

# Community-Based Digital Archives to Support Diversifying Campuses and Enhance Community Involvement

Charlotte Nunes and S. Abu Turab Rizvi

**abstract:** This installment of “Reports from the Field” demonstrates how the building of community-based digital archives in academic libraries can support campus diversity initiatives and spur greater engagement with community concerns. As college campuses rapidly become more diverse along racial and ethnic lines, social issues concerning race and ethnicity arise frequently both on campus and in the surrounding communities. These issues create an opportunity for academic libraries to build digital archives that reflect the voices of community members and for students and professors to engage with these materials in their learning and research. As a result, the curriculum and research possibilities of educational institutions can more clearly reflect the diversity in and around them. This report describes a multiyear, multi-institutional effort to build community-based digital archives. Through the creation of such archives, the academic library becomes pivotal in helping colleges and communities engage with one another in reciprocally beneficial ways.

## Introduction

Community-based digital archives can help fulfill the aspiration of many college campuses to develop a curriculum that is appropriately diverse and that advances inclusiveness and other educational goals. As evidenced by a United States Department of Education report on practices to address race and ethnicity in higher education, such a curriculum allows members of a diverse student body to “see themselves reflected,” thus creating “a sense of belonging and inclusiveness.” According to the report, educational experiences based on diversity themes “greatly impact all students—including students of color.”<sup>1</sup> Yet often, curricular opportunities fail to keep pace with the diversity on campuses, even if the surrounding communities have a rich array of racial and ethnic groups. Academic libraries and the related cultural institutions of a region struggle to capture the diversity of voices and experience in the communities they serve. By partner-

ing on digital archives to collect and preserve the region's voices, libraries can support curricular innovations based on those voices and help their parent institutions enhance the diversity of their curricula. Coursework can employ the oral histories and cultural artifacts of various community members, delve into the issues in their lives, and allow students and faculty members to see people from a broad variety of backgrounds in the academic work they undertake. Given that digital archives constitute primary research materials, they can enable students to find new ways to pursue traditional research

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Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium (LVEHC), an association of educational and cultural institutions in the Lehigh Valley region of northeastern Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> Communities and academic institutions vary tremendously, so the experience of Lafayette College Libraries may not fit another library's situation exactly. Thus, the authors outline a number of ways that academic libraries in general are well suited to community engagement, inviting exploration and consideration by individual libraries. The authors offer some thoughts about the LVEHC and community engagement, before turning to the collection-building activities of Lafayette College Libraries and then to the role of academic libraries in campus-community engagement in general. Without insisting on a sharp distinction between campus and community constituencies—indeed, the boundary between the two is often hard to draw—the authors consider the reciprocal benefits of campus-community partnerships centered around academic libraries. By referring to specific LVEHC collection-building projects and outcomes, the authors illustrate how academic libraries play key roles in facilitating campus-community partnerships and advance the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The authors share lessons about community-focused digital collection building derived from the experience of the Lafayette College Libraries in Easton, Pennsylvania. The libraries partnered with the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium (LVEHC), an association of educational and cultural institutions in the Lehigh Valley region of northeastern Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> Communities and academic institutions vary tremendously, so the experience of Lafayette College Libraries may not fit another library's situation exactly. Thus, the authors outline a number of ways that academic libraries in general are well suited to community engagement, inviting exploration and consideration by individual libraries. The authors offer some thoughts about the LVEHC and community engagement, before turning to the collection-building activities of Lafayette College Libraries and then to the role of academic libraries in campus-community engagement in general. Without insisting on a sharp distinction between campus and community constituencies—indeed, the boundary between the two is often hard to draw—the authors consider the reciprocal benefits of campus-community partnerships centered around academic libraries. By referring to specific LVEHC collection-building projects and outcomes, the authors illustrate how academic libraries play key roles in facilitating campus-community partnerships and advance the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This report acknowledges the robust and various conversations about diversity reflected in demographic professional representation,<sup>3</sup> holdings,<sup>4</sup> and mission and values statements<sup>5</sup> at academic and public libraries and archives.<sup>6</sup> In this report, and given the thematic emphases of the LVEHC, the authors consider diversity especially in terms of race, ethnicity, and histories of migration. They focus on how diversity in these terms is (and is not) represented archivally. In so doing, the authors recognize calls by the Society of American Archivists to advocate diversity in archives at large<sup>7</sup> and by the Institute of Museum and Library Services to invest in digital infrastructure specifically to expand cultural heritage collections.<sup>8</sup>

