

Fall 2018 ART 3310

Course Information

Title: Curation and Collections Management in the 21st Century
458A Fox Fine Arts
TR 12:00-1:20
Credit: 3 hours

Instructor Contact Information

Dr. Elisabeth Sommer
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Office hours Tuesday 3:00-5:00; Wednesday 11:00-12:00
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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 in particular 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.

Course Structure

In order to accomplish this, the class will focus on an understanding of the principles and practices of developing, exhibiting, and caring for collections in the 21st century museum. 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 the some aspects of natural history museums.

Class Expectations

You will be expected to **engage with the readings and participate in class discussions**. You should arrive in class with a **written list** of the points/ideas you believe most significant from the readings assigned for that day. **I reserve the right to collect these without prior notice.**

You will also have opportunities for hands-on and individual experience in both the curatorial and managerial aspects of collections. There will also be **two in class quizzes**, noted on the syllabus. **If you have to be absent on one of these days, you must notify me in advance, and arrange to make up the work.**

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. 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), and a **narrative proposal** for its use in an exhibition, including relevant label text.

Other Written Work

In addition to the semester project, written work will consist of the report on your clothing re-housing project (see below), and an analytical paper (essentially a short essay on an aspect of curation in the 21st century). There will also be two quizzes.

All are due on the dates noted in the syllabus. **Late papers or write ups will be penalized.**

Re-housing Historic Clothing Project

We will be assisting the Centennial Museum with a project to place some of their historic clothing collection in proper housing. Each of you will be assigned a piece or set of clothing for which you will produce a condition report, and then re-house it in proper materials (provided by the museum). You will need to document the process through photographs and a written report.

Grades

Grading will be broken down as follows:

Participation 20% (includes hands-on exercises)

Quizzes 10% (5% each)

Historic Clothing Re-housing Project 20%

Analytical Paper 20%

Semester Project 30%

Course Schedule

Aug. 28: Intro. What Does it Mean to be a Curator in the 21st Century?

Aug. 30: 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. 4: The Curator and the Museum Visitor (Viv Golding, "Creolizing the Museum: Humor, Art, and Young Audiences" Chapter 12 in *Museums and Communities*)

Sept. 6: 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. Kaeppler, eds. **on Blackboard**)

Sept. 11: Pioneering Change (Bryony Onciul, "Community Engagement, Curatorial Practice, and Museum Ethos in Alberta, Canada" Chapter 5 in *Museums and Communities*)

Sept. 13: Re-evaluating Traditional Exhibits (Serena Iervolino, "Museums, Migrant Communities, and Intercultural Dialogue in Italy" Chapter 7 in *Museums and Communities*)

Sept. 18: Sharing Curatorial Authority (Wayne Modest, "Co-curating with Teenagers at the Horniman Museum" and Mary Hutchinson, "'Shared Authority': Collaboration, Curatorial Voice, and Exhibition Design in Canberra, Australia" Chapters 6 and 9 in *Museums and Communities*)

Sept. 20: Curating a New Museum: Skype session with Dr. William Pretzer, Chief Curator of History, National Museum of African-American History and Culture

Sept. 25: The Importance of Research—in class exercise in object analysis, research methods, and interpretation

Sept. 27: Creating a Furnishing Plan in historic house museums (Bradley C. Brooks, “The Historic House Furnishing Plan: Process and Product” from *Interpreting Historic House Museums on Blackboard*) Discussion of the use of period inventories

Oct. 2: Curation and Collections Management in an Artist’s House: Skype session with Laura Heemer, Curator and Program Director, Wharton Esherick Museum (**Analytical Paper Due**)

Oct. 4: Introduction to the Historic Clothing Project—field trip to the Centennial Museum, meet there (you’ll have until Nov. 8 to complete the project)

Oct. 9: The Art of Collecting I: How and What Do We Collect? (James Gardner, “Building the Intellectual Framework” from *The AAM Guide to Collections Planning*; Stephen Weil, “Collecting Then, Collecting Today: What’s the Difference?” and James Gardner and Elizabeth Merritt, “Collections Planning: Pinning Down a Strategy” from *Reinventing the Museum on Blackboard*)

Oct. 11: The Art of Collecting II: Ethical issues in Museum Collecting (William L. Merrill and Richard E. Ahlborn, “Zuni Archangels and Ahayu:da: A Sculpted Chronicle of Power and Identity” from *Exhibiting Dilemmas on Blackboard*)

Oct. 16: 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. 18: Documenting an Accession I: New Perspectives in Access (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. 23: Documenting an Accession II: in-class exercise in using Past Perfect software (MRM5 Chapter 3A “Initial Custody and Documentation” and Chapters 4C “Computerized Systems” pp. 169-178, 5A “Numbering” and 5B “Object Handling” **on Blackboard**)

Oct. 25: Documenting an Accession III: Measuring, Condition Reporting and Marking (MRM5, Chapters 5C, “Measuring, 5D, “Condition Reporting” and 5E, “Marking” **on Blackboard**)

Oct. 30: Deaccessioning, When, Why, and How (MRM5, Chapter 3L “Deaccessioning”; Malaro, *Primer*, pp.216-230 sect.e, **both on Blackboard**)

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

Nov. 6: Caring for the Collections I: Overview (MRM5 Chapter 5G and 5I “Preventive Care” and “Inventory” **on Blackboard**)

Nov. 8: Caring for the Collections II: Storage—possible field trip to the El Paso Museum of Art (MRM5 Chapter 5H “Storage” **on Blackboard**) **Historic Clothing Project results due**

Nov. 13: Caring for the Collections III: Disaster and Pest Management Plans (MRM5 Chapters 6C-6F pp.360-380 **on Blackboard**)

Nov. 15: The Green Curator (MRM5 Chapter 6G “Registrars and Sustainability” **on Blackboard**) **Quiz 2** (covers collections care)

Nov. 20: 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. 22: Thanksgiving!! (Give thanks that we’ve made it this far)

Nov. 27: The Particular Challenge of Native American Artifacts—guest lecture TBD (MRM5 Chapter 7C and Chapter 7H pp.448-452 **on Blackboard**)

Nov. 29: Catch up day (because you never know when it might come in handy)

Dec. 4: Sharing Semester Project Results

Dec. 6: Sharing Semester Project Results continued

Apr. 27: **Semester Project Reports due by 6:00 (no exceptions short of a Dire Emergency—but please let me know if one should occur)!**