12-1989

Museum Studies in Collection Management

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Museum Studies in Collection Management

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At the workshop on "Collection Resources for the 1990's " held in Washington, DC, October, 1988, one of the identified needs for institutions was for additional trained collection management staff (Hoagland and Mabee, ASC Newsletter 16(6):9. 1988). There are few academic programs that provide training in the management of biological, geological and anthropological collections. Because this is an identified need for the 1990's, the question arises: "Are we able to meet this need?" and, if we are not currently in a position to do so, "What must be done in the future to meet this need?"

To identify the current academic programs giving this training, a survey of Museum Studies Programs offering work in the management of scientific and anthropological collections was conducted. This survey concentrated on those programs offering degrees. Thirty-five questionnaires were sent and 18 positive responses were received. This survey may not be totally complete, but most of the programs have been identified.

Results of the survey are presented at the end of this article. Most of these Programs offer degrees at the Master's level, but three (Baylor University, California State University-San Bernadino, and University of Alaska-Fairbanks) are offered at the undergraduate level. One program (Texas A&M University) offers a Ph.D. in Museum Studies and work may concentrate on management of collections.

Program Composition

Based on this survey and my experience with two of these programs, I believe that there are some components needed for successful programs. These include the following: 1) The program must be associated with a museum. It is important that students have a protracted exposure to a museum so that they can develop a museum conscience. 2) The program should include a mixture of courses. There should be a core of museum-related courses. These will acquaint the students with museum philosophy and operations. These are the courses that give museum studies programs their unique character. The program should include disciplinary courses such as mammalogy, ichthyology, and plant taxonomy, and theoretical courses such as systematics, evolutionary theory, and zoogeography. It is important that collection management staff know the collections under their care and have an appreciation for the uses of these collections. 3) The program must include an extensive internship. Much of the work that is conducted on collections in museums cannot be taught in a classroom but must be learned under the direction of trained professionals in real situations. 4) These are professional degree training programs and are not research degree programs. The considerable difference between these types of programs must be recognized by the museum community. If there is to be a collection management profession, then those of us in museum management must treat these people as professionals and work to develop a uniform professional track for them within our museums. I would suggest the following track as a starting point for discussion: Collection Assistant; Curatorial Assistant; Collection Manager.

Special Considerations

There have been suggestions that the free-standing museums become involved in training programs for collection managers because of the lack of academic programs in this field. Clearly, these institutions are able to give excellent practical experience; however, in my opinion, they must also be prepared to give the students the
Many people entering the collection management profession have earned degrees in regular Master's programs, such as biology or geology. We have successfully recruited collection managers from such programs; however, these people often lack an appreciation for the museum and its functioning as an organization. Also, in many cases, people with these backgrounds lack the practical experience that can be gained through an internship.

From the point of view of the university, there are several special considerations. A scientific collection management track alone will not sustain a museum studies program. It simply cannot provide enough students to make the program economically feasible nor will it provide the range of courses necessary for a successful program. The only means by which these programs can be maintained is to extend them by discipline (history, art, etc.) and/or career (educators, exhibitors, administrators, etc.).

The question has arisen concerning the inclusion of a research component in the training of managers of scientific collections. The research would involve new management techniques or research projects. I would recommend the gathering of basic data on collections. The research would involve new management techniques or research projects. I would recommend the inclusion of a research component (as well as additional museum courses) in the training of managers of scientific collections. This will be the best possible manner in which to recruit highly-motivated students into the professional track for them to follow.

Association of Systematics Collections: If professionally trained collection management staff is a national priority for museums as suggested at the ASC-sponsored workshop in October 1988, then ASC must become an advocate for museum studies programs at a national level. ASC also may want to become involved in setting standards for the collection management portions of programs such as the AAM has done for overall programs. The ASC is in an excellent position to coordinate the internship relationship between museum studies programs and natural history museums. Finally, ASC can be an advocate for funding traineeships from NSF, IMS, etc. for students pursuing degrees in management of natural history collections. This will be the best possible manner in which to recruit highly-motivated students into the professional track for them to follow.

Conclusions

Currently, there are probably not enough programs training students in the management of natural history collections if projected needs are correct. If this need is to be met, there must be a coordinated effort involving current and future museum studies programs, natural history museums, and ASC.