This report is also animated by the scholarship on community-engaged digital archives. Such sources as "Diversifying the Digital Historical Record" by Michelle Caswell, Christopher Harter, and Bergis Jules;<sup>9</sup> "Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives" by Jules;<sup>10</sup> and the Sustainable Futures series on the blog *Medium*<sup>11</sup> provide guidance on how community archives can



partner with academic institutions to achieve sustainability without compromising their autonomy and authority. Thus inspired by conversations about diversity in academic libraries and about sustainability in community archives, the authors offer a model of socially engaged archives work that supports diversity in academic libraries, builds trust among campus and community partners, and generates exciting curricular opportunities that enact the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

### The Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium

The group of higher education institutions, cultural organizations, and libraries that launched the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium sought to employ the methods of the humanities to understand transformations in the communities of the Lehigh Valley over the past 50 years. During this time, the region emerged from an industrial past focused on the production of steel, textiles, and cement to become a landscape of postindustrial cities mixed with rural and suburban communities. The valley has attracted a variety of migration resulting in a complex demographic profile. These changes create a need for greater understanding, representation, and engagement of the valley's richly diverse population. In recognizing community needs for which the engaged humanities could make a difference, several areas of concern arose as centers of attention for public problem-solving in the LVEHC.

One area of concern is a mismatch between the Lehigh Valley's growing diversity and the representation and participation of its population groups in the cultural and academic institutions in the region. The histories, art, and understanding of recently arrived racial and ethnic groups are underrepresented and need to be bolstered with relevant

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archival materials and cultural production. For example, a museum that wanted to mount an exhibition on Syrian Maronite Christian communities in the area or a student who wanted to write a paper about them would find a dearth of relevant artifacts and accounts. Similarly, members of that community would not see themselves represented in the Lehigh Valley's cultural institutions.

Another concern of the LVEHC is to develop a clearer understanding of working life in the Lehigh Valley through the methods of the humanities. Representations of work, which are anchored in an industrial and agrarian past, have not kept up with the shift in employment from large industrial corporations to service-oriented occupations. The availability of jobs has determined patterns of migration and settlement. The LVEHC focuses on the tenuousness of work, its varieties, the relationships it represents, its relation to craft, and its connection to identity.

The stories of many of the populations of the Lehigh Valley are not generally available, and the LVEHC hopes to engage community members in story making to create publicly available accounts that are now missing. The narratives will occasion further



opportunities for research, teaching, representation of communities, and public history. The formats in which stories are expressed include documentary film, dance, original musical and theatrical compositions, kiosks with historical information, oral histories, and creative writing.

Another endeavor for the LVEHC is to bring the Lehigh Valley's sense of place up to date with current geographical realities. The transformation of farmland to other uses; the ongoing relationship of the area's many rivers and streams to its people; the effects of the urban renewal movement on cities, where many projects not only failed to revitalize the economy and but also reinforced patterns of segregation; and the rapid suburbanization and development of transportation networks are all important aspects of the area's geography. For instance, Easton and Allentown have both been shaped economically and culturally by the impact of highways, which have altered the character and trajectory of the two cities.

In short, the overarching problem the LVEHC addresses is insufficient engagement by cultural and academic institutions with the community's heritage, history, and traditions, to the detriment of an understanding of important trends in the region. The humanities are well-equipped to address this problem.<sup>12</sup>

Lafayette College Libraries has important partners in this effort. The LVEHC was initially composed of 12 Pennsylvania academic, cultural, and community-based institutions that spanned the three main urban areas of the Lehigh Valley: Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton. The Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges (LVAIC) is also a project participant. Six academic institutions constitute the LVAIC—Cedar Crest and Muhlenberg Colleges in Allentown, DeSales University in Center Valley, Lafayette College in Easton, and Lehigh University and Moravian College in Bethlehem. Other cultural institutions in the LVEHC include a large museum, a historical society, a public library, and an arts trail, which collaborate with the academic institutions. The consortium members have worked together to curate exhibitions, create exhibition catalogs, conduct research, and serve with community organizations. To enhance the capacity of academic and cultural institutions to engage with one another, the LVEHC enlisted the assistance of community leaders and the Lehigh Valley Research Consortium, in which researchers from throughout the region study its political, economic, social, health, and environmental issues.

