

Herencia: Professors explore the meaning of 'heritage'

June 12, 2015

Consider your heritage. Who were your forebears, and what were their stories? Where were they from and where did they go? What did they eat? What sports teams did they cheer? What music did they listen to?

In *Herencia/Heritage*, Art Professor Jose Alfonso Guevara López and Anthropology Instructor Lynda Carroll explored the impact of family history, place and story during a June 11 event in Titchener 101.

Guevara, visiting from the University of Monterrey in Mexico (UDEM), and SUNY Broome's Carroll will be co-teaching a course this fall through SUNY's Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiative. Students from both schools will work together online on class projects.

The college obtained a grant that will allow several SUNY Broome professors to collaborate with their colleagues in Mexico, noted Professor Kathleen McKenna, who is also involved with COIL. This will include travel to Mexico for SUNY Broome professors, and vice versa for their colleagues.

Only one out of a thousand community college students study abroad, McKenna said. Programs such as COIL will allow these students to access the same opportunities as their peers, even if they cannot make a trip abroad.

Guevara and Carroll are currently working on a syllabus – one that will encourage both students and professors to challenge their boundaries, and use terms and technologies they may be unfamiliar with.

"Art and archaeology can work very well together. There are some archaeologists who believe what defines humanity is our ability to create art," Carroll explained.

Herencia

Carroll – who teaches both anthropology and archaeology as a laboratory science course – connected with Guevara after viewing his profile on the COIL network, and then met him in her native New York City. The trip inspired her spoken-word poetry piece on the meaning of heritage that formed the core of Thursday's event.

The logo for *Herencia*, devised by Guevara, shows Binghamton's Exchange Street bridge spliced with a span from Monterrey. The words *Herencia* and *Heritage* are similarly spliced together.

During the presentation, Carroll detailed her heritage as a native of Queens who came to the Southern Tier 20

years ago for school and never left. Diehard Mets fans, her family never attended a Yankees' game; they proudly tell of a cousin who served as a batboy for the Mets when they won the pennant in 1968. Uncle Vinnie would take Carroll and her relatives in the "green bomb," as they dubbed the Chevy Impala, out for Italian ice and "slices."

Carroll spoke of her Italian heritage – of the grandfather who spoke Italian strangely after spending years working in the Brazilian mines, of favorite family foods, lost languages and missed opportunities. She spoke, too, of her Irish grandfather who disparagingly referred to her as a "half-breed," of the tensions between Italians and the Irish in New York City, of family tensions, distance and love.

And she also addressed how her heritage continues to evolve: the sister who moved to Poland, other family members who relocated to the Southwest. Her husband, an Englishman preparing for American citizenship. Her son Rowan, who views himself not as English, Italian and Irish, but as American.

"Heritage isn't the past; heritage is evolving," she said.

As she spoke, images and videos danced across the screen behind her – of Queens and her family, of carousels, and also shots of life in Mexico.

Family lines are harder to trace for Guevara, although he spoke of an ancestor from Texas that his family refers to as "the gringo." Heritage, in the sense of ancestry, is less important in Monterrey – possibly due to the lack of written records and the importance of oral culture in days gone by.

Monterrey's traditional music, norteño polka, also has Texan roots by way of the accordions toled by traveling salesmen. Colombian music, which also features the accordion, also became popular.

Monterrey hosted the very first baseball game in Mexico, which is largely soccer country. It was North America's first industrial city, Guevara recounted. Located in one of Mexico's northeastern states, the denizens of old originally wanted to split off with Texas and form their own republic – an idea that still remains, in some form, today.

"In Monterrey, we all mix it up. We didn't know where we came from," he said. "Every day, we are making our own heritage."

**SUNY Broome Anthropology
Instructor Lynda Carroll and
University of Monterrey Art
Professor Jose Alfonso Guevara
López discuss the meaning of
heritage in Herencia.**

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