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Project Background and Objectives

My project titled “Afro-Latin Voice Across Campus” seeks to transform Afro-Latin and Caribbean Studies into a visible, repeatable practice of student scholarship. With the support of the Probationary Faculty Development Grant (PFDG), I developed key infrastructure for an experimental course that introduces students to Afro-Latin histories, principles of public history, and digital humanities. The project built on research I conducted with support from the University of Florida in 2024, where I gained access to primary document collections related to Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean communities.

During the funded semester, the objectives of the project included the following:

- Select and prepare a curated selection of primary sources and digital materials related to Afro-Latin identity, language, and culture
- Create the assignment framework and scaffolding activities that will support student research along with public and digital humanities work
- Design an exhibit template and online platform to host multilingual content of future student-created exhibits

The questions that guided the project were:

- How do Afro-Latin linguistic and cultural practices shape expressions of Black identity in Latin America and the Caribbean?
- What interpretive strategies best convey these histories to a public audience?
- How can undergraduate students transform archival sources into public scholarship that fosters inclusive understanding of the African diaspora?

This project addresses the limited visibility of Afro-Latin and Caribbean histories in university curricula and public spaces. Lynn Nnenna Anyanwu’s work exposed the gap between academic scholarship and curriculum on African descendants in Latin America, even as cultural awareness about Afro-Latinos has grown in recent years through popular

culture. Scholars such as Lillie Padilla and Rosti Vana have also written on student interpretations of the inclusion (or lack thereof) of Afro-descendant voices within studies of Latin America and its languages. Padilla and Vana's research revealed students' desires for critical conversations about representing Latin American diversity in a more culturally competent way. My project builds on this scholarship to develop an experimental course in Afro-Latin history that narrows the gap between academic scholarship and curriculum, encouraging critical conversations about Latin American diversity through student engagement in public and digital humanities. The project and resulting experimental course will focus on experiential, student-centered learning and expand the curricular offerings of the Latin American Studies Minor (LASM) and the History Department.

Implementation and Results:

In this section, I will cover the implementation and results of the project in four key areas: course infrastructure, experimentation in student-curated exhibits on Afro-Latin history, development of an online platform for digital exhibit curation, and permissions for primary sources.

Course Infrastructure:

To develop course infrastructure, I created a master Canvas course page that contains key readings, activities, and assignments related to the project.

To develop activities and assignments, I used the preeminent textbook for public history, *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences*, edited by Cherstin M. Lyon, Elizabeth M. Nix, and Rebecca K. Shrum. Modules for the course were organized into four phases:

1. Scholarship & Field Orientation
2. Artifact Engagement & Historical Analysis
3. Exhibit Development
4. Final Exhibit & Reflection

Module 3 (Exhibit Development) was organized according to the curation process, so that students practice the skills necessary for curation and the exhibit they will create by the end of the semester. The skills for curation include understanding categories of historical analysis, recognizing the different kinds of artifacts historians use, and practicing categorization and organization of artifacts into a coherent exhibit.

Key scholarship selected as readings for the course reflects the core principles of Afro-Latin American Studies: to balance the histories of "deeply embedded inequalities" with

histories of Afro-Latin agency and creation, prioritizing “the voices, actions, strategies, and decisions of Africans and their descendants.”¹

Assignments were designed not only according to the curation process, but also by using Bloom’s Taxonomy to ensure students build skills in a transformative way. Those skills include the following:

- **Understand** historical narrative through readings and comprehension quizzes
- **Familiarize** with existing literature and trends through discussions
- **Examine** curated artifacts and primary sources through in-class activities
- Practice curation and public digital humanities through a curated list of artifacts and primary sources
 - **Develop** exhibit components (both interpretive and non-interpretive labels)
 - **Organize** artifacts for exhibition through online platform, Omeka.net
 - **Conduct** evaluations
 - **Reflect** on exhibit organization and implementation

Together, the lessons, literature, and assignments developed during the funded semester will be the foundation of the experimental course associated with my project. These components were crucial preparation to submit the course syllabus for consideration as an experimental course for Spring 2027 (with the syllabus due October 9, 2026).

Though I will initially propose the course as experimental, I plan to develop it into a full course in the future, if enrollment and student interest are maintained. I have also done preliminary research on potential conflicts with existing courses to begin communication with potentially affected instructors. My initial evaluation of existing courses leads me to believe that, due to the public history and digital humanities components, the course should not conflict with existing courses. Rather, it should complement the various perspectives offered by other departments on campus that cover the African diaspora and Black political thought more broadly.

Preliminary Implementation through Student Art Exhibit at the Shattuck Symposium, March 2026:

Through the Shattuck Symposium, which took place at Sacramento State March 16—18, 2026, I was able to experiment with student-centered exhibits as pedagogical practice as well as student engagement with Afro-Latin thought and history. This experience revealed

¹ Alejandro de la Fuente and George Reid Andrews, editors. *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 10-13.

important takeaways for the future of the project supported with the Probationary Faculty Development Grant.