Survey Results


Baylor University (Museum Studies Program). Calvin B. Smith, Stretcher Museum, Baylor University, Waco, TX 76798. Training for collection management positions in anthropology, biology, geology, and paleontology. Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Museum Studies. Museum Studies courses: Introduction to Museums, Museum Administration, Museum Marketing and Development, Educational Programming for Museums, Collection Management, Exhibit Design and Preparation, Principles of Conservation, Using the Museum as a Teaching Resource. Internships: One or two hours per week lecture and a minimum of six to 12 hrs. per week laboratory, serving in a museum. Comments: Programs supported by Stretcher Museum.

California State University—San Bernardino (Museum Studies Program). Russell Barber, Department of Anthropology, California State University, San Bernardino, CA 92407. Training for collection management positions in anthropology (10). 186 credit hours for a BA in Anthropology (Track B: Museum Studies-52 credits required in

* The numbers in parentheses are the number of students graduated in each area of collection management in the past 5 years.

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George Washington University


John F. Kennedy University, Center for Museum Studies. John F. Kennedy University, 1716 Seventeenth Street, San Francisco, CA 94103. Training for students in management of collections of ethnography, anthropology and scientific artifacts. 54 units required for a Master of Arts degree in Museum Studies. Museum Studies courses: History and Philosophy of Museums, Seminar in Research, Documentation of Collections, Conservations: Care and Preservation of Collections, Curatorship, Exhibition Design, Museum Education, Museum Management. Internship: A two-semester course of study that places students in a museum or museum-related institution. Students are required to develop a 6 to 12 unit thesis, which reflects their expertise in a special subject area. Faculty: 10. Administrative unit: School of Liberal and Professional Arts. Comments: Associated with many museums in the Bay area including California Academy of Science and The Exploratorium.


San Francisco State University

Texas A&M University. David J. Schmidly, Head, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Texas A & M University, College Station, TX. Training for collection management positions in biology (1), 36 hours for a Master of Agriculture and 94 hours for a Ph.D. Museum Studies courses: Museums: Their Functions, Collection Management, Museum Programming. Internship: Must leave campus for a 3 to 6 month internship at a major research-oriented collection for Master's level students. Faculty: 4. Administrative unit: Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences. Comments: Associated with the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collections.


University of Alaska-Fairbanks (Museum Studies). Craig Gerlach and
University of Iowa (Museum Training Program). George D. Schrimper, Museum of Natural History, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52240. Training for collection management positions in biology (5) and paleontology (4). 38 hour Master's program with degree in Anthropology or Science Education. Museum Studies courses: Museum Technique, Museum Accessory Work, Introduction to Museology, Principles of Exhibit Design, Introduction to Conservation of Museum Objects. Internship: One semester or summer equivalent required for M.A. or M.S. Students placed in external facilities for at least 20 hours per week. Faculty: 3. Administrative unit: College of Natural History. Comments: Associated with the University of Nebraska State Museum, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, and State Museum of History. This is a new program that will begin classes in the Spring Semester of 1990.

University of Oklahoma. Barbara Wilson, College of Liberal Studies, University of Oklahoma, 1700 Asp Avenue, Norman, OK 73019. A two-year program leading to a Master of Liberal Studies with museum emphasis. The program integrates brief on-campus stays with year-long work and study at home institution. Program progression: 1) Introductory Seminar (2 weeks)-introduced to 6 major areas of museum study. 2) Directed Study-at home institution doing papers and critiques; special project. 3) Colloquium (3 weeks)-work with MLS program; develop topic and prospectus for thesis. 4) Advanced study during second year of program, research and writing of thesis. 5) Advanced Seminar (2 weeks) presentation of thesis to committee. Administrative unit: College of Liberal Studies. Comments: Museums and collections associated with the program include Museum of Art, Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, History of Science Collections, and Western History Collections.

University of Washington (Museology Program), Miriam Kahn, Director of Museology Program, Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195. Training for collection management positions in anthropology (8). 36 hours Master's program in Anthropology/Museology. Museum Studies courses: Introduction to Museology, Seminar in Museum Issues (Theoretical), Seminar in Museum Issues (Practical), Seminar in Specimen Documentation, Collections Management, Conservation. Internship: 10 weeks full time. Faculty: 2. Administrative unit: Department of Anthropology. Comments: Associated museum is the Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum.