

Professional Leave Report Cover Sheet

Name: Tammy Lau

Department: Special Collections Research Center

College: Henry Madden Library

Leave taken:  Sabbatical       Difference in Pay       Professional Leave without Pay

Time Period:  Fall

Spring 2021

Academic Year

Other

Your report will be sent to your Dean for your PAF and to the Library Archives.

**Sabbatical Report**  
**Spring 2021**  
**Tammy Lau**

In the spring 2021 semester, I took a sabbatical leave with two goals in mind—one, to research the cultural and ethnic history of the San Joaquin Valley and explore the possibilities of a Cultural and Ethnic Archives in the Valley, housed in the Special Collections Research Center at the Library. The other goal was to write two articles that had been on the back burner for a few years.

I began my research by looking at the published literature on the different ethnic groups in the Valley but did not find much beyond what I already knew about. I then began looking at the different languages spoken in schools in the Valley to get a better sense of the diversity and to think about immigration history from the Spanish colonial period onward.

I compiled a list of the various ethnic groups that have populated the Valley as I thought about the waves of immigration.

**American Indians/indigenous peoples** (Western Mono/Monache, Yokuts, Chukchansi, Me-Wuk)

**Spanish** (colonial/mission period)

**Dutch** (late 1800s to early 1900s, Hanford, Kings County, Christian Reformed Church, Calvinist, Southern San Joaquin Valley=Kings, Tulare), Excelsior Society, agricultural colonies as means of immigration, Perrin Colony)

**German Volgas** (“Rooshians” of West Fresno, American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, Central Valley Chapter; Volga Germans of Fresno [FB])

**Dust Bowl migrants** (1913 Indigent Act, Kern, Madera, Tulare; Dust Bowl Migration Archives, CSU Bakersfield)

**Latinx** (Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation, Mexican American Political Association, League of Mexican American Women)

**African Americans** (African American Museum, African American Coalition [Covid-19], Black American Political Organization, Fresno; Fresno State African American Programs and Services, Fresno State NAACP chapter, African American churches)

**Jewish** (Jewish Federation Central California, Temple Beth Israel, of Fresno State Jewish Studies Reading group)

**Swedish** (Kingsburg)

**Armenians**

**Chinese** (First Chinese Baptist Church of Fresno, [Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs Fresno Chapter](#), Chinese Association of Fresno, Fresno Business Institute & Resource Center, Central California Chinese Cultural Association, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Fresno, China Alley Preservation Society)

**Japanese** (Japanese American Citizens League [Central California District Council and local chapters], Nikkei Foundation, Fresno Betsuin Buddhist Temple, United Japanese Christian Church, Mrauk Oo Dhamma Center, Nikkei Farmers League)

**Portuguese** (Fresno State Portuguese Beyond Borders Institute, St. Peter Portuguese Festa Fresno)

**Basque** (Fresno Basque Club)

**Koreans** (Reedley, Central California Korean Historical Society, Fresno Korean Baptist Church, Harmony Korean Church, Korean Full Gospel Assembly of God Church)

**Sikh** (San Joaquin Gurdwara, Sikh Institute Fresno)

**Hmong** (Hmong International New Year, United Hmong International Inc., California Hmong Institution, Hmong Community Center, California Hmong Chamber of Commerce, Hmong Community Alliance Church of Fresno, Stone Soup Fresno)

**Muslims** (Islamic Cultural Center, Masjid Fresno)

**Arab Americans** (Arab American Community Center)

**Mien**

**Laotian** (Lao Community Cultural Center of Fresno, Lao American Foundation, Lao Night Market)

**Cambodian** (Fresno Cambodian Buddhist Society, Cambodian Reconciliation Society in Fresno, Khmer Society of Fresno)

**Thai** (Thai Association of Central California)

**Vietnamese** (Vietnamese of the Central Valley California, Vietnamese Buddhist Society of the Central Valley, Chua Thien An, Phap Duyen Tinh Xa)

**Filipino** (Filipino American Association of Fresno and Vicinity, Valley Springs Fillipino American Church, Filipino Fresno Catholic League, Fresno Central Valley Filipino SDA Church [Seventh Day Adventists])

