

Get to Know . . .

Jesse Silva

Gwen Sinclair

Jesse Silva has long been a familiar face at FDLP conferences. He is the Scholarly Resources Strategy and Federal Government Information Librarian at the UC Berkeley Library, a position he has held for about four years. He is responsible for policy development, implementation, and budgeting for scholarly resources and collections. Jesse has been at Berkeley for about sixteen years and, in his previous position, had liaison responsibilities for legal studies, political science, and public policy in addition to federal government information.

A native Californian, Jesse attended UC Santa Cruz, where he worked as a student assistant in the library. After graduating in 2000, he took a staff position in the government documents department. Jesse explained, “When September 11 happened, it was really interesting to see the dialogue on Govdoc-1 about scrubbing of websites and information being removed, and that’s what motivated me to go to library school.” While working on his MLIS degree at San Jose State University, he moved to San Francisco. He accepted a job as a government documents cataloger at San Jose State, which gave him a completely different perspective on the field.

Jesse cited the Census Bureau publication *Measuring America* as a favorite resource.³ “It really shows our history in terms of race, gender, and how we classify and count people,” he explained. He also identified the classic *United States Government Publications* by Boyd and Rips, which he learned about from Andrea Severson, as “a great resource that has helped me to answer so many questions and learn about the publishing history of many documents.”⁴

Jesse’s job as a government information librarian led him to work on a particularly meaningful project on LGBTQ history. It began when Jesse did a presentation with Kelly Smith of UC San Diego about LGBTQ history in government documents at the 2016 Depository Library Conference (an updated version of the presentation was done in 2018).¹ Jesse repeated the presentation at UC Berkeley, where colleagues were inspired to work with him to create a major exhibit in the Brown Gallery at Doe Library, “We’re Here, We’re Queer, We’re in the Public Record,” that showcased government documents related to LGBTQ history. What Jesse found especially moving was seeing what viewers had written in the comment books, some of which can be read in the Library’s annual report.²

Jesse’s research on the LGBTQ History Project inspired him to embark on a much larger project to research the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act,

P.L. 82-414), which among other things, explicitly prevented homosexuals from immigrating to the US. Jesse was awarded funding from UC to research the act’s legislative history at the National Archives. He will also visit the Library of Congress to explore Representative Francis Walter’s political papers and travel to the University of Nevada at Reno to review Senator Pat McCarran’s papers to learn what was going on behind the scenes when the law was passed.

In addition to his research projects, Jesse shared another aspect of what he loves about his work: “The people! Everyone is very committed to the work that they’re doing.” He enjoys working with bright and motivated faculty and students at Berkeley. His job also gives him a great opportunity to learn what goes on in the government and to see how world events are reflected in government documents. He finds the recent developments related to the all-digital FDLP intriguing because, he explained, staff cuts and space reductions have necessitated the deselection of most print at his library. Consequently, Berkeley has gone from being an 80 percent tangible selective to being an 80 percent digital selective.

When asked what advice he would give to a newly-minted government information librarian, he recommended reading the *Washington Post* to learn about what goes on in Washington, DC. He encouraged librarians new to the field to reach out if they have questions because the government information community is very welcoming. He joked, “We’re all kind of weirdos in a sense!”

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Notes

1. Jesse Silva and Kelly L. Smith, “We’re Here, We’re Queer, and We’re in the Public Record: Federal Government Documents on the LGBT Movement” (webinar, Federal Depository Library Program, June 19, 2018), <https://tinyurl.com/4w83r3ss>.
2. University of California at Berkeley Library, “We Inspire Conversation,” *Annual Report FY 2017–18* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley Library, 2018), <https://tinyurl.com/2wbfwywp>.

3. J. C. Gauthier, *Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses from 1790 to 2000* (Washington, DC: Census Bureau, 2000), <https://tinyurl.com/2p8skmeh>.
4. Anne Morris Boyd and Rae Elizabeth Rips, *United States Government Publications*, 3rd ed. rev. by Rae Elizabeth Rips (New York: Wilson, 1950).