals who shared similar interests.

There was a real focus within the DSP to create opportunities for me to gain as much experience as possible within an academic library. I was encouraged to look at the type of work I wanted to do within academic librarianship, and once I decided that I wanted to focus my career on conducting library instruction and outreach services, I was offered opportunities to conduct that type of work throughout my appointment. Having worked entry-level jobs most of my life, it was a welcomed change to work at a more professional level within this program and have the duties and service responsibilities that would be expected of an academic librarian. The types of duties that came from the DSP consisted of leading data analysis presentations, serving on library hiring committees, conducting library and information literacy instruction, and tabling outreach events in order to promote library services. I had opportunities to join departmental meetings and administration briefings that allowed me to better understand the inner workings of such a large institutional organization regarding budget spending, strategic planning, and so forth. Throughout these experiences, I also learned how to communicate and collaborate with colleagues using various office software (Outlook, Slack, Google Docs), which I did not have experience using in a professional setting. These experiences allowed me to understand the work environment, culture, and etiquette within an academic institution and helped prepare me to work in an academic work environment in the future. Overall, the myriad of professional development opportunities that I was able to participate in helped to solidify my interest in becoming an academic librarian and in working with diverse and underrepresented communities, specifically in the realm of instruction and outreach.

Ultimately, the benefits of the opportunities afforded to me during the DSP came through when the DSP Committee asked me to create cover letters and résumés for actual outreach and instruction librarian positions within academic libraries. As I looked at the position descriptions of academic librarian positions, I found myself comfortable with meeting the requirements and qualifications for these positions. Additionally, I was able to attain letters of recommendation from colleagues with whom I worked with throughout my appointment. I then met with the DSP Committee to receive advice and feedback on my résumé and cover letter. While I found myself being able to meet the desired experiences for many of these positions, the insight gained from the DSP Committee allowed me to understand what employers are looking for in job applications and in interviews. Consequently, I feel confident in applying for such positions once I attain my MLIS, a confidence I don't think would exist without the help of the DSP.

While the DSP offered me exciting and interesting professional opportunities, I must say that at first, I felt inadequate in my ability to perform such responsibilities. My previous library experience was based mostly on circulation and shelving, and these new duties were out of the realm of the backroom work I had

normally done. In truth, I was somewhat inexperienced, but the whole point of the DSP was to afford me the types of opportunities that were out of my realm of experience and comfort so that I could grow into a well-rounded academic librarian. More so, as I tried out different aspects of academic librarianship, from cataloging to public services, I always found that my fellow colleagues were not only helpful but excited to advise me and offer me opportunities to grow. Whether they offered me the opportunity to teach a reference manager workshop or took the time to teach me how to use LibGuides, being mentored by such compassionate and experienced individuals made it easy to step out of my comfort zone throughout my DSP appointment. Even as my appointment came to an end, I found many of my colleagues wishing me the best, exchanging contact information with me, and offering to write letters of recommendation. Having such a supportive network of fantastic and caring individuals certainly made it hard to leave, but it also eased my mind as I know I can come to them with questions or ask for advice as I take the next step in my journey toward becoming an academic librarian.

## **Valeria Dávila**

### ***OSU Libraries Diversity Scholar***

#### **OCTOBER 2019–JUNE 2021**

My name is Valeria Dávila, and I am from Argentina. My journey in LIS began at OSUL after moving to Oregon in mid-2016. Having no prior experience at libraries but a professional background in photography, film, and digital film restoration, and an interest in archives, I worked almost two years at the Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC), a department within the OSUL, digitizing photographic and paper materials for access and digital preservation. After defending my thesis in 2018 and earning my bachelor of arts in film at Fundación Universidad del Cine, I decided to pursue an MLS-archives degree. Because I had limited financial means, being appointed as a Diversity Scholar at OSUL before starting my program in fall 2019 was instrumental to my decision.

Having recently completed my first nine months in the DSP, what I love most about the program is its focus on helping Scholars explore and develop their areas of interest, made possible by a DSP Committee that cares and is invested in providing all kinds of valuable opportunities. In my case, being not only the first foreign Scholar in the DSP, but also the first with a preexisting interest in archives—most particularly, audiovisual archives—I find this aspect incredibly supportive and beneficial to my professional development.

