

Fall 2020 ART 3310

Course Information

Title: Curation and Collections Management in the 21st Century
464A Fox Fine Arts & Online
TR 10:30-11:50
Credit: 3 hours

Instructor Contact Information

Dr. Elisabeth Sommer
Office location: 219 Kelly Hall
Office hours: Tuesday 3:00-5:00; Wednesday 11:00-12:00 via Zoom; **Please note: I will keep Zoom open all day M-F if you need to meet with me outside of office hours**
Phone: 917-921-2642 (cell)
Email ewsommer@utep.edu

Instructor Introduction (who the heck am I?)

I began my professional life as a professor of European History. I then saw the light and turned my attention to museums. I did graduate coursework in Public History/Museum Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and then held positions at the Staten Island Historical Society (Director of Research and Interpretation) and Roanoke Island Festival Park on the Outer Banks of N.C. (Manager of Education and Interpretation), after which I taught Museum Studies at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. Most recently I served as Education Curator for the El Paso Museum of Art. I have also done work for the Thomas Wolfe State Historic Site in N.C., the Asheville Art Museum, Historic Kenmore, and the Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center. I hold a BA in History from UNC-Greensboro and a PhD in European History from the University of Virginia. Okay, that's more than enough about me.

Course Description

So you think you might want to be a curator or collections manager? Welcome to the complex and compelling world of those jobs in the 21st century. In this century, curators can no longer afford to seclude themselves in their offices and rule their world as the resident expert on objects (especially ones of which they are fond). Today's curator must be prepared to encounter the world, and, most frightening of all, encounter the museum audience. In addition, today's collections managers are faced with the need to consider how to make collections more accessible while still preserving them and the planet. **This class aims to prepare students to face this new reality including:**

- The need for multi-cultural vision and awareness
- Consideration of access as cultural as well as physical
- Acknowledgement of the existence and impact of systemic racism
- The need to foreground community service and needs
- Sharing authority within and without the museum

This course should help you become comfortable and confident in navigating these issues, and to give you some ideas and tools for implementing best practices in curation and collections management. **This will include practical experience in the following:**

- Accepting objects into a museum collection
- Processing objects into a museum collection
- Sustainable conservation/preservation of objects in a museum collection

Each of the above involves multiple steps, including research, handling, condition reporting, marking, and the creation of various plans. **This is intended as an introduction to both curation and collections management and will not cover everything in depth.**

Course Structure

The **first part** of the class will cover the larger **cultural and intellectual perspective** necessary for identifying collections needs, developing an effective collection, and exhibiting artifacts from the collection. The **second part** will focus on the nitty gritty of **managing the collection**, from accessioning to deaccessioning, and will include training in the use of Past Perfect software and Nomenclature. Examples and discussion will be drawn primarily from the fields of history and art, although we will also cover some aspects of natural history museums.

Class Expectations in the Age of COVID

The presence of the coronavirus has forced us to rethink both how we teach, and how we evaluate students. I realize that many of you may have found your lives upended with children attending class at home, job loss, extended work hours for those in essential positions, and concern for older relatives. As a result, I've built in some flexibility into coursework and deadlines. That said, we still need to learn as a team to the degree that we're able.

To that end, you will be expected to **engage with the readings and participate in class discussions**. To assist with this, you'll be expected to respond to **discussion questions** posted on Blackboard. **These will be assigned points and count toward your discussion grade**. In order to earn the full number of points possible (5) you must post your responses before the online class meeting.

Please **enable your camera (via web or phone)** during our online sessions. It makes communication easier if we can all see each other. If there is a problem with enabling the camera, please let me know ahead of time. We'll communicate using both video and chat box, so if there's a problem with your microphone/audio, you can participate via chat. **All Zoom class sessions will be recorded and posted to Blackboard**. I will not share the recordings of your class activities outside of course participants, which include your fellow students and any guest faculty or community-based learning partners with whom we may engage during a class session. **You may not share recordings outside of this course**. If you are unable to attend a class meeting, let me know ahead of time if

possible. You are responsible for reviewing the recorded session to see what you missed.