Students from one of my existing courses, HIST 138A (Colonial Latin American History Survey), engaged with a unique primary source of Black political thought from the early nineteenth century for the purpose of exhibiting their work at a public symposium. Students used a transcribed and translated primary source to engage in decolonial historical analysis, where we “read against the grain” to recover the voice and agency of an Afro-Cuban political thinker named José Antonio Aponte. Students used trial records of the Spanish colonial system that described the book of paintings (since lost) that Aponte used to organize rebellion against colonialism and slavery. To recreate those paintings, students engaged in artifact evaluation and creative application, all skills that will be replicated in the PFDG project and ensuing experimental course.

In preparation for the student art exhibit, I guided students in placing their artifact within broader historical contexts and used written assignments for students to reflect on the importance of public access to culturally competent exhibits of Afro-Latin history. The scaffolding assignments used to create the art exhibit have been used as a model for the future experimental course associated with my PFDG project. The experience of this exhibit in the Shattuck Symposium proved that our undergraduate students have great capacity for public historical interpretation and excitement for experiential learning. More importantly, students were inspired by curriculum that centered underrepresented groups and communities that are often marginalized in academic scholarship and curriculum. The Shattuck Symposium student art exhibit served as an important practice-run of reproducible, publicly accessible, and sustainable student exhibits for future course iterations.

Online Platform:

One of the most crucial aspects of this project was selecting a sufficient online platform to host multilingual primary sources for student engagement in the experimental course, as well as host the future digital exhibits that students will create for public interaction. I experimented with several platforms, assessing cost, potential for long term use (longer than one semester or academic year), accessibility features (crucial for student learning and for engagement with the public), and the possibility for multi-user creation or editing on the backend.

During the grant period, I examined four different online platforms: SquareSpace, Scalar, ReclaimEd Hosting, and Omeka. I spent the first two months of the grant period

experimenting with Scalar, which is a free, online digital humanities platform developed at the University of Southern California designed for “collaborative authoring and reader commentary.”² However, by April, I received news through discussions with colleagues at USC that the university plans to retire the platform in the near future. Omeka.net then emerged as the best online platform for the project based on the key criteria mentioned above (cost, long term use, accessibility, and multi-user editing).

Omeka.net has long been a standard hosting site for historians and organizations that publish public-facing history. Omeka.net is also a free platform with embedded accessibility features. The platform provides infrastructure for metadata for any items hosted on the built site, which is often required as part of permissions and copyright compliance (more on this in the “permissions” section of this report). Many county and state-level public humanities projects continue to be hosted through Omeka, which gave confidence that this platform would work best for my project over time. It is possible that in the future, the free version of Omeka may need to be paired with ReclaimEd hosting to improve on some features and as the site gets larger, but ultimately the free version is enough for the project at this current stage.

Table 1: Online Platform Assessment				
Name	Cost	Ideal for Long Term Use	Accessibility Features	Multi-User Ownership or Editing
<i>Squarespace</i>	\$222 (\$172 / year, \$50 for first 3 years of domain name)	No	No	No
<i>Scalar</i>	Free	No	Yes	Yes
<i>ReclaimEd Hosting</i>	\$81 (\$15 domain, \$66 / year)	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Omeka</i>	Free	Yes	Yes	Yes

I originally budgeted \$200 for digital infrastructure, but in experimenting with and evaluating various platforms, I was able to save the \$200 by using a free platform that still

² “Scalar 2 User’s Guide,” published March 25, 2025, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/guide2/index>.

had potential for long-term use and multiple authors or users, as well as accessibility features.

Permissions:

Identifying usable primary sources, determining copyright status, and obtaining permissions was perhaps the most challenging part of this project. I originally planned to use items from the George A. Smathers Library at the University of Florida. Many items from the library's collections can be reproduced or duplicated without fee, so long as the item or collection in question isn't prohibited from reproduction for any reason.³ However, the most promising collection I consulted in my 2024 UF research trip (the Althoff Collection, a series of interviews with Afro-Mexican people of Cuajinicuilapa in the 1980s) was unfortunately classified as strictly prohibited from any kind of reproduction.

The Althoff Collection was the largest collection of artifacts I planned to use for this project, creating a challenge to find alternative primary sources.

