

Course Title: AAD 410/510 Museum Collections Management

Instructor: Elizabeth Kallenbach

Course Context: This course is an AAD graduate level course, required for the certificate in museum studies (verify this), but is open to anyone. The primary audience includes students from AAD, but also Historic Preservation, Anthropology, and Art History. It is offered once every other year. Currently there is one instructor who teaches this course.

Essential Questions

- Why do we preserve museum objects?
- What methods do we employ to preserve and care for museum collections?
- How do we make collections accessible?
- Why should museum collections be accessible, and to whom?
- What different perspectives are there in caring for cultural objects?

Learning Outcomes (grounded in core content, concepts, and skills):

Upon completion of this course, students should:

- Understand the role of a collections manager and registrar within the museum profession;
- Have a basic understanding of preventative care of objects, through safe handling and proper storage;
- Be familiar with collections management and museum terminology;
- Be able to discuss registration processes, including accessioning, deaccessioning, loans, and inventories;
- Be able to properly catalog, document, and label an object;
- Understand the essentials of the museum environment and be able to discuss risk management;
- Understand the nature of how collections are used and accessed;
- Be able to discuss ethical issues surrounding collections management and be knowledgeable of the AAM Professional Code of Ethics.

Core content/themes/topics

- Cultural, artistic, and scientific collections are a resource that belongs to the public.
- Museum collections managers/ registrars act as stewards of a shared heritage or knowledge resource.
- *Preservation* and *access* are the two major themes that drive the course content.
 - Preservation* embodies everything related to the long term care of an object, including how objects are exhibited, loaned, stored, documented, cleaned, handled, and how their storage environment is managed.
 - Access* to collections, while sometimes in direct conflict with preservation, is the cornerstone of creating relevant collections that are available to the public for research, education, and artistic or cultural inspiration. Access includes such topics as databases/catalogs, digital images and photography, records management, on-line resources, exhibition, loans, repatriation, and accessible storage and housing environments.
- A museum's code of ethics and collections management policy should guide the manager's/registrar's decisions and written protocols.

Key concepts and skills

- Understand how best practices and professional standards are used in a museum.
- Recognize the inherent challenges and limitations to meeting best practices and standards.
- Create condition reports for a museum object.
- Catalog and document a museum object.
- Make recommendations for storage, handling, and conservation of a museum object.
- Build a foundational knowledge of professional standards, ethics, and best practices within the field.
- Be familiar with key resources utilized by museum professionals (journals, websites, foundational texts).

Key Activities and Assessments:

· Labs

Labs involve hands-on practice preparing object condition reports, cataloging, labeling, handling and packing objects. Students are expected to participate in the labs in order to receive credit. The lab portion of the course is a critical component, as students have the opportunity to work directly with museum collections.

· Student-led discussions

Graduate students are required to sign up for one class in which they will introduce an additional reading (i.e. news item, scholarly article, blog, book, website) related to the topics of the week. A question or comment about the reading, with a link to the reading, should be posted to our discussion tab on Canvas the Friday before.

· Reaction Papers

The class includes about six site visits to museum collections and storage areas (Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Museum of Natural and Cultural History Anthropology and Paleontology Collections, UO Special Collections Knight Library, Hallie Ford Museum of Art in Salem, Lane County Historical Museum). Tours of these collection areas include informal discussions with the host collection managers/directors. Students write about a two-page reaction paper, which can be a critique, a summary of what was learned, or a discussion incorporating relevant readings.

· Midterm Exam

There is one take-home exam for the course, which is short-answer/essay format. This exam covers the discussions and readings from weeks 1-6.

· Final Research Paper

Students choose a topic of their interest and write a 10-15 page paper (not including references). A list of suggested topics is made available, though they are free to choose any topic relevant to the course, with the instructor's approval. Students are expected to use the assigned readings as foundational information from which to build upon. The paper is an opportunity to explore real-life examples within the museum field, to discuss controversial topics, to discuss challenges facing museum collections and examples of solutions, to conduct a review of a particular collections project, or to examine the field from a historical perspective, looking at trends and/or significant changes within museum collections management.

· Final Paper Presentation

During the last class meeting, students conduct a 10 minute presentation/discussion on their paper topic.

Primary Resources (readings, support materials):

Required Text:

Museum Registration Methods 5th Edition (MRM5). American Alliance of Museums, AAM Press, Buck, Rebecca A. and Jean Allman Gilmore (Eds.), 2010.

Additional readings are often drawn from the following texts:

Registration Methods for the Small Museum, American Association for State and Local History, Daniel B. Reibel, 2008

Collections Care and Stewardship; Innovative Approaches for Museums, Rowman & Littlefield, Edited by Juilee Decker, 2015 (this is a new publication I would like to use for the next course)

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

Caring for American Indian Objects, A Practical and Cultural Guide, Minnesota Historical Society Press, Sherelyn Ogden, 2004.

Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives, and Museums, G.E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep, Eds., 2006.

Common websites used for supplemental reading and reference:

American Alliance of Museums
Northern States Conservation Center
International Council of Museums
National Park Service

Supplemental news articles or journal articles are located on-line or on Canvas (see syllabus for examples).