

History 6302

Collections Management in Museums

University of West Georgia/Atlanta History Center

Summer 2017

Instructors:

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Class meetings: Class meets on Wednesday from 12:30-5:30 at the Atlanta History Center, except on days that we have field trips. Please see the AHC website at www.atlantahistorycenter.com for directions.

Course description and objectives:

This course is an examination of the processes by which a museum manages its collection, including collections policies, acquisitions, collections development, registration, cataloging, conservation, and collections care. Students will acquire skills to conduct registration and curatorial work according to professional museum standards.

Each class meeting will consist of discussion of assigned reading, presentations by instructors and occasional guest speakers, and some student presentations. Class meetings will also include specialized training in particular topics such as object handling, packing, or care of objects on exhibit.

Readings

Required Readings:

Buck, Rebecca A. and Jean Allman Gilmore, eds. *The New Museum Registration Methods*. American Association of Museums, Fifth Edition, 2010.

Connecting to Collections, on-line resources - <https://www.connectingtocollections.org/> There are specific webinars listed for each class, but please explore the others on your own!

Other useful readings:

Buck, Rebecca A. and Jean Allman Gilmore. *Collections Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries*. American Association of Museums, 2007.

Case, Mary, ed. *Registrars on Records: Essays on Museum Collections Management*. American Association of Museums, 1998.

MacLeish, A. Bruce, *The Care of Antiques and Historical Collections*. Alta Mira Press, 1996.

Malaro, Marie, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998.

Simmons, John E., *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*. American Association of Museums, 2005.

Van Horn, Deborah Rose, Heather Culligan, and Corinne Midgett. Lanham, ed. *Basic Condition Reporting: A Handbook*. Southeastern Registrars Association, Fourth edition. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015.

Online Resources:

American Institute for Conservation : <http://www.conservation-us.org/about-conservation>

National Park Service, *Conserve-o-grams*, multiple topics and publication dates, available online at <http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conservoogram/conserv.html>

Building an Emergency Plan: A Guide for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions. The Getty Conservation Institute,

1999. http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/emergency.html

IPI webinars - <http://www.ipisustainability.org/webinar-info-series2/>

On reserve at the Center for Public History

Several years ago, the Center for Public History received the Collections Management “bookshelf” from the American Association of State and Local History, which includes a wide assortment of resources for collections care. These materials will be of interest to any students in this class, both for additional reading and for your conservation/preservation brief. While we have students working this summer, you might want to contact us in advance before you come to be sure that we are open.

Course Assignments

Collections Management portfolio (40% of final grade)

All students will prepare a portfolio that demonstrates what s/he has learned about collections management during the semester. Portfolios should be well-organized with an attractive cover, table of contents, and all assignments. Remember that we would like you to design this portfolio as if you were to present it to a potential employer to The portfolio will include:

- A narrative of at least 1,500 words describing the student’s learning over the course of the semester, relating the *books and articles*, class activities, speakers and practicum to each other. The format and content of this narrative is flexible and you are welcome to be creative if you choose to do so. The narrative will be evaluated on the content and your demonstration of what you have *learned* in the class. Please be sure that you do not simply describe the lectures and practicums, such as what you did during the class, but that you *reflect* on the content of the course and what you have learned. Please be sure to reference readings and include footnotes! (20% of final grade)
- A narrative of at least 2,000 words that describes the process of processing a museum collection. Please include items which illustrate your in-class and practicum assignments, such as completed forms, photographs of you at work, etc. Again, you are

- welcome and encouraged to be creative on this narrative. (20% of final grade)
- demonstrate your mastery of registration and curatorial skills. (5% of final grade)

In addition to these narratives, the portfolio should include the following assignments (described below under course requirements):

- PastPerfect Practicum assignment;
- Your essay on the registration ethics issue;
- Any class handout that your team may have provided for the ethics issue you researched;
- The conservation/preservation brief that you prepared for the class (you need not include other student briefs, just your own);
- Make-up work and discussion of the readings from any class days that were missed
- Copies of work that you did in class, including condition reports, catalog worksheets, etc.

PastPerfect Practicum Assignment (15% of final grade)

Students will *produce Past Perfect entry forms for three objects* at the Atlanta History Center. PastPerfect is one of the most popular museum collections management programs, and we want you to have experience in entering objects into this database. A free evaluation version of this software is available at <http://www.MuseumSoftware.com/> and may be downloaded to your home computer for this exercise.

During the first week of the class, each student will choose three objects to document and **research** (with approval of the instructor), which will include photography and measurements. Students will then complete the Past Perfect forms for these three objects using the downloaded software. In addition to collecting and reporting the descriptive information, students will need to conduct research on the objects to document them as part of this process. These reports must be as complete as possible.

