AMST 489

Museums Collections Management

SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Course Description: An overview of the fundamental principles of Museums Collections Management, registration, and preservation issues in museums and art galleries is presented through lectures, hands-on practice, guest lectures and field trips. The importance of the “object” as a representation of cultural and social history is stressed while focusing on the care, preservation, documentation and maintenance of objects in the museum environment.

Prerequisites: AMST 300 or approval of instructor; AMST 360; Junior or Senior classification.

Course Objectives: The objectives of this course are to provide an understanding of the nature and importance of material culture care and preservation as it relates to cultural heritage management and social history; to introduce fundamental collections management documentation methods and terminology; and to provide a hands-on opportunity to develop professional skills and knowledge as related to the Collections Management field through the complete documentation of an object.

Learning Outcomes: Upon successfully completing this course, students will:

- Understand and be able to explain the role of a Collections Manager in the museum environment
- Be informed of the AAM Professional Code of Ethics for Collections Managers
- Be able to discuss ethical issues surrounding collections management and the care of objects
- Be able to articulate the importance of the object to U.S. Cultural Heritage Management
- Be familiar with Collections Management and museum terminology
- Be able to completely and accurately document and label an object with the appropriate materials
- Be able to demonstrate the appropriate methods of safe handling and storage of objects
- Be able to describe the ideal museum environment
- Understand the basics of preventive collections management

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and Class participation (10% of course grade)

This is an experiential learning class. Attendance and participation in class discussions, projects, and critiques are imperative to the understanding of collections management processes and procedures. To do is to understand.
2. Mid-term exam (25% of course grade)

3. Final exam (30% of course grade)

4. Final Project/Presentation (35% of course grade)

The final project will be a combination of oral presentation and the appropriate text for a fully documented object. The documented object must be approved by the instructor prior to the start of the project. All visuals, text, and materials must be cited or presented as appropriate, including but not limited to handling and storage guidelines, labeling guidelines, condition reports, loan documents and visuals.

5. Course Readings:

  http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/introvocab/


- Additional readings will be available electronically. The syllabus contains links to all articles posted on the internet; remaining articles and book chapters can be found through the Evans Library electronic course reserve system (library-reserves)

Course Policies:

**Grading Policy:** My grading policy is consistent with Student Rules regarding Academics (http://student-rules.tamu.edu).

- Project assignments must be completed and submitted according to schedule.

- Evaluation of Final Project: As stipulated above, the final presentation and accompanying materials/documentation are the minimum requirements for successful completion of the project. The work’s *quality* will also be taken into account. I will provide in advance both tips for giving engaging presentations, but also the rubric by which I will consider the quality. Briefly put, an A is exemplary (clear, concise, thought-provoking, professional); a B is very good (thoroughly and competently completed, demonstrating an understanding of the materials presented); a C is competent (it fulfills the basic requirements, but does not in any way exceed the assignment); a D fails to fulfill the assignment and presents it poorly; and an F is a failure to complete and present the final project.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement:**
"The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability
requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room 116B of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637.”

Academic Integrity Statement:
“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do.”

Upon accepting admission to Texas A&M University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor System. Students will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the TAMU community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor System.

For additional information please visit: www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor

Student Rules:
I follow the provisions in “Student Rules” on plagiarism, attendance, and all other matters. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with and upholding all rules.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1: Re-visit the role of the museum and museum professionals. Fitting in with the disciplines: Museum Studies, Archaeology, Fine Arts, Cultural Heritage Management.

Collection Management Terminology


http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/introvocabls/

PDF 1, 4-5

Week 2: Giving the object value, Why do we do what we do?


Elaine Heumann Gurian, “What is the Object of this exercise?: A Meandering Exploration of the Many Meanings of Objects in Museums” Reinventing the Museum, pgs. 269-283

“Behind the Scenes at the Museum” The Economist, 2000-2001 Dec-Jan Vol 357 pgs. 115-116

Round table discussion with staff members from The Stark Galleries and the MSC Forsyth Center Galleries, Cushing Library, and the Anthropology dept. Participants
will identify their professional positions, what they do, and why they do what they do.

**Week 3: Professional Ethics and the Code of Conduct, NAGPRA, Illegally acquired Collections**

American Association of Museums (AAM) Code of Ethics

[http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/coe.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/coe.cfm)

*AAM Advocacy for Museums: Issues at a Glance, 2007*

[http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/introvocab/J](http://www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/introvocab/J)

PDF 3

[http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/MN_ND05_DeathbyEthics.cfm](http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/MN_ND05_DeathbyEthics.cfm)

AAM Ownership and Protection of Cultural and Natural Resources (2008)

Susan Breitkopf, *Indiana Jones is Dead: The Field Museum in a Smaller World*  

Joelle Seligson, “California Raids Echo through the Field”  


**Week 4: Collections, Collections, Everywhere**


We will visit the collections from the Department of Entomology. Students will be expected to visit the Stark Galleries and MSC Forsyth Galleries on their own time and report back to the class next session.

**Week 5: Collections Management Policies and Paperwork**

A.E. Whittington and D.A. Barraclough “A comparison of collection management practices
between two collections of Diptera” *Studia Dipterologica*, 1999 6:1 49-58


**Week 6: The Museum Environment**


Jill Snyder and Joseph Montague, *Caring for your Art: A guide for Artists, Collectors, Galleries and Art Institutions* (Allsworth Press) 2001 Ch 2


**Mid-term exam**

**Week 7: Handling and Storage of the Object**


**In-class demonstration and practice of appropriate object handling techniques**

**Week 8: Documenting and Labeling the Object**


In-class demonstration and practice documenting and labeling objects

Week 9: Inventory and the information you need for your records, The database, Documentation con’t

Suzanne Cowan, “Inventory,” New Museum Registration Methods eds. Rebecca Buck and Jean Gillmore (AAM)2001 pgs.117-119

Behind the scenes tour of the Bush Presidential Library Collections

Week 10: Shipping from here to there


Discussion and Practice packing objects

Week 11: Abstract and outline of final project presented for in-class assessment and critique

Week 12: Preventive Care and Museum Visitors


NSCC Museum Collection Care http://www.collectioncare.org/cci/ccip.html


Field Trip to the Conservation Research Laboratory, Riverside Campus

Week 13: Planning for the worst and helping your neighbors

Jane Hutchins, First Aid for Art: Essential Salvage Techniques (2006)
Rebecca Buck, “Insurance for the Times: Terrorism Coverage”
http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/MN_JA03_Insurance.cfm 2003

NSCC Museum Collection Care, Emergency Preparedness
http://www.collectioncare.org/pubs/v2n1p4.html

Disaster Relief for Museums, International Community of Museums (ICOM),
http://icom.museum/disaster_relief/links.html

Week 14: Presentations of Final Project

Final exam TBD