### Literature Review: Community-Based Archives and Campus Diversity

The literature notes that digital archives are an important way to advance the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion through collection building but points to gaps that exist

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along racial and ethnic lines. The nonrepresentation of community members in academic library collections can have serious effects, gauged by the testimony of college undergraduates who encountered similar nonrepresentation. As S. L. Ziegler states in "Digitization Selection Criteria as Anti-Racist Action," a "culture

of inclusion involves collection development.” As archives and libraries choose what collections to build and digitize, they “choose what narratives to promote, what history to highlight, and what legacies to further.”<sup>13</sup> In a comprehensive survey of community archives, scholars Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor highlight the consequences of campus archives that fail to reflect meaningful diversity.<sup>14</sup> In response to the survey, Bergis Jules, cofounder of Documenting the Now, a project to create ethical standards and tools for the preservation of social media content, reflected on his undergraduate experience. Jules reported:

It is a huge deal when you are on a campus of 30,000 people and you can’t go to the archives and find anything about black history . . . One of the implications could be that you don’t really get an opportunity to build a lasting connection with your institution of higher education . . . You don’t get to sort of have that lasting feeling of “I belong to this place.”<sup>15</sup>

Kelly Besser, founder of the Transgender Living Archives, also emphasized the demoralizing emotional experience of nonrepresentation in campus archives. Besser recalls

wanting to write a paper on transgender history for a historical methodology class and being told by the professor that there was “not enough information” to write anything other than a “theoretical” paper . . . I went into . . . [an LGBT repository], and what I found there [on transgender history] was devastating. Our materials weren’t being preserved, they weren’t cataloged, they weren’t described . . . [I felt] heartbroken. I think I cried.<sup>16</sup>

As these survey respondents testify, nonrepresentation in archives can produce feelings of marginalization and alienation from the campus environment and the undergraduate experience as a whole.

For the same reason, respondents to the survey by Caswell and her coauthors highlighted the significant positive impacts of archival collections driven by values of diversity and community engagement. For Jules, a primary way to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in academic libraries and archives is through collection building. “The implications are huge as far as self-realization, or pride-building, or knowledge enhancement, all of those things,” he explains. “That’s, I think, the power of some of these community-based archive projects.”<sup>17</sup> In particular, Caswell and her team report that “interview subjects whose work was organized around preserving the histories of communities of colour described how . . . community archives helped them see their families reflected in history, and as a result, they felt a sense of inclusion or social belonging.”<sup>18</sup> This experience of “seeing oneself in history,” they conclude, “can catalyse a profound ontological change, from a position of loneliness and despair to one of solidarity and hope.”<sup>19</sup>

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The field of community-based archives is well-positioned to guide academic libraries in advancing diversity and creating more expansively welcoming environments for all who visit and use academic libraries and archives. Of course, such work cannot serve as a cure-all for diversity, equity, and inclusion problems. As Ziegler suggests, "There is always a danger that predominantly white institutions lean too heavily on traditionally excluded communities to help us fix our self-imposed racism problems."<sup>20</sup> But encouragingly, Jimmy Zavala, Alda Allina Migoni, Michelle Caswell, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor point out that community-engaged archiving has already "compelled shifts in dominant models of practice to reflect community values and agency in archival management, particularly regarding custody and governance."<sup>21</sup> Certainly, campus investments such as the LVEHC Digital Archive, which intentionally centers the interests of community partners, yield rich benefits for faculty and students by enabling high-impact teaching and research opportunities. Even more broadly, they advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education at large by directly addressing the historically exclusionary nature of many campuses and academic memory institutions.

The key to avoiding a superficial interest in the optics of diversity is to redistribute archival resources and authority as advocated by archival theorist Yusef Omawale. In his report "Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives," Omawale writes,

We should do our best to benefit and learn from the accumulated wisdom of the existing [archives] profession, but also refuse attempts at incorporation which will only further alienate our communities from themselves . . . In these refusals lie the possibilities of

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sustainability. Most materially, by refusing offers of inclusion and recognition, and instead demanding redistribution. Our archives have always existed and our communities have always done archival work.<sup>22</sup>

For Omawale and the other scholars cited here, community-engaged archiving is crucial to arriving at equity in historically discriminatory memory institutions. Academic libraries and archives must challenge themselves to redistribute archival resources and authority to promote diversity in the library mission.