Assigned Readings

This class has **one required book**, *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*, Viv Golding and Wayne Modest eds. (available on Amazon and in the bookstore). Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Semester Project

Each of you will select an object or group of objects to work with as your “real life” example over the course of the semester. The object(s) must be one(s) with which you could **tell a story** and **engage an audience**, and one that you can **bring with you** to class on the days we meet face-to-face. Other than those requirements, the field is wide open.

During the semester, you will use your object to practice documentation, and, most importantly, to develop an exhibit concept and storage/handling recommendation. This will entail researching the object and its larger context. You will have to consider both its physical makeup and its cultural role. The **final report** will include the **cataloging** documentation, the **condition report**, a **recommendation** for best marking, storage, and handling processes (with explanations), either a short **video exhibition** of the object or a **narrative proposal** for its use in an exhibition, including relevant label text in both cases.

Other Written Work

In addition to the semester project, written work will consist of an analytical paper (essentially a short essay on an aspect of curation in the 21st century). There will also be two quizzes focused on collections management. These will be conducted online.

The Paper is due by midnight on the date noted in the syllabus. **Late papers will be penalized.** If there is a problem turning an assignment in on the due date, please let me know ASAP.

Grades

Grading will be broken down as follows:

- Participation 20% (includes hands-on exercises)
- Quizzes 20% (10% each)
- Analytical Paper 20%
- Semester Project 40%

COVID Procedures and Policies

Any day that you are planning to be on campus you must complete the questions on the UTEP screening website (screening.utep.edu) prior to arriving. The website will verify if you are permitted to come to campus. If you think you or a family member might have COVID-19, don't come to campus and please arrange to get tested ASAP (Information on

testing in El Paso is here <http://epstrong.org/testing.php>). If you test positive, have recent contact with someone who did, or have symptoms, the University urges you to report this. Reports should be made at [screening.utep.edu](https://www.utep.edu/resuming-campus-operations/news/august/utep-coronavirus-proactive-testing-program.html). Since COVID can be asymptomatic, please take advantage of campus testing. The information on testing is here <https://www.utep.edu/resuming-campus-operations/news/august/utep-coronavirus-proactive-testing-program.html>.

Also, please take care of yourself! I know this situation has been hard for me. Many of us are not made for isolation and not one of us is made for chronic stress. There are funds available from the CARES Act specifically set aside for student assistance. The link to information about these funds is here <https://www.utep.edu/resuming-campus-operations/faqs/index.html>.

Course Schedule

*Indicates on-campus meeting day

Aug. 25: Intro. What Does it Mean to be a Curator in the 21st Century?

Aug. 27: The Intellectual Framework (Viv Golding, “Collaborative Museums: Curators, Communities, Collections” Chapter 1 in *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*, Viv Golding and Wayne Modest, eds.)

Sept. 1: The Curator and the Museum Visitor (Viv Golding, “Creolizing the Museum: Humor, Art, and Young Audiences” Chapter 12 in *Museums and Communities*)

Sept. 3: The Many Facets of a Single Object (Richard Kurin, “The Hope Diamond: Gem, Jewel, and Icon” from *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian*, Amy Henderson and Adrienne L. Kaeppeler, eds. **on Blackboard**)

Sept. 8: Pioneering Change (Bryony Onciul, “Community Engagement, Curatorial Practice, and Museum Ethos in Alberta, Canada” Chapter 5 in *Museums and Communities*)

Sept. 10: Re-evaluating Traditional Exhibits (Serena Iervolino, “Museums, Migrant Communities, and Intercultural Dialogue in Italy” Chapter 7 in *Museums and Communities*)

Sept. 15: Sharing Curatorial Authority (Mary Hutchinson, “‘Shared Authority’: Collaboration, Curatorial Voice, and Exhibition Design in Canberra, Australia” Chapters 6 and 9 in *Museums and Communities*)

Sept. 17: Virtual tour of new exhibit at the Rubin created by an artist using objects from the collections of the Centennial, UTEP Special Collections, and the Rubin.