Please submit two copies of these completed forms on the final class date, one to include in the portfolios and one to provide to the Atlanta History Center.

Students can receive extra credit for this assignment (up to 20 points) for entering these records into Rediscovery, the data base that the AHC uses.

Class Presentation and Essay on Registration Ethics Issue (15% of final grade)

All students will be assigned to work in a team of two students to research, present, and lead discussion about a current issue in museum registration. Please plan for a discussion of about twenty-five minutes.

In addition, each student will write a three- to four-page essay that presents the current issue and takes a position on the issue (the essay's thesis statement), using evidence from your research. Please include footnotes, as appropriate, and use at least five sources, which must be included in your bibliography. A maximum of three on-line sources may be used. Your essays are due on

the date for which the issue is to be discussed (as stated on the syllabus). Comments will be provided in sufficient time to revise the essay, if desired, for the final portfolio.

These issues are:

1. What is ethical and what is unethical about selling objects from a museum's collection to pay the bills? Please explore the recent issues surrounding museums which are selling some of their collections, why they are selling them, and what is controversial about these actions.
2. What are the issues that surround NAGRPA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) and how are museums handling these collections? Has NAGRPA been successful, and why or why not? How would you measure success?
3. What should museums do regarding Nazi-era art and collectibles? One place to begin is *Museum Policy and Procedures for Nazi-Era Issues*, by the American Association of Museums (2001).
4. What are the problems that museums have faced in collecting ancient antiquities? How should museums resolve these issues? You might begin with *Who Owns Antiquity: Museums and Battles over our Ancient Heritage* (2008), but please consult other sources as well. Please include a discussion of current issues regarding looting and destruction of ancient antiquities in the Middle East.
5. How should museums deal with contaminated cultural materials in museum collections? You can begin with the book *Old Poisons, New Problems: A Museum Resource for Managing Contaminated Cultural Materials* (2007), but please check out other sites and sources as well.

Conservation/Preservation brief (10% of final grade)

Each student will prepare a *one-page* brief on preservation and conservation of a particular type of material or object that might be found in a museum collection. These briefs are due on July 8. The briefs must be one full page, but may not exceed one page. Please list at least two or three of the best sources that you used for reference at the bottom of the page.

Please remember that the "Collections Management Bookshelf" at the Center for Public History has some resources that will be helpful for you in preparing this Brief.

Make enough copies of your brief to distribution to everyone in the class, so that you will all be able to take advantage of each other's research. With this assignment, you will finish the class with a set of conservation briefs, and relevant sources, prepared by your fellow students to use in your own work.

Object label (5% of final grade)

Each student will write an exhibit label for one of the objects that s/he completed for the practicum. The labels and objects will be installed in an exhibition case the last day of class. Students will determine how to best display and mount their chosen artifact.

Class attendance and participation (15% of final grade)

Attendance is essential for this course. Students will arrive having done the reading and being prepared to discuss it.

Students who miss a class meeting will be expected to (1) make up any assignments, without requiring extra time from the AHC staff and (2) prepare a written discussion of the topics of the day to add to the student's portfolio.

Because there are only eight class days, students who are absent for *more* than one class day will have their final letter grade lowered one letter grade. More than two absences will result in a failing grade.

Revision policy

Students are welcome and encouraged to turn in any written work *in advance* to Dr. McCleary for comments. Except for the conservation/preservation brief and the essay on a current registration topic, there is no required due date for the assignments before submission in the final portfolio. If you turn in an early draft for review, allow sufficient time for me to read your assignment and offer suggestions.

Any assignments may be revised for the portfolio. The final grade for that assignment will be based on the assignment that is in the portfolio, but *only* if you submit the first draft (with comments) in the portfolio so that I can assess your revisions.

Dress Code

This class will require a dress code for practicum assignments, which occur for each class. This can and often will include moving large objects, kneeling, bending, etc. Jeans, tennis shoes, and t-shirts are often the best clothing for these practicums.

- Sneakers or closed shoes are required. No flip flops or heels.
- Pants are required. No dresses, skirts, or shorts.
- No dangling jewelry or large rings.
- No loose clothing.
- Wear clothing that can get dirty.

Class Schedule

Please note the following:

- Readings for each class meeting are listed on the day for which they are assigned. Please complete the readings by each class day. The reading is heavier at the beginning of the semester, allowing you to focus more time on the portfolio over the last two weeks. .
 - This schedule is subject to change.
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May 31: **Class Orientation and Introduction to Collections Management**

- 12:30 Course introduction
1:30 What is a Museum Collection? Why does it need to be “managed”?
What is a Museum Registration system?
What is a registrar and his or her role in the museum?
2:30 Creating a Collection Policy: Comments & Critique
3:30 Exercise: Object selection and handling

Read: Buck and Gilmore, Section 1 “The Profession; “Section 2:“Policies;”and “Object Handling,” pages 209-218.