### **The LVEHC, Community Engagement, and Digital Archives**

The LVEHC is based on a reorientation in thinking about how institutions of higher education should relate to their communities. The traditional perspective on community engagement is based on an ethic of service or volunteerism, aimed at correcting deficits communities are thought to have, so that they benefit from the expertise of academic institutions. Such a view tends to see the college or university as superior to its neighbors, offering them help and scholarly know-how to correct their problems. The role of libraries in this outlook would be restricted to offers of librarianship expertise or volunteer service among librarians, rather than arising from a rethinking of the library's





professional mission. In this traditional view is taken strictly, the college neither belongs to the community nor works directly with it. To conceive a reciprocal relationship requires a reframing which recognizes that community members have assets of knowledge and expertise that are relevant to the issues. The town-gown relationship should involve public problem-solving to which all contribute rather than a one-way transmission of knowledge.<sup>23</sup> In this perspective, academic institutions, as long-term participants in the life of their communities, have the power to convene community members, engage in the discernment of concerns and issues, and explore how various forms of distributed expertise can be applied or developed to better the situation of community members. This new orientation proved valuable in the conception of the LVEHC, and a new role for academic libraries finds a place in it.

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Addressing the gaps identified in the literature on community-based digital archives and campus efforts toward diversity, equity, and inclusion is a key goal of the LVEHC. One outcome of this goal is the LVEHC Digital Archive, which focuses on the cultural, economic, and demographic changes in the Lehigh Valley during the past half century. The range of materials collected include “oral histories, family photographs, business documents, historic maps, ephemera, material objects, and other primary source materials that document diverse ethnic and immigrant communities, emergent economies in the era of deindustrialization, relationships between culture and the environment, and other topics.” In this way, “the archive provides primary sources for educators, scholars, students, and others who wish to explore transformations of the past half-century in the Lehigh Valley.”<sup>24</sup>

The LVEHC Digital Archive is housed in the Lafayette College Libraries. The libraries’ Department of Digital Scholarship Services partnered in the project from its inception, working closely with Lafayette’s Special Collections & College Archives to create and steward digital collections of primary sources.

To date, collections of note in the Digital Archive include the Easton NAACP-Sigal Museum Collection, a collaboration among members of the Easton chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and curators at the Sigal Museum and Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society in Easton. The project documents the Black experience in Easton during the past half century. Other major collections include the Allentown Band Oral History Collection, which chronicles narratives of this historic community group; and Estoy Aquí [I am here]: Latina Women of the Lehigh Valley, an assemblage of oral history narratives reflecting the heritage of the Latinx population in the Lehigh Valley.

The LVEHC Digital Archive results from a reshaping of the traditional responsibility associated with collection building. The archive is based on the idea that community partners retain autonomy over the collection-building process while accessing the resources they need to render collections sustainable in the long term. Establishing this relationship starts with the LVEHC Memorandum of Understanding for Partnering Organizations (see the Appendix). This document enables the Department of Digital Schol-

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arship Services and a community partner—for instance, a public library or community organization—to set mutually agreeable terms for their partnership. The memorandum emphasizes that contributions to the LVEHC Digital Archive are nonexclusive; that is, community partners can archive, display, and circulate their digital assets anywhere they like in addition to the LVEHC Digital Archive. The document stipulates that, upon request, the Department of Digital Scholarship Services will provide copies of the assets to the community partner.

To facilitate a collection-building process that makes central the autonomy of community partners while positioning digital assets for long-term stewardship, the Department of Digital Scholarship Services provides extensive support to its partners outside the libraries. For image and text collections, this support includes digitization services and consultation on naming and managing files. For oral history collections, the department provides consultation on planning and executing an oral history project, oral history consent form templates, training in how to use audio recorders, auditing of oral history transcripts, and editing of oral history sound files. This support is codified in workflow documents created by staff members of the Department of Digital Scholarship Services. Both the memorandum of understanding and the workflow documents specify that a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) be used for all metadata, oral histories, and other original contributions to the LVEHC Digital Archive. According to the terms of the license, the copyright of an item remains with the creator, but the material can be freely circulated with attribution for noncommercial purposes. The implementation of this license across the Digital Archive respects contributors' intellectual property while advancing open access. By implementing this license, the Department of Digital Scholarship Services supports the growth and circulation of community-led digital collections while the collection-building process remains in the hands of community partners. The LVEHC Digital Archive thus represents a significant commitment on the part of Lafayette College Libraries to sustain community-led collections securely and in the long term.