Sept. 22: Confronting Race within Community (Eric Gable, “The City, Race, and the Creation of a Common History at the Virginia Historical Society” Chapter 2 in *Museums and Communities*)

*Sept. 24: The Importance of Research—in class exercise in object analysis, research methods, and interpretation

Sept. 29: Various Careers within Curation: Zoom session with Logan Metesh, former Curator of Firearms, National Rifle Association Museum, Javier Segovia, Collections and Education Manager, The Tom Lea Institute, and Bernadette Ramos, Preparator, EPMA
Analytical Paper due by midnight

Oct. 1: Collections Management in an Art Museum: Zoom session with Laura Heemer, Registrar, Woodmere Art Museum, Philadelphia, PA

Oct. 6: Curating a New Museum: Skype session with Dr. William Pretzer, Chief Curator of History, National Museum of African American History and Culture

Oct. 8: The Art of Collecting: How and What Do We Collect? (James Gardner, “Building the Intellectual Framework” from *The AAM Guide to Collections Planning*; James Gardner and Elizabeth Merritt, “Collections Planning: Pinning Down a Strategy” from *Reinventing the Museum*, and a recent case of controversy at the Whitney, **all 3 readings on Blackboard**)

Oct. 13: Accessioning, What, Why, and How (*Museum Registration Methods: 5th Edition*—hereafter referred to as MRM5, Chapter 3B “Acquisitions and Accessioning, Chapter 3D “Provenance Research”; Marie Malaro, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections* pp.58-71 and 203-206 **both on Blackboard**)

Oct. 15: Documenting an Accession I: New Perspectives in Access and a Zoom session with Rachel Frederick, Library of Congress (Fiona Cameron, “Museum Collections, Documentation, and the Shifting Knowledge Paradigms” from Gail Anderson, ed. *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift on Blackboard*)

*Oct. 20: Documenting an Accession II: Handling, Assessing, and Measuring (MRM5, Chapters 5B “Object Handling” and 5C “Measuring” **on Blackboard**)

*Oct. 22: Documenting an Accession III: in-class exercise in using Past Perfect software (MRM5 Chapter 3A “Initial Custody and Documentation” and Chapters 4C “Computerized Systems” pp. 169-178 and 5A “Numbering” **on Blackboard**)

*Oct. 27: Documenting an Accession IV: Condition Reporting and Marking (MRM5, Chapters 5D, “Condition Reporting” and 5E, “Marking” **on Blackboard**)

Oct. 29: Deaccessioning, When, Why, and How (MRM5, Chapter 3L “Deaccessioning”; Malaro, *Primer*, pp.216-230 sect.e, **both on Blackboard**)

Nov. 3: Dealing with Loans (Malaro, *Primer* pp.239-262 and 284-290 **on Blackboard**)
Quiz 1 due by midnight (covers collections plans, accessioning and deaccessioning)

Nov. 5: Caring for the Collections I: Overview (MRM5 Chapter 5G and 5I “Preventive Care” and “Inventory” **on Blackboard**)

*Nov. 10: Caring for the Collections II: Storage—possible virtual field trip (MRM5 Chapter 5H “Storage” **on Blackboard**)

Nov. 12: Caring for the Collections III: Disaster and Pest Management Plans (MRM5 Chapters 6C-6F pp.360-380 **on Blackboard**)

Nov. 17: The Green Curator (MRM5 Chapter 6G “Registrars and Sustainability” **on Blackboard**) **Quiz 2 due by midnight** (covers collections care)

Nov. 19: The Duty of Care, the Duty of Education: The Debate (Rebecca Pomerantz “The Proper Use of Objects in a Museum Setting” and Malaro, *Primer* pp.433-438 both on Blackboard)

Nov. 24: The Particular Challenge of Native American Artifacts (MRM5 Chapter 7C and Chapter 7H pp.448-452 **on Blackboard**)

Nov. 26: Thanksgiving!!

Dec. 1: Sharing Semester Project Results

Dec. 3: Sharing Semester Project Results continued

Dec 10: **Semester Project Reports due by 6:00 (no exceptions short of a Dire Emergency—but please let me know if one should occur)!**