Promoting public outreach and awareness for UNLV Special Collections has evolved for me over the past six years as University Archivist. It started out as an idea that quickly grew into a wonderful partnership between UNLV and the local community. I originally promoted outreach as a librarian in Oro Valley, Arizona. It was a nice way for the organization to get the word out about the new library in the neighborhood. I started by reading novels to kids in Summer Camps at the nearby middle and high schools. It was a lot of fun and I was asked to come back again. This evolved into not only reading, but handing out literature about the new library. Over time, I would see the kids and their parents at other events at the library. We were developing relationships with the community. I was becoming one of the faces of the new library. It was rewarding because you felt like you were making a positive impact on your community. That’s when I realized the power of public outreach. You are indeed the face of the institution when you work at a library or archive. When the public sees you they see your organization. So, it is imperative that you maintain that relationship as much as possible. These are the same people that will not only use your materials, but even support you during tough economic times.

UNLV Special Collections promotes public outreach and awareness of their virtual and digital collections. They do this by providing access to virtual exhibits celebrating institutional milestones. An example of this includes “UNLV’s 50th Anniversary” virtual exhibit.

The UNLV 50th Anniversary virtual exhibit was created just after I started as UNLV’s first University Archivist in 2006. I had the abilities and experience to be the web developer for the Special Collections’ website so creating a virtual exhibit was my first online project for UNLV. Not to mention the university’s 50th anniversary was fast approaching and I wanted to get the word out that UNLV has a university archives. It was time to make a splash!

I started my plans by surveying what we had in the archives. I looked at our vertical files, books, and materials within our Records and Publications Series. I wanted unique materials that not only explained our past, but were hard to find anywhere else. For example, we received a donation from the family of William Carlson in 2007. William Carlson was the Dean of the Southern Regional Division of the University of Nevada (UNLV) from 1957-1964. His family provided old plans of the first building on the campus. This building would later be named Maude Frazier Hall and the Carlson family had its original architectural drawings.

The family even donated photographs Carlson took as the building was being erected. These were great gems for the University Archives as well as a virtual exhibit.

The next element that I decided on adding to this virtual exhibit was an index of the UNLV Presidents and Leaders. This page took some researching since I was new to UNLV and didn’t know all the past
campus leaders myself. I researched several books and vertical files located within UNLV Special Collections. I then made a list and even located the photographs in the UNLV Photograph Collections.

The next step was to create the web page. I added descriptions under each photograph and included links to more information on a particular campus leader. It almost felt like something on Wikipedia. I wanted to create a one-stop-shop for all things historical regarding UNLV. These added links went to photographs of buildings on campus and even to other departmental websites at UNLV.

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The next element that I thought relevant and important for this virtual exhibit was a “Timeline.”

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The items that I chose here were, “History at a Glance”,

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“University Enrollment”,

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“University Names”,

Slide 11
and “University Building Completions.” Each one provides a plethora of factoids on UNLV.

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The next element that I decided to include was a FAQs page. This is an element that I have seen on other sites and knew would benefit the users of this virtual exhibit. Further, I received a range of questions each month about the history of UNLV. Therefore, I included several questions and informative answers for our future researchers of this virtual exhibit. They included questions ranging from who was the first graduate (Jon Eric Cobain in 1964).

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Jon Eric Cobain in 1964

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to what was the original mascot for the university (Beauregard).

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Finally, the last element that I decided to include within this virtual exhibit was a bibliography. This page is a lengthy list of publications which would assist any researcher of UNLV history.

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The 50th Anniversary virtual exhibit was created for students, faculty, and researchers. It would become a permanent resource for those researchers. Since there wasn’t a resource like this created for previous anniversaries. I will eventually add more to it as we approach future anniversaries.
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A link to the UNLV 50th Anniversary virtual exhibit is located on the right navigation bar of the University Archives homepage. It is easy to see it from the homepage which lists other significant elements to the University Archives site.

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The virtual exhibit was well received by students, faculty, and researchers. In 2007, UNLV Marketing and Public Relations referred to it as a resource during the 50th Anniversary celebrations. Specifically, they used the Presidents and Leaders web page to confirm terms for each UNLV campus leader. UNLV students who learned about the University Archives in 2007 utilized several items from the Carlson donation. The students used this historical material for a time capsule that would later be displayed in the new Student Union. One of the goals of creating this virtual exhibit was finally creating a permanent place for celebrating UNLV’s history. Now, the University Archives will only need to add to this virtual exhibit as we approach another anniversary. All this initial effort will save time in the future.