**Indian** (Central California Society of India)

**Polynesians** (Polynesian Club of Fresno)

Because of the dearth of sources on so many groups, I realized the only way to document their histories would be to create community archives for each group, which is why I researched local organizations and institutions created by the communities. Around the same time, I started reading books on the social justice movement (a searingly pertinent topic after the killing of George Floyd) and the two stains of my research started to come together. The list is roughly in sequential order by the eras of populations. The Mono and Yokuts and Chukchansi peoples were the first as they are indigenous to this land. As sovereign entities, the indigenous groups should not be equated as just another ethnicity in the American panoply. They are not excluded here but are acknowledged as agents who preserve their own history, whether or not they choose to share that with the wider world. Other groups are much more recent and therefore have had much less time to establish roots and organizations, which is why they are not listed but I am open to any and all community archive possibilities. My hope is that I can develop community contacts within various groups and begin the process of establishing trust and connections with them that lead to institutional trust and long lasting partnerships. Some of the collections will lend themselves to grant-funded projects while others may be self-funded or donor-funded.

One of the goals of community archiving is to acknowledge and honor the self-determination of each group. That is, each group does and should define itself. The archives houses, preserves and makes the collections available but it does not seek to label or put parameters around the groups.

The work of community archiving is inherently collaborative, based on personal relationships and trust. It is a long, slow process that takes institutional commitment to support it regardless of the current political climate. It must also surpass the tenure of individual archivists.

The underlying result of community archives in my mind is to not just expand the historical record and be more inclusive in our historical perspectives but to examine and transform the nomenclature that surrounds ethnic groups. We, as a society, are now reckoning with the fact that words and labels are not neutral and archives and libraries certainly are not either. When we use the words “immigrant” or “ethnic group,” the

majority think of racialized, minority groups. However, each and every one of us has ethnicity and my hope is that community archives help to underscore this fact and equalize the nomenclature we use. This means that being a French-German American is no different from being a Muslim American or Guatemalan American. We all have ethnic and cultural roots, no matter where from or how long those roots have been established in America.

This line of thinking dovetailed with my participation in the New Storytellers Digital Ethnic Studies Research Institute in summer 2021 (starting at the tail end of my sabbatical), sponsored by the Center for Digital Research at the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. A cohort of us spent 10 weeks in multiple online sessions each week examining and discussing what digital ethnic studies means and I learned much from my colleagues.

They encouraged me in my ethnic and cultural archives investigations and efforts while pointing out the sensitivities involved with working with specific groups. Since then, after more reading, reflection and study, I've decided that the best name for an umbrella community archives effort for the San Joaquin Valley is "Communities and Cultures of the San Joaquin Valley." Under this umbrella, separate, discrete collections have equal standing and the collections and archive arrangements can be as varied as the groups themselves.

The archives world has become more sensitive to the imperialistic practices and attitudes of the past and we are entering a post-custodial phase, especially with digital archives. Along with the growing social justice change in America and the new mandate to each Ethnic Studies in California, it's an exciting time to be in the field.

Because of these rapid changes, I decided not to pursue writing the two "overdue" articles I had planned to write earlier. The moment had passed and it no longer seemed important to write about two specific past projects (specifically the 9066 Japanese American exhibition in 2017 and the Utopias class collaboration in 2019). Instead, I turned my attention to embracing a new framework for all the work done in the Special Collections Research Center, namely digital Ethnic Studies and social justice/Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access (DEIA). This has transformed everything we do in Special Collections and has led to important new initiatives. Among these initiatives are: an ongoing class collaboration exploring Research and Development (R&D) efforts in digital design with Laura Huisenga and her students to enhance access to our ethnic collections, a review of all of our collections for overlooked and underutilized materials as well as survey of where the gaps are in the collection, a fresh look at the way our collections are described and presented and a renewed commitment to collect on and document the history of the people who have been historically ignored, oppressed or erased.

In addition to more connections between classes and students on campus, I continue to build on our ongoing connections with ethnic groups such as Japanese Americans. And we have recently been approached by the Fresno Unified School District to partner with

them on providing digitized primary sources for their newly mandated Ethnic Studies curriculum, district wide.

My hope is that these efforts will lead to meaningful new partnerships and collections that resonate with our student body and other researchers, provide new avenues for growth in inclusiveness and create collaborative opportunities for more research and projects. This, in turn, will pave the foundation for a Special Collections that reflects the true diversity of our population, in all ways.