

# Outreach in Oregon

## Tribal Archives Institute Breaks New Ground

Oregon State University Libraries was no stranger to the nine federally recognized Native American tribes in Oregon. Larry Landis, director of OSU Libraries' Special Collections & Archives Research Center (SCARC), and the school's university archives had worked with the tribes over the course of ten years on various projects to help build up their archives and record management programs.

But even Landis admits these efforts were scattered and not as extensive as they needed to be. There was no denying the need for in-depth archives and records management training for all of Oregon's tribes. Although all the tribes were managing their records with varying degrees of success, not all tribal governments had developed an archives program. There were few (if any) opportunities for comprehensive yet budget-friendly archival training or professional development opportunities. Plus, most tribes faced challenges traditional archives couldn't relate to.

Then, in 2009, OSU signed a memorandum of understanding with the Confederated

**Anne Hartman, SAA Editorial and Production Coordinator**

Tribes of Warm Springs. A key part of that document called for OSU to provide assistance with archives and records management issues. Landis jumped on board with the idea, but also knew that the need for such training existed across the state. He'd long been in contact with David Lewis, manager of the Cultural Resources Department for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, who indicated that "if the training were offered in Oregon, I would make every attempt to get our archives and cultural staff to attend in force."

It was then that the idea for the Oregon Tribal Archives Institute (TAI) was born. Rather than single out tribes to work with, Landis and the team at OSU reasoned the best way of addressing the issue was to bring the tribes together for extensive, customized sessions on a variety of archives and records management topics. Landis submitted

a proposal for—and received—a two-year grant from the Oregon State Library's Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) program to cover the costs of the institute. The idea received immediate encouragement from many.

"It is through collaboration of this kind that long-term productive

relationships between tribal and non-tribal stakeholders will flourish, enriching our shared communities," Allison B. Krebs, the 2010–2011 chair of SAA's Native American Archives Roundtable, wrote in a letter of support.

### Out of Office

Still, the team at OSU knew they had a long road ahead of them. Landis worked with Oregon Multicultural Librarian Natalia Fernández, SCARC's Instruction and Public Services Archivist Tiah Edmunson-Morton, and TAI intern Laura Cray to tackle the project. Not only did they have to ensure that as many tribes as possible would participate, they also had to design an engaging weeklong institute that would feature key topics.

But they decided it wasn't up to them to select those topics, and that effective planning would take place outside the confines of OSU. The heart of the grant's first year became site visits with each of the nine tribes not only to discuss their needs but also to build stronger ties between OSU and the tribal communities.

Fernández, who completed the site visits with Landis and Cray, noted that the visits "were a time to explain the project in more detail and to talk to the tribes about what their needs were. We needed to build a curriculum, but we also wanted to make sure that we tailored it to what people needed rather than assuming what topics they'd need covered."

The visits lasted from a few hours to a day, each revealing more about the archives and records management programs that existed and the communities themselves. At the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, they met with members of the cultural resources



Facilities planning session at the Siletz Tribal Community led by tribal archivists. Courtesy of Oregon State University Libraries.



Elizabeth Nielsen, OSU Special Collections & Archives Research Center staff member, demonstrating best practices for audio/visual materials. *Courtesy of Oregon State University Libraries.*

and tribal records departments. They toured the Coquille Indian Tribe's facilities and discussed plans for a new document management database.

"We wanted them to get to know us both for the practical side of curriculum building . . . but also to make those personal connections so that they'd be more invested in attending the Institute," Fernández said.

## A Customized Curriculum

With the site visits wrapped up, Fernández, Landis, and Edmunson-Morton next looked to build the Institute's program. Although the visits helped identify which topics would benefit each tribe, the topics varied, and the three faced the daunting challenge of fitting sessions into the program without overwhelming attendees with information. They began jotting topics onto large sheets

of paper—everything from grant writing and disaster planning to digitization—and, over the course of six months, whittled down the list to those topics that would satisfy the most needs. They paired sessions covering complimentary topics and sought to balance lectures with hands-on activities. They decided against holding concurrent sessions, and instead opted to keep attendees together throughout the week.

"We wanted there to be an opportunity for everyone to be together for discussion so that records managers, archivists, cultural resources specialists, and museum curators were all in one room, talking about their challenges and successes," Fernández said.

Another challenge: Identifying instructors who could expertly address the topic at hand while also customizing content to address the specific challenges the tribal archivists and records managers faced. In addition to Landis, Edmunson-Morton, and Fernández facilitating a number of the sessions, staff of the University of Oregon Libraries provided their expertise on a variety of topics. The three reviewed the site visits with each of the invited facilitators to familiarize them with the attendees and to

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help ensure important topic points would be covered. In some cases, the facilitators incorporated examples of projects that tribes were undertaking into their curriculum. In other cases, the facilitators had first-hand experience working as tribal archivists. Jennifer O'Neal, a member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde who was the head archivist for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian Archive Center, served as a facilitator for several sessions, including "Archives 101" and "Collection Management Systems." O'Neal, who now works as the University of Oregon's university historian and archivist and serves as the chair of SAA's Native American Archives Roundtable, also delivered the keynote address.

### Running the Institute

The Institute was held in August 2012 on OSU's campus. The event drew eighteen attendees, including at least one individual from each of Oregon's nine tribes. Sessions ran the gamut, from "Funding Opportunities" and "Facilities Planning" to "Digitization Practices" and "Born-Digital Records." Participants went off campus on two days to tour facilities at the Siletz and Grand Ronde communities as well as the Benton County Museum.



The TAI Team: Laura Cray, Tiah Edmunson-Morton, Natalia Fernández and Larry Landis, OSU Special Collections and Archives Research Center staff members. *Courtesy of Oregon State University Libraries.*

With the Institute's small setting, attendees had the chance to get to know each other—a major goal of the Institute. They bounced ideas off one another, shared their stories of success or frustration, and asked for input.

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"Tribes are so scattered over Oregon, so I didn't know who was working in the same field that I am," Lewis said. "It was good to have met these people so that we all have a better understanding of where we are in terms of [archival and records management programs]."

"All the participants were so appreciative that this training was developed and that they were able to create a network of archivists from across the state to collaborate with and rely on for assistance," O'Neal added.

Another goal for the Institute also was accomplished: Thanks to the LSTA grant, OSU could cover the costs for two attendees from each tribe to attend the Institute as well

as for lodging, meals, and travel expenses. "That was one of the big pushes behind the grant," Fernández said. "Not only did we want to provide the opportunity for professional development and networking, but we wanted to make sure it was not a financial burden, because that would defeat the purpose of assisting them."

"To have participants from all nine tribes in Oregon really tells me that there [was] a need," Lewis said, adding that the training could help the Grand Ronde community to "increase the skills of the staff and help them do their work better and more efficiently."

### Looking Back, and Ahead

There's still work to be done. Fernández, Landis, and Edmunson-Morton gathered initial feedback on the final day of the Institute, and they'll conduct interviews in early 2013 for additional feedback. They've also set up a Facebook page and listserv to keep the conversation going among attendees. Although no plans are set for another Institute, they haven't ruled out that possibility—or the possibility of hosting shorter, focused sessions for the group again.

Looking back, Fernández says their best move was going on the site visits and getting to know the attendees on a personal level. "The Institute would not have worked if we had just developed something and invited people to attend," she notes. "It was essential for us to meet with each of the tribes in person. We got to know them, and we were able to build trust and show them we were committed." ■

For more on this project, visit <http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oma/tai/index.html>.



David Lewis, Larry Landis, and Jennifer O'Neal at the opening dinner. *Courtesy of Oregon State University Libraries.*