The Easton NAACP-Sigal Museum Collection in the LVEHC Digital Archive is an example of a community-led collection-building effort with broad significance for campus-community engagement. This collection was supported by Lafayette College Libraries and a series of grants from the LVEHC. Collaborators at the Easton branch of the NAACP and the Sigal Museum and Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society gathered a physical collection of primary source materials, including family photos, ephemera, and newspaper clippings documenting Black life in Easton during the past half century. Two consecutive Black History Month events cohosted by the museum and the Easton NAACP branch in February 2018 and February 2019 invited community members to come together, share stories, donate and lend materials, and view a curated selection of primary source materials. These materials were digitized by Lafayette College Libraries and incorporated both in the LVEHC Digital Archive and in a landmark exhibition at the Sigal Museum titled *Destination: Northampton County*. This permanent display features migratory histories of several influential ethnic communities, including African American families from Cuthbert, Georgia, who arrived in the Lehigh Valley during the twentieth century to pursue jobs in industry. Two developments in the wake of these community-led archiving efforts demonstrate the sustainability and



impact of this collaboration. Charles Dickerson, a member of the NAACP Easton Branch, joined the Sigal Museum's Board of Trustees, thus ensuring the continued influence of the NAACP on Sigal programming. In addition, staff at Lafayette College Libraries and the Sigal Museum were recognized with prestigious 2019 NAACP Image Awards for their work facilitating the collaboration.

In the partnership described here and many others supported by the LVEHC, the work of the academic library is integral in both representing and involving diverse community members so their lives and histories find a firmer foothold in the cultural institutions of the region where they live. The materials gathered form the backbone of ongoing public history and public humanities outreach and serve as a repository of the historical memory of Lehigh Valley communities. They also inspire community members to become involved with the region's cultural institutions. For example, the February 2019 Black History Month event in anticipation of the *Destination: Northampton County* exhibition at the Sigal Museum drew over 100 community members.<sup>25</sup> Local news coverage of the events documents robust participation from members of the Lebanese, Filipino, and African American communities.<sup>26</sup>

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### Curricular Innovation

The LVEHC Digital Archive has enabled the curricular efforts of the academic institutions involved in the consortium to evolve toward greater engagement with diversity, enriching their educational mission. As faculty reflections on the LVEHC blog attest, class projects to help build and interpret community-led digital collections result in enthusiastic student involvement and deep engagement with course learning objectives.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, faculty and students are often members of the off-campus communities centered in LVEHC collection-building efforts. Faculty members Elizabeth Ortiz and LuAnn McCracken Fletcher of Cedar Crest College led their English and Communications undergraduates in a collection-building endeavor resulting in *Estoy Aquí: Latina Women of the Lehigh Valley*.<sup>28</sup> This digital collection highlights "Latina women whose stories . . . reflect the diverse heritage of the Latinx population in the Lehigh Valley: Puerto Rican, Dominican, [Colombian], Mexican, Honduran, Venezuelan." As Ortiz and Fletcher report, the stories in the collection bear out "the difficulties of pursuing higher education as a Latina." Such themes, Ortiz and Fletcher write, "resonate[d] with our students' lives, many of whom are first-generation students themselves."

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The Cedar Crest faculty members became eager to offer collection-building courses in the future. "Almost from the first week in talking with students, we knew we'd want to run [these courses] again . . . especially since so many Cedar Crest students heard from members of our classes about the value of the courses and the work we produced together, and want to take the courses."<sup>29</sup> In this way, the LVEHC Digital Archive bridges the boundaries between campus, local, and regional communities.

The benefits of LVEHC collection building extends beyond situations where students identify personally with Digital Archive content. In Andrew Uzendoski's Ethnic American Literature class at Lafayette College, students built an interpretive exhibit that put primary sources from the Easton NAACP-Sigal Museum Collection into conversation with course readings by seminal U.S. authors such as James Baldwin and Nella Larsen.<sup>30</sup> The goal of this assignment was to explore how themes and topics in these important literary works related to Black history in the Lehigh Valley. In the process of building the exhibit, students met with the local NAACP affiliates who helped build the digital collection. This interaction deepened student understanding of the primary source materials they used. Uzendoski reflects that the assignment was a "successful way to conclude our intersectional discussions on identity and to encourage conversation and collaboration between the student body at Lafayette College and the diverse communities that live in the Lehigh Valley."<sup>31</sup>

The LVEHC can support course innovations across the curriculum. In economist S. Abu Turab Rizvi's first-year seminar Making Change Democratically, students use the LVEHC's Black Bethlehem Project oral histories to identify social problems affecting the Black community in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The personal narratives give his students practice in dealing sensitively with the actual voices of community members and allow students to see community members as holders of expertise about matters that involve them. Students develop an analysis of the problems by relating them to the academic literature on race in postindustrial cities and compose policy briefs addressed to local officials.