Watch/Listen:

<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/objecthandlingrecording/>
<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/coming-up-essential-elements-of-a-collections-management-policy/>

June 7 **Collections Policies, Acquisitions, and Records I**

- 12:30 Acquiring Collections and Doing Appraisals
1:30 Collections Records overview
2:45 Collections records at the Atlanta History Center
3:30 Exercise: Cleaning objects and exhibits

Read: Buck/Gilmore, “The Basics,” pages 37-82;
“Records Management,” pages 149-160; and “Appraisals,” 438-446.”
“Dusting wooden objects” available at

<http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conservoogram/07-05.pdf>

Watch/Listen: <https://www.connectingtocollections.org/documenting-your-collections/>

Also worth watching...

<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/dangerous-collections/>
<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/arsenic-and-old-lace-controlling->

[hazardous-collection-materials/](https://www.connectingtocollections.org/hazardous-collection-materials/)
<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/lock-stock-and-barrel-firearms-collecting-for-museums/>
<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/a-conservation-primer-caring-for-historic-furniture/>
<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/notes-from-the-home-front-care-handling-of-heirloom-textile-collections/>
<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/reframing-the-problem-caring-for-framed-objects-in-small-institutions-aka-on-a-budget/>

June 14

Collections Records II

12:30 Collections management databases and software
1:30 Loans
2:30 Deaccessions, Disposal, and Abandoned Property
3:30 Ethics—class presentations #1 and #2
4:30 Rediscovery demonstration

Read: Buck/Gilmore, “The Basics,” pages 85-137 and 155--203; “Records Management,” 161-203; “Ethics,” 393-427, 228-270.

Watch/Listen:

https://www.connectingtocollections.org/the_deaccessioning_dilemma_laws_ethics_and_actions/

June 21

Care of Collections I

12:30 Preventative care of collections
1:30 Storage and environmental conditions
Integrated Pest Management
2:45 Insurance and Security
3:30 Exercise: Condition Reporting

Read: Buck/Gilmore, “Collections Management,” pages 287-300; “Risk Management,” pages 351-360 and 365-392, “Condition Reporting,” 223-232; Integrated Pest Management, 369-380.

“Identifying Museum Insect Pest Damage” available at

<http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conservoogram/03-11.pdf>

“Preservation of Museum Collections” available at

<http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conservoogram/01-01.pdf>

“Preventative Conservation Recommendations for Organic Objects” at

<http://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conservoogram/01-03.pdf>

Watch/Listen: <https://www.connectingtocollections.org/storagesolutions/>

Also worth watching...

<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/re-org-step-by-step-storage-reorganization-for-small-museums/>

<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/recording-community-webinar-making-the-most-of-the-storage-you-have/>

June 28 Museum Practicum--Gatheround exhibition

Read: Buck/Gilmore, "In-House Exhibitions" and "Hosting Traveling Exhibitions," pages 238-246, and "Preparation," 307-313.

Watch/Listen: <https://www.connectingtocollections.org/much-ado-about-mannequins-making-the-perfect-form/>

July 5 Class at the Margaret Mitchell House

12:30 Conservation brief discussion

1:30 Disaster planning

2:30 Student presentation #3 and 4

3:30 Inventory

Read: Buck/Gilmore, "Inventory," pages 300-306; "Collections Management," pages 315-350; "Risk Management," pages 360-364;

Watch/Listen:

<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/maintaining-collection-inventory/>

Due: Conservation/preservation brief. Please make enough copies to distribute to all your classmates.

July 12 Care of Collections II

11-12: Field trip to Carlos Museum

Museum Ethics and Registration Issues; Cataloging and Marking

1:00 Student presentations #5

1:30 Registrar's roundtable: What are the current issues?

Will Grewe-Mullins, Fernbank Museum;

Andy Carter, Waring Archaeology Laboratory

Mary Troy, National Park Service

2:45 Cataloging, Marking, and Photographing

Read: Buck/Gilmore, "The Basics," pages 205-277; and pages 205-286.

Watch/Listen:

<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/ethical-issues-collections-management/>
<https://www.connectingtocollections.org/markings-and-labeling-collections/>

July 19

Practicum

- 12:30- 5:30** Collections Management Practicum: Complete individual assignments
Install exhibition
- 5:30-7 p.m.** Reflections over dinner, including *all* students and participating AHC staff and volunteers

Portfolios due by July 20, no later than 5 p.m.