During my first nine months, I attended the 2019 Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) Conference for the first time, where I connected with professionals in the field from the US and around the globe. This experience

was significant for me at a personal and professional level, as friendships and collaborations that I value started there. Besides attending AMIA, I was able to improve my audiovisual archiving skills by helping preserve audiovisual materials at SCARC. I had helped preserve a collection of films at SCARC prior to my DSP position, and having continuity in this sense was key. The opportunity for working with such materials came early in 2020, as the library moved collections originally housed at an external facility to a considerably smaller location. Urged by these circumstances, SCARC began to reevaluate the size of certain collections. I was then charged with reassessing a myriad of film elements from the OSU-produced documentary *Farmers of the Sea* (1984) from the Oregon Sea Grant Communications Moving Images Collection to determine which elements were to be kept and which deselected. Involving a kind of responsibility I had never had before, the challenge of this task attracted me because it provided an opportunity for personal and professional growth.

Besides my interests in audiovisual preservation and archiving, as a Latina, I intend to serve underrepresented and especially migrant and Spanish-speaking communities. In this aspect too, the DSP offered opportunities from the start. In October 2019, I tabled at the Noche de Alma Latinoamericana event to share information about the OSU's Corvallis campus library with the Spanish-speaking community in Corvallis. Soon thereafter, the opportunity emerged to contribute to a collection development initiative at the Guin Library, an OSU branch in Newport specializing in marine science. Guin's director, Mary Markland, sought to add books in languages other than English to the marine-themed children's book collection at Guin to better reflect and serve the local community, but Spanish books with such characteristics were scarce. I was traveling to the International Book Fair (FIL) in Guadalajara, México, at the time—the largest Spanish book fair in the Americas to date—with the REFORMA Oregon program *Libros for Oregon*, and I took advantage of the trip to acquire books for Guin at FIL that were hard to get in the US. This collaboration brought me endless joy and holds a special place in my heart.

Most recently, moving to remote work mid-March amid the COVID-19 outbreak, I had time to work on projects that expanded my options for serving Spanish-speaking communities that I would not normally do in the context of the DSP, projects such as translating video presentations of the fourth edition of the No Time to Wait Symposium to Spanish, in an attempt to help make their content on open access, standardization, and audiovisual preservation available to Spanish-speaking audiences around the world. Furthermore, this summer I will be collaborating in a bilingual Spanish-English oral histories project with OSU Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA), a project I am very excited about.

In addition to advancing my specific career interests in the DSP, I also gained a holistic understanding of academic librarianship. Teamwork and collaboration



are strong components in every workspace and especially in academic librarianship, and this program provided me with plenty of opportunities for both. I gained this understanding by not only serving on committees and participating in cross-departmental meetings, but also by having time to meet with colleagues to discuss their work and role within the library's larger environment, as well as by collaborating with them in projects such as a mass book deselection coordinated by the Resource Acquisition and Sharing Department. Participating in this project helped me explore this fascinating and controversial aspect of collection management I was eager to learn more about.

All these wonderful opportunities—some sought after, some circumstantial, some totally unexpected—emerged within these first nine months only, and I am looking forward to what other opportunities my remaining time with the DSP will bring!

## **Beth Filar Williams and Natalia Fernández**

### ***DSP Committee Members***

From our experiences developing the DSP, we would like to share our lessons learned to help you in implementing a similar program at your institution:

*Examine your library's and institution's commitment.* Are you and your library investing in ongoing concrete actions that support equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism? It is essential that this work is integrated into all departments so that the scholars are working in an environment that is truly committed to social justice. Be sure to review the ACRL Diversity Standards for cultural competencies for academic libraries.<sup>4</sup>

*Work with human resources.* Determine the best fit in terms of classification for the position to ensure that the scholars receive the benefits they deserve, including a salary that reflects the work of a scholar, health benefits, as well as professional development funding.

*Consider all possible options.* What type of program will work best for your library, especially if funding or buy-in is an issue? For example, consider the options of piloting a short-term version of the program, developing a one-year-only program for a second-year MLIS student, or perhaps creating a remote-only position.