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What is the present and future of promoting UNLV Special Collections. Currently, it includes a Facebook page and a What’s New blog?

Social networking is growing and we are working closely with UNLV Libraries to plan and implement any new ideas that will help promote Special Collections. Eventually, Special Collections will switch to a new software called Drupal. Drupal even includes the ability to blog.

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Here is the homepage for the UNLV Special Collections Facebook page. It is a wonderful tool to promote the events and collections. It provides all the advantages of a regular Facebook page. This includes adding photographs, likes, maps, and past events. The timeline on the homepage provides a quick way to see all the wonderful activities at UNLV Special Collections. It’s a nice resource to receive immediate feedback from our patrons and supporters throughout the community.

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The “What’s New in Special Collections” blog was planned and implemented several years ago when social networking was really taking off and UNLV Libraries was utilizing it within other departments. This blog is located on the left navigation bar of the Special Collections website. It is powered by Moveable Type. It includes a search feature, recent entries, categories and monthly archives. It even includes a Tag Cloud feature. This blog has been a nice new tool for promoting awareness of the wide variety of resources in Special Collections. Recently, I utilized it to promote a University Archives Open House.

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Local outreach continues to be an excellent way to promote Special Collections. Recently, I was a guest speaker at the Clark County Nevada Genealogical Society and Vanderburg Elementary School.

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I was asked to be a guest speaker last year. This happened after I had serendipisly walked into their headquarters at Paseo Verde Public Library in Henderson, NV. Their Vice President introduced himself and asked me to be a guest speaker the following year. My point here is that you never know when the opportunities will arise to promote your collections. When you see a chance take it. We are all a part of the same ecosystem of history. We can each benefit from each other.
I planned to promote via outreach the wide range of primary and genealogical resources accessed through Special Collections. I wanted to show the local genealogists maps, photographs, and vast digital resources. I also found that UNLV Libraries provides several computer terminals for non-students looking to do research in the library. This allows our non-students access to databases and indexes which will aid them in their research efforts.

I have promoted the UNLV Special Collections' virtual and digital collections at the K-12 level, as well. I have two little boys who have gone to Vanderburg Elementary School in Henderson, NV. I started working as a volunteer there for my son's classes. One day, I suggested that I bring primary source material over during their Nevada history unit. So, for the past three years, I have been showcasing the resources at UNLV Special Collections.

It has been a wonderful opportunity to put a face on the name of the institution again. In fact, a recent digital collection from UNLV Libraries entitled, “Southern Nevada: The Boomtown Collection” was created with a link to Grade 3-12 Teaching Resources. This was a grand opportunity to showcase Nevada history in the elementary schools.

This link lead educators to academic activities, working with primary sources, and standards pages. All of which would aid in their students understanding of mining towns in southern Nevada. The activities were organized by grade and subject area. For the first time, grades 3-12 students had an ability to discover the historical treasures of the boomtown era of southern Nevada through the various items located within this digital collection. It would help students of history like 3rd Grader Austin Sommer.

This is a group of 4th and 5th Graders from Las Vegas in the Reading Room of UNLV Special Collections. This outreach event was presented by our Director Peter Michel.
Promoting public outreach and awareness for UNLV Special Collections has evolved for me as a University Archivist. It started out as an idea that quickly grew into a wonderful partnership between UNLV and the local community. I now have been involved in public outreach at UNLV Special Collections for the past 6 years. I am now one of the many faces of UNLV Special Collections. It has been a thrill for me to be making a positive impact on my new community in Nevada.

Promoting public outreach doesn’t change whether you are working for a library or an archive. The message is still the same. It’s about enlightening your local community to all the significant items within your institution. Items that give your community a sense of place. A place that they will want to preserve so that future generations will appreciate where they came from, as well. So, even when budgets are being debated you will have a solid support system from your own local community. Therefore, try to always find a way to create an event or be apart of a bigger one in order to promote your collections. It’s a wonderful way to make your community aware of how important you are to them.