Few other items from my 2024 UF research trip aligned with the project and were available for fair use. I have submitted forms for reproduction for those items, which include:

- registers of slave deaths in nineteenth-century Cuba
- a register of enslaved peoples working for the Royal Havana company in 1749
- photographs of sugar workers in 1950s Cuba
- cartoons related to Santería in comic books from revolutionary Cuba (post-1959)

These items did not represent a coherent or diverse enough body of sources to be used for the project or in the experimental course. To increase the variety of artifacts from which students could curate their exhibit, I researched additional oral histories and collections from UF to be used as part of the project. This included the "Panama and the Canal Oral Histories" Collection, with over 170 interviews. Most of these interviews and their associated media are available for reproduction through the Creative Commons Attribution – Noncommercial ShareAlike 4.0 International Public license, which allows anyone to "freely copy, modify, and share this work for noncommercial purposes under the same terms, if they include the original source information and attribute the copyright holder."⁴

³ University of Florida George A. Smathers Library, "University of Florida Special and Area Studies Collections Digital Reproduction," published August 4, 2025, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://sasc.uflib.ufl.edu/resources-policies/digital-reproductions/>.

⁴ See, for example, the Copyright Management statement listed for: Adica Moore (interviewee) and Francis Williams Yearwood (interviewer), "An Interview with Adica Moore," July 17, 2020, Panama and the Canal Oral

Additional potential artifacts had unknown copyright holders. In these cases, the host site suggested that “users of this work have responsibility for determining copyright status prior to reusing, publishing or reproducing this item for purposes other than what is allowed by fair use or other copyright exemptions.”⁵ It is possible that these items can be reproduced as part of my project under fair use for educational purposes. However, once the item is reproduced for the public, fair use becomes more complicated. I’ve decided to only include links to the original hosting site for these items to prevent additional liability for me as the instructor, students as users and curators, or the university.

I also consulted the free digital collections of the Cuban Heritage Collection (CHC) through the University of Miami. The CHC charges for reproduction and duplication for public or exhibition use, with prices ranging between \$50--\$200 per item, depending on duration of use and format. I determined it was not worth spending funds on permissions that expire within a year for a small number of images that may not serve student needs in the future or represent the items that students will choose to curate.

While navigating permissions and copy right proved to be the most challenging aspect of this project, it is an essential part of ethical scholarship, and I plan to use these experiences to create an activity for students to complete in the experimental course, so that they gain exposure to practices of ethical scholarship.

To display the student exhibits in public campus spaces, we would create a slide deck that could be displayed on campus-owned displays (screens available in different buildings and hallways) that contains the exhibit title, Big Idea statement, one to two student-authored interpretive labels, and a QR code to the online exhibit for the public to explore more. This way, the content achieves visibility and traction without entering into additional copyright complications from reproduction not already mitigated on the Omeka site.

I originally budgeted \$300 for permissions, but throughout this process, determined it was not necessary for most sources. For other sources that did have an associated cost, it did not make sense to spend the funds on permissions for a small number of sources that, in the end, may or may not be selected by students for future exhibits. I therefore did not spend any of the associated funds from the Probationary Faculty Development Grant.

Histories Collections, University of Florida George A. Smathers Library,
<https://dloc.com/AA00081353/00001/citation>.

⁵ See, for example, this listing for supplemental items associated with the interview of Nelly Ibarra in the Panama Canal Oral Histories Collection: “Photographs and documents supplementing an Oral History interview conducted with Nelly Ibarra,” Panama and the Canal Oral Histories Collection, University of Florida George A. Smathers Library, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/es/AA00081818/00001/citation>.

Results and Conclusion:

The results of the grant period, therefore, include the following:

- Created master Canvas Course with Modules, Assignments, and Rubrics
- Draft Syllabus for Experimental Course
- Two collections identified for reproduction and inclusion (with copyright clearance)
- Three additional databases identified for potential inclusion (including copyright clearance)
- Online platform identified for exhibit hosting
 - Initial set of items and associated metadata uploaded to Omeka
 - Templates of item entries and exhibit created for students to use as model

Future Work:

The grant period resulted in several successes. I developed essential course infrastructure, determined (through experimentation) the best online platform for future exhibit curation, and determined collections that could be used while maintaining copyright compliance. However, due to some of the challenges encountered during the grant period (mainly, restrictions on key collections I planned to integrate), there is still future work ahead to make the course viable.

Currently, curated artifacts are mainly from Cuba and Panama. I plan to continue additional research of collections that represent Venezuela, Colombia, and Mexico and that are accessible, reproducible, and copyright compliant. I've already identified a few potential databases of primary sources, and plan to continue assessing viability and adding artifacts to the Omeka site over the summer and fall semester of 2026. I will also continue to catalog items already deemed available through fair use from the University of Florida George A. Smathers Library.

I will continue developing and editing rubrics for assignments and activities created during the grant period, as well as organizing and aligning course-level and module-level objectives.

I sincerely thank the College of Arts and Letters and the committee for the Probationary Faculty Development Grant for this opportunity. The grant allowed me to make significant progress on development of the project and experimental course to ensure its future success. I look forward to sharing with our students in this decolonial, public and digital humanities work.