*Seek administrative support.* Administrative support is critical, as is sustainable funding. Administrators need to commit both fiscally and systematically, prioritizing the program by dedicating their own time and energy as well as strongly encouraging staff to participate.

*Find advocates within your library.* Have conversations with faculty and staff at all levels of your library to ensure staff capacity and buy-in from all departments. Library staff will be working with the scholars daily. Make sure that your colleagues understand that their positions are not internships; a scholar is to be treated as a colleague.

*Seek program partners beyond your library.* Determine existing programs on campus, as well as in your community or local area, that could become partners or advocates for your program. Local MLIS programs, those on campus working with undergraduate students of color, and your current and former library student employees can help in this area.

*Reflect on what success means for your program.* Develop assessment strategies, including feedback from the scholars themselves, from library faculty and staff who work with the scholars, and your own self-reflection, in order to ensure that the program adapts, evolves, and improves.

*Do your research.* Seek out literature written by scholars of color who have published about developing and structuring effective programs for librarians of color. The 2019 book *Developing a Residency Program: A Practical Guide for Librarians* is an in-depth guide filled with practical advice that covers the processes to successfully develop, build support for, and structure a program.<sup>5</sup> The book covers recruitment, hiring, onboarding, program assessment, and ideas for post-program support for individuals as they continue their library careers.

*Build in an infrastructure.* As part of the program, ensure the scholars continue to receive ongoing support even after they have graduated and have begun their careers.

## Conclusion

As Anantachai and colleagues state, “Professionals are generally better equipped to grow and to succeed when they have such collegial group environments and networks at their disposal.”<sup>6</sup> One of the key outcomes for the DSP is not only to provide Scholars with mentoring during their time in the program but to establish a supportive network as they move on to a professional position. Effective mentorship and a supportive network are keys to retention, for all librarians, but especially critical for librarians of color.<sup>7</sup> As we move forward with our program, we will continue to assess its effectiveness. Currently, we seek feedback to evolve and improve the program experience through methods such as the Scholars’ reflective journaling and self-evaluation, feedback from library staff who have worked with them on projects, and the Scholars’ presentations or written reports shared with the library at the end of their appointment. Additionally, in order to ensure the program’s sustainability, we will not take our existing buy-in from colleagues for granted and will continue to advocate for the program. For now, we will continue to offer one to two positions per academic year. During the

2020–2021 academic year, we hired our fourth Diversity Scholar into a 100 percent remote position. Our long-term goal is to grow a solid cohort, building a strong network for the Diversity Scholars so that, as our Scholars end their time with us, the relationship does not end. We will continue to support them through ongoing mentorship after their DSP experiences and into their careers.

## Notes

1. Oregon State University, “Diversity Scholars Program,” last modified October 15, 2020, <https://guides.library.oregonstate.edu/diversity-scholars-program>.
2. For more specific information on the development and implementation of the Diversity Scholars Program, read the article by Natalia Fernández and Beth Filar Williams, “Creating a Library Wide Culture and Environment to Support MLIS Students of Color: The Diversity Scholars Program at Oregon State University Libraries,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, June 24, 2020, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2020/diversity-scholars-program>.
3. Diversity Scholars are paid a monthly stipend, \$1,275 per month (for thirty weeks of work over a nine-month period, totaling 600 hours), which is about \$18.80 per hour. (For comparison, minimum wage in Corvallis, Oregon, is \$12 per hour as of July 1, 2020.) The position includes health care coverage as well as \$2,500 in professional development funds per nine-month appointment. Our university librarian gave us a set amount of funds for the positions using soft money that could be spent at her discretion.
4. American Library Association, “Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries (2012),” last modified May 4, 2012, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity>.
5. Lorelei Rutledge et al., *Developing a Residency Program* Practical Guides for librarians, no. 63 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).
6. Tarida Anantachai et al., “Establishing a Communal Network for Professional Advancement among Librarians of Color,” in *Where Are All the Librarians of Color? The Experiences of People of Color in Academia*, ed. Rebecca Hankins and Miguel Juárez (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2015), 32.
7. Anantachai et al., “Establishing a Communal Network,” 50.

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