The LVEHC Digital Archive supports diversity goals, advances high-impact research and teaching, and reaffirms the public service mission of higher education by centering

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community partners' interests in ways that are mutually reinforcing. Our experience with the LVEHC convinces us that teaching and learning are greatly enhanced with the materials that community engagement makes available because of the relevance and vividness of the stories they capture. Such resources not only allow for the researching of a paper but also yield narratives that can connect with a student's life.

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dents, faculty, and community members to collaborate on research or creative activities. In doing so, they can solve or express important community problems and effect social change. Moreover, a library with community-sourced archival materials takes on a newly significant role as part of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in higher education.

## Other Impacts

The experience with community-based digital archives affects other important issues that arise in librarianship. Community engagement leads to the development of collections that are locally specific and consequently distinctive at a time when book collections are increasingly held in common.<sup>32</sup> While academic libraries may receive donations of locally relevant materials, a more active and purposeful approach builds such collections via community engagement.

Moreover, collection building is not the only area in libraries in which diversity figures importantly. Efforts to advance diversity as a goal in community engagement may support diversification of the library staff, an important goal in many institutions. Rosalinda Hernandez Linares and Sojourna Cunningham write that as of 2012, “Non-white librarians made up 13.6% of credentialed librarians . . . If libraries were reflective of the actual population of the United States, the percentage of non-white librarians should be 40.9%.”<sup>33</sup> Writing in 2014, Director of Oberlin College Libraries Alexa Hudson-Ward cites similar statistics:

In 2009 89% of librarians in the United States were white, according to US Census data analysis . . . A July 2013 study released by the American Library Association’s (ALA) Office of Research and Statistics found that, of 40,000 ALA members, 87.1% are white . . . These numbers have remained steady for nearly a decade.

Hudson-Ward urges that “vigilance to ensure that our libraries’ workforce represents the changing demographics of the communities we serve is vitally important to our lifeblood.”<sup>34</sup>

Libraries approach the challenge of increasing diversity on multiple fronts, including formalizing organizational commitments, transforming hiring practices and professional development, and developing library programming.<sup>35</sup> Attention to community diversity in the mission of academic libraries complements and supports the effort to diversify library staffing.

Another consequence of a focus on community-based collection building is to develop the relation between academic and public libraries. The LVEHC encompasses area academic libraries as well as regional public libraries, including the Easton Area Public Library, the Allentown Public Library, and the south and central branches of the Bethlehem Area Public Library. The authors found that academic and public libraries learn from one another. The traditional academic library concerns for supporting teaching and research found a footing in the Bethlehem Area Public Library’s Black Bethlehem Project, an oral history collection supported by the LVEHC and conducted with partners at Northampton Community College, Lehigh University, and Lafayette College Libraries. M. Rayah Levy, the Bethlehem Area Public Library head adult services librarian who led the project, remarked,

I started this project because our Local History Room had little to offer students and other patrons who came to the library looking for materials related to the African American experience. The chance to partner through with Lafayette College Libraries on an oral history project for the LVEHC Digital Archive came at an opportune moment when I was actively looking to expand our holdings on Black life in Bethlehem.<sup>36</sup>



Public libraries have much to teach academic libraries regarding community involvement and inclusion. Academic and cultural institutions can be forbidding to community

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members. A key issue motivating the LVEHC was the distance community members felt from such institutions. Partnership with public libraries helped to bridge this separation.

