

ON DISPLAY: PARTNERING SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND RESEARCH & INSTRUCTION THROUGH STUDENT-LED EXHIBITS

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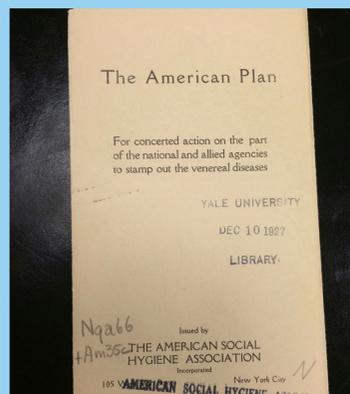
Proposed Program to Develop Student-Led Exhibits:

1. SC&A and research instruction librarians identify and approach faculty who may be interested in a curricular partnership in their 100-level classes. Depending on the nature of SC&A resources at a given institution; art, history, and liberal arts programs may be the most receptive and have the most applicable to learning outcomes.
2. This committee of staff, faculty, and librarians identify a SC&A collection or area of focus that will be examined by the class. Within that area, smaller facets of study are identified. These facets provide groups of students within the class a more narrow focus of analysis.
3. Joint class instruction is provided by SC&A and research staff related to: **How to browse collections, use a finding aid, access materials, examine primary sources, understand sources, form conclusions, and use secondary sources** to understand the artifact. The goal is to include both primary and secondary research methodologies.
4. Students are divided into small “curatorial groups” tasked with investigating one pre-determined facet of the overall display. They will have to **perform primary and secondary analysis, draw conclusions, determine what items to display, develop an installation plan, and draft text-based exhibit aids.**
5. Exhibit space is secured in the library or other prominent campus location. (Student unions or administrative buildings may see larger, or different, viewerships.) Installation will be performed by students with the aid of SC&A staff to ensure security of artifacts.
6. The class will host an opening reception for friends, classmates, family, faculty and staff. Each curatorial group will be required to speak about their research with visitors. This model is based on the practice of an “art opening” where artists discuss their work directly with viewers.
7. A written component will be required to ensure students engage in written research skills pertaining to the exhibition process. This also serves to help faculty evaluate the success of the program in relation to curricular requirements.
8. Information from the exhibit will be archived online through a digital exhibit program. Photos of the exhibit and items on display, as well as curatorial statements and relevant metadata, will be preserved and searchable on the library’s website. This creates an archives of the program accessible to patrons, researchers, students, and donors.

Examples of Student-Led SC&A Exhibits:



Wolfe, Katie. (2019). Art History, Theory and Criticism, Interdisciplinary Sculpture, “To Cast an Echo,” Decker Library Exhibits and Displays, accessed July 16, 2019, <https://deckerlibrary.omeka.net/items/show/79>.



Stern, Scott. (2015). “The American Plan: The U.S. Government’s Forgotten Plan to Lock Up Women and Free the Country from the Scourge of Disease.” Student Research at Yale University Library 2015, accessed July 16, 2019, <http://exhibits.library.yale.edu/exhibits/show/student-research-at-yale-univ/ap-1>



Students of ENG 313. (2017). Jane Austen 1817-2017: A Bicentennial Exhibit. University of Michigan. Retrieved from: www.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/jane-austen-bicentennial/context



Moses, Deyane. (2019) “Blackives: A Celebration of Black History at MICA.” Retrieved from www.mica.edu/art-articles/details/blackives-a-celebration-of-black-history-at-mica/

The Closed-Stacks Issue

The nature of archives and special collections separates them physically and mentally from the other resources offered by academic libraries. Students versed in research are often familiar with more readily accessible scholarly information sources – texts, articles, indexes, and reviews.

Special collections and archives (SC&A) diverge from this by offering a different mode of study built on first-hand examination of objects, with scholars forming conclusions based on primary source materials. These materials are often rare and kept from circulation for their own conservation. How does a library overcome the necessity of closed-stacks and simultaneously make patrons aware of the resources available to them? What skills are necessary for students to be able to access, assess, and learn from SC&A materials?

