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Former Baylor alumni Gloria Meraz and Mary Woodward returned to campus to engage in a moderated conversation about “leading Texas libraries” on Friday in Armstrong Browning Library. The two women spoke about the impact Baylor has had on their careers and the current state of libraries in the education system and community.

Meraz currently holds the position of Director and Librarian of Texas State Library and Archives Commission. She received her degree from Baylor in Museum Studies in 1990, while Woodward graduated in 1985 with a degree in Elementary Education and English. Woodward was elected as the Texas Library Association president in 2022.

The women began their conversation by touching on their experiences as Baylor undergraduates. Meraz said that Armstrong Browning was instrumental in her discovery of her passion for libraries as she worked there during all four years.

“[Armstrong Browning Library] not only supported the academic interest I had, but it opened the world to me in ways that I had not expected,” Meraz said. “And that door has never closed.”

Woodward was the first person in her family to attend college. She said she realized that she wanted to do something that was meaningful for her, which was education, no matter how much money she made.

Meraz and Woodward then discussed the purpose and importance of libraries, especially in the digital age. Meraz said that the key is good and reliable information, and it’s like the “wild west” trying to find quality information through the internet.

“You still need quality resources and that requires intentionality and expertise,” Meraz said. “Libraries by their nature transform to meet the needs of the community we serve and that’s how it should be.”

Woodward said there is a difference between information resources: there are “Walmart resources” and “designer resources.” She said that designer resources are not free, but the library has paid for them for you so you can access them for free.

“Libraries provide designer-quality resources that we can’t just get with a regular Google search,” Woodward said.

Another topic the women covered was the many controversies surrounding libraries and archives, something Meraz said has become a “heated” conversation in the past few years. They acknowledged that despite the many debates, there is nothing they care about more than the state of impact that libraries can have on the education of young people.

“When you pair up the right book with the right kid, it is really transformational,” Woodward said. “That’s what we don’t want to see wasted, where those kids are not able to get a book that speaks to their mind.”

Meraz and Woodward both stressed the power of libraries, archives, and information. Meraz said that working in any of these fields provides people with flexible skills that position them to go do a broad range of things they may not have conceived of before.

“If you know how to use information, how to find it, how to present it,” Meraz said, “there isn’t a field you cannot conquer.”