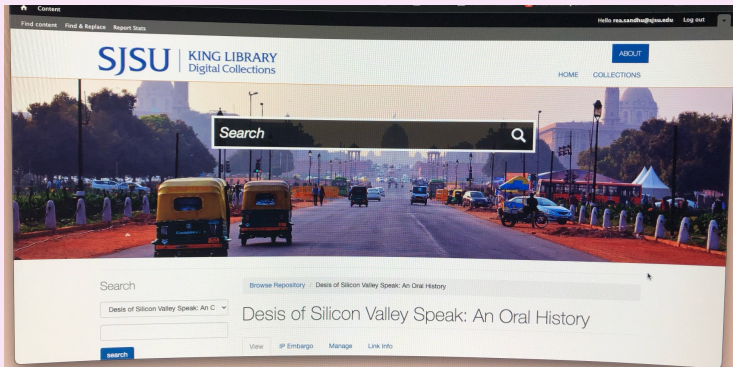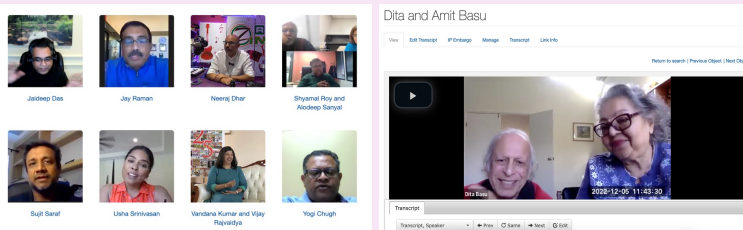# Exploring the skills needed to effectively run an oral history archive

Rea Sandhu, San José State University

"Desis of Silicon Valley Speak: An Oral History Archive"

Found in SJSU's Digital Collections, this oral history archive was created by librarian Mantra Roy in order to capture the voices of Indian immigrants residing in the Silicon Valley/SF Bay Area. During my internship, I was able to help upload **14 out of 19 interviews** in the collection.

More information on the archive's mission and goals can be found at library.sjsu.edu/sasv/oral-history.

Please note: *As of August 2025, the video interviews are not available to the public due to a migration of the collection to the CSU Digital Archive.*

➤ *Transcripts are accessible via this link bit.ly/desisofsv or by searching for the archive via library.sjsu.edu/digitalcollections.*

➤ *Photos/screenshots presented here are of the original digital collection format.*

What did I learn?

1. Conducting research

➤ Having an understanding of the culture and language was essential in order to review the transcripts for accuracy, as opposed to just relying on an automated software to catch the human/linguistic intricacies.

➤ Research was still needed to fill in some of the gaps, such as specific cultural events and figures. A lot of online searches were conducted by looking for viable sources of information and credible organizations, followed by fact checking my results with my supervisor.

2. Co-conducting an interview

"To me, librarianship was always about service to others." - Tanaz Sutaria, retired librarian and current artist (2024).
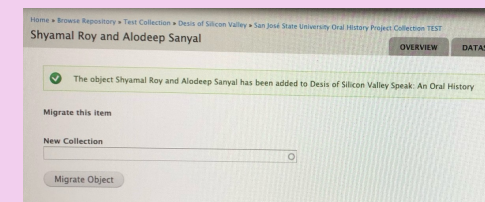

➤ I guided the interviewee through a designated set of questions and used active listening skills to connect to the interviewee's responses and prompt further questions and conversation.

➤ Oral History Methodology: By using a sense of shared identity and empathy, I was able to build a rapport with the interviewee (explored more in future journal article*).

3. Filling out metadata

➤ I gained familiarity with the Library of Congress' subject headings, which I often referenced to get the best idea of what searchable metadata tags looked like. This gave me a great introduction to controlled vocabularies.

➤ I conducted subject analysis as a result.

➤ I also researched existing university digital collections' metadata to better understand the concept of searchability.

4. Troubleshooting video/transcript uploads

➤ I gained familiarity with a digital repository system (Islandora) with the help of technical library staff.

➤ I also wrote an Islandora guide for troubleshooting the technical issues I faced during the uploading process, such as when an .mp4 file type wouldn't go through or would take too long to ingest.

➤ .vtt and .srt files had to be converted frequently in the process of editing transcripts in order to maintain an accurate file type to upload onto Islandora.
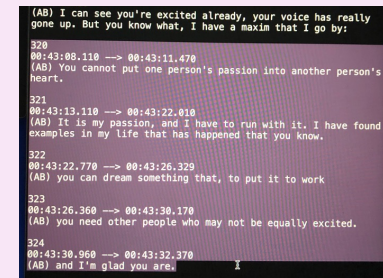

General effectiveness: Why hire BIPOC LIS students?

Representation is key – especially in leadership.

According to A*CENSUS II findings in 2023: "**BIPOC individuals make up just 11 percent of archives administrators**, while 88 percent of archives administrators are White."[1]

➤ I believe seeing representation within my own supervisor and maintaining a personal/professional commitment to help promote BIPOC voices in archival spaces has allowed me to gain the skills that I have today.

➤ In a time where DEI principles are being attacked, hiring BIPOC students is essential to overcoming barriers and accessibility in the archives.

➤ The type of commitments that BIPOC students bring to archival projects must be acknowledged, with their innate cultural awareness and passion to see their communities be represented truthfully within archival institutions.

Picture taken of a transcript in midst of editing, showcasing a quote by Amit Basu, former civil engineer and current Bengali-language teacher and translator (2022).

[1]Skinner, M. (2023, January 31). *A*CENSUS II: Archives Administrators Survey.* https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.318227

*Next steps: Releasing a journal article

In co-writing an article with my supervisor Mantra Roy about the archive, I got to research key oral history methodologies, the long-haul work needed to bring the archive to life, as well as the significance of having interviewed mostly privileged immigrants in our specific geographical location.

If you're interested in reading the article when it's published, please use this QR code to get the article sent to your inbox, or feel free to contact me at **rea.sandhu@sjsu.edu** with any inquiries.