Bringing Students to SC&A

This proposal involves the partnership of SC&A staff, research and instruction librarians, and faculty to create a project targeted towards incoming first-year and transfer students, that assigns students to curate an exhibit featuring special collections materials and resources. Requirements teach students how to access special collections materials, use finding aids, and best practices for primary source scholarship.

“...STUDENT CURATED DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL EXHIBITIONS INCREASE THE VARIETY OF LEARNIN EXPERIENCES IN WHICH THEY CAN PARTICIPATE.”
(CHEN, 2015, P.65).

The exhibit component differs from solely text-based outcomes by employing different processes in analysis and presentation. Students entering a collegiate educational environment for the first time may have trouble engaging with standard research practices, but experiential learning can lead students into academic analysis by engaging with materials in multifaceted ways.

“EXHIBITS ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, BECAUSE THEY ARE ‘READ’ DIFFERENTLY THAN TRADITIONAL ‘TEXTS’ OR ‘STORIES.’ EXHIBITS HAVE ALWAYS OFFERED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ‘HYPER-LINKED’ DISCOURSE.”
(FABIAN, 2003, P.45)

Gathering Resources

Personnel:

- Special collections & archives librarians and staff
- Research & Instruction librarians
- Faculty willing to devote instructional time and resources to engage with pertinent collections (art, history, and liberal arts are good starting places)

Material and digital resources:

- Display space and resources (supports, cases, visuals aids)
- Online exhibit hosting platform (ie. CONTENTdm, LibGuides, Omeka)
- Documentation tools (scanners, printers, cameras)

Outcomes & Goals

Results:

- A physical exhibit and verbal presentation.
- A written component, such as a traditional paper or response.
- An online archive for the display.

Lessons: “Students will...”

- ...develop familiarity with SC&A resources and how to access them.
- ...acquire familiarity with research modes and methodologies for primary sources and non-textual artifacts.
- ...understand the value of SC&A collections to their research.

Impact:

- SC&A resources will see a greater usage as more students gain familiarity with the department. This is a demonstrable outcome, measurable by usage statistics.
- Physical items will be on display outside of the closed-stacks, with images and information preserved online, where it will reach the patron and donor community at large.
- An ongoing partnership with SC&A and research staff, with better understanding of the roles of each and the merits of SC&A resources in instruction and research.

Considerations

- The uncomfortable truth of many archives collections is documentation of of historical prejudice. Some of the materials are likely to be uncomfortable or offensive. How is this addressed within the lesson? How can students understand and still make valuable conclusions about the resource?
- Given how job duties in libraries are ever-increasing, are staff able to accommodate a lengthy and intensive program?
- How is success measured? Is it direct feedback from students & faculty? Is it dependent on tracking usage and engagement statistically? Are librarians benefitting from this partnership?

Conclusion

Student curation has the potential to create a unique form of engagement with SC&A materials that not only aids students, but faculty, donors, visitors, and other library staff, while increasing visibility of collections and promoting the scholarship of the institution.

“DISPLAYS...CAN BE A SURPRISINGLY EFFECTIVE LOCUS FOR PARTNERSHIPS WITH GROUPS ACROSS CAMPUS.”
(MALONEY, 2012, P.281)

As Maloney says, exhibits can result in effective relationships outside the library, but also within. The dual goals of this program – both usage of SC&A collections and knowledge of research techniques directly related to curricular outcomes – requires a close partnership between intra-library SC&A and research instruction departments.

References:

Chen, Amy., Pickle, Sarah., Waldroup, Heather. (2015). Changing and Expanding Libraries: Exhibitions, Institutional Repositories, and the Future of Academia. The Process of Discovery: The CLIR Postdoctoral Fellowship Program and the Future of the Academy, 167, 62-79. www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub167/

Fabian, Carole Ann., et.al. (2003). Multiple Models for Library Outreach Initiatives. The Reference Librarian, 82, 39-55. www.hawthornpress.com/store/product.asp?sku=J120

Maloney, Michelle M. (2012). Cultivating community, promoting inclusivity: collections as fulcrum for targeted outreach. New Library World, 33(5-6), 281-289. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03074801211226364>