

Kathia Ibacache's Mission to Bring Indigenous Voices to CU Boulder

When a Ph.D. student at the University of Colorado Boulder requested nearly 800 books by indigenous authors, Romance Languages librarian Kathia Ibacache recognized a major gap in indigenous literature. That realization inspired her initiative, started in 2019, to bring more indigenous voices to Norlin Library.

Ibacache's work brings greater visibility to Indigenous voices and languages, enriching CU Boulder's library with diverse perspectives.

Originally from Chile, Ibacache moved to California in 2000, earning her Master of Library and Information Science from San José State University and her Doctor of Musical Arts in Early Music Performance from the University of Southern California. After starting a family in California, she joined CU Boulder in 2019 as the romance languages librarian.

As the romance languages librarian on track for tenure, Ibacache selects books for the romances languages collection, plans events, conducts research and engages in community service. As part of her tenure requirements, each year she completes a community service project, most recently visiting an elementary school in Broomfield, Colorado, to read stories by indigenous authors.

"After we read the stories we had the students make their own, so we had materials for them to make their own books and the students loved it. It was very rewarding," said Ibacache.

She also supports other faculty by providing materials for events or classes. Wilma Doris Loayza, an assistant professor at CU Boulder who teaches Quechua Language and Culture often works closely with Ibacache.

“There’s a lot of support at the library and Kathia is always helping me whenever I need material for my Quechua program,” said Loayza.

Ibacache’s dedication to collaboration and cultural representation extends beyond the classroom. Since 2019, she has made significant progress growing the romance languages collection of indigenous literature. With the collection’s continuous expansion, Ibacache has recently focused on bringing more indigenous voices to CU Boulder through public events.

She recently brought film maker Xun Sero to CU Boulder to discuss his film, “Mamá.” Though the event lasted only one hour, the preparation took months, which entailed pitching the idea to her supervisor, applying for grants and coordinating an international guest. While Ibacache led the effort, she emphasized the teamwork behind it.

“I’m the face of the university library, you went to a program and you see me but you don’t see everyone behind me, there is a big number of people who work behind the scenes,” said Ibacache.

One of the people working behind the scenes was Women and Gender Studies professor Leila Gomez who helped plan the event and agreed to serve as a panelist.

“I am here to help Kathia, her initiative is something I value and she really did most of the work I am just happy to help,” said Gomez.

The event was successful, and as the gap of Indigenous authors and voices at CU Boulder continues to shrink, Ibacache is now focusing on expanding the film collection. She will also continue her program Beat Back the Ban, which works to unban books.

Ibacache is consistently improving Norlin Library whether she’s in the library helping students, running programs or selecting literature and film for the romance languages collection.

“I feel it is important for every student to be represented in the library, so when that Ph.D. student informed me of the gap of indigenous authors in the collection, it was important to me to fix it,” said Ibacache.

Through her work, Kathia Ibacache ensures that CU Boulder’s library is a living reflection of the diverse voices and cultures that shape our world.

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