### **Conclusion: Bridging Boundaries**

This report touches on the idea that building community archives might have a political valence. Jarrett Drake, in the report “Seismic Shifts: On Archival Fact and Fictions,” urges collection builders to “make clear their political projects,” rejecting the idea of archives as neutral or objective. He writes, “We are not collecting history for history’s sake . . . the opportunity exists to embody the seismic shift in paradigms that we want to see in society.”<sup>37</sup> The social goal animating the projects discussed in this report is that enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within and beyond the campus not only is important but also enriches academic experience. Campus-community engagement animated by goals of diversity and equity crosses various boundaries: between town and gown, between the faculty activities of teaching and research and the exercise of service or outreach, and among disciplinary divisions. Libraries such as Lafayette’s support the teaching and research missions of the academic community and stand ready to support community engagement efforts that intersect with them. They are a venue where all the disciplines are represented and so interdisciplinary efforts become possible. Consequently, the example of the LVEHC indicates that academic libraries can convene complex community engagement initiatives, help promote an understanding of and document diversity, play an active role in responding to mutually identified needs, and help bridge various divides. All these capacities unite to help create more inclusive campus climates.

In consequence, academic libraries are unusually well placed to support campus-community engagement efforts that advance the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion through collaborative, community-engaged collection building. Academic libraries can take advantage of their standing as places where community members feel welcomed and included, where diverse populations can engage with one another, and where disciplinary and physical boundaries become porous. The authors hope that the examples offered in this report will inspire other academic libraries to engage with their surrounding communities to advance shared purposes and achieve more inclusive environments on campus and beyond.

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*Charlotte Nunes is director of Digital Scholarship Services at the Lafayette College Libraries in Easton, Pennsylvania, and codirector of the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium; she may be reached by e-mail at: [nunescl@lafayette.edu](mailto:nunescl@lafayette.edu).*

*S. Abu Turab Rizvi is a professor of economics at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, and a visiting scholar at the Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and was the principal investigator of the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium grant; he may be reached by e-mail at: [rizvia@lafayette.edu](mailto:rizvia@lafayette.edu).*

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## Appendix



### LEHIGH VALLEY ENGAGED HUMANITIES CONSORTIUM

UNDERSTANDING TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE PAST HALF-CENTURY

[SITES.LAFAYETTE.EDU/LVEHC](https://sites.lafayette.edu/lvehc)

#### LVEHC Digital Archive

#### Memorandum of Understanding for Partnering Institutions

*The LVEHC Digital Archive is hosted at Lafayette College and stewarded by the Department of Digital Scholarship Services (DSS) at Lafayette College Libraries. The purpose of this form is to document agreements between DSS and partnering institutions (such as regional college archives, public libraries, and cultural heritage institutions) contributing digital assets to the LVEHC Digital Archive.*

#### Partnering institutions:

#### Names of partnership stakeholders:

#### Brief description of the partnership, including the nature of the digital assets to be contributed to the LVEHC Digital Archive:

#### Timeline (including start and end dates) of the contribution:

#### Brief description of the copyright status (if known) of the digital assets to be contributed to the LVEHC Digital Archive:

#### The undersigned understand the following:

- The deposit of content described in this memorandum will be both non-exclusive and perpetual. At the request of the depositing institution, a copy of content will be returned to the institution.
- Signatories to this Memorandum of Understanding agree to make all metadata generated for the LVEHC Digital Archive as part of this partnership available under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).
- In the event of significant changes to the conditions of the partnership (including but not limited to the departure of a project stakeholder from a partnering institution), stakeholders will revisit this Memorandum of Understanding.

#### I agree to the terms laid out in this document (please initial):

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stakeholder 1 name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stakeholder 2 name



## Notes

1. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Office of the Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Key Data Highlights Focusing on Race and Ethnicity and Promising Practices* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2016), 37, <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf>.
2. The Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium (LVEHC) is a four-year initiative (2017–2021) funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. It is codirected by Nunes and Andrea Smith, professor of anthropology and sociology at Lafayette College; Kate Pitts is grant coordinator. The LVEHC brings together a consortium of colleges, universities, and cultural institutions in the Lehigh Valley region of Pennsylvania to explore the “personal, historical, and community narratives about the past half-century in the Lehigh Valley region of eastern Pennsylvania using methods of the humanities and arts”; see the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium, <https://sites.lafayette.edu/lvehc/>, for more on the consortium and the many people who have led to its success.
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4. Christina Vercelletto, “How Diverse Are Our Books?” *Library Journal*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/detailStory=How-Diverse-Are-Our-Books>.
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17. Jules, “Architecting Sustainable Futures.”
18. Caswell, Migoni, Geraci, and Cifor, “‘To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise,’” 14.
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