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ANDREW SIMPSON

Division of Environmental and Life Sciences, Macquarie University,
Australia

Integrating university museums into Museum Studies programs

The development of „Museum Studies”

People seeking entry to the museum profession are confronted with three basic choices. The traditional pathway consists of obtaining a degree within an academic speciality followed by on-the-job training in a museum. In recent times, this is often initially undertaken in a voluntary capacity. Another pathway is through undertaking a variety of training options such as short courses and workshops offered by museums or professional associations. The final and most recent entry point is by obtaining a university degree, diploma or certificate in museum studies. Despite the importance of museums as cultural institutions there is little consensus on the most appropriate professional preparation for museum work.

Simmons identified the many variable definitions attributed to the terms museology, museum studies and museum science¹. The lack of consensus concerning definitions means that intellectually diverse tertiary education programs may utilize similar nomenclature. In this paper the broad definition of Simmons is adopted for the term „museum studies”. As follows: „*Museum studies*’ is the study of museums, the study of the history and function of museums, their roles in society, and how museums acquire, preserve, and interpret collections. Museum studies includes collecting, collection care, collections management, exhibition, public programs, architecture, management, finances, research, and conservation”².

Simmons discussed the historical development of museum studies programs, noting that prior to 1900 there was nothing available. On the job training was the only form of professional development. He covered the development of early programs during the

¹ J. Simmons, Museum Studies training: Academic variations and a new model for developing countries. Paper delivered as Keynote Speaker at the Museums Australia 2005 Conference Politics and Positioning, Sydney, NSW, Australia, 1–4 May 2005 (Unpublished, accessed through organisational web site <http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au>).

² J. Simmons, *idem*.

twentieth century and noted that structured training was split early on between short courses and university degrees in both North America and Europe. The pioneering university based schemes were few at first, but saw a proliferation during the 1970s. This was in part allied to the expansion of tertiary education in many western nations. Museum Studies training commenced in Australia in 1975 at the University of Sydney, a program that still continues today.

The proliferation of programs has also seen considerable diversification as individual institutions attempt to eke out specialised niches in the education marketplace. The various merits of alternative programs have been explored by a number of authors³. Furthermore, there has been extensive discussion in the literature on the nature and substance of museum studies as a field of intellectual endeavour⁴. While neither of these issues are analysed here, it is worth noting that even today, the vast majority of museum studies programs are delivered only at post-graduate level. This means they require an academic speciality of relevance to an existing museum, and hence potential employer, to be completed at undergraduate level prior to enrolment. Many of these programs also have some form of „hands-on” learning, work experience or internship as a compulsory part of the academic credit to be undertaken.

Today, the International Council of Museums’ (ICOM), International Committee for the Training of Personnel (ICTOP) maintains a website listing a compilation of education options for prospective and/or practicing museum professionals covering 23 nations⁵. A range of institutions (predominantly universities) offer a bewildering variety of certificates, diplomas, masters and higher degrees. While the listing does not claim to be comprehensive, it gives a flavour of the diversity available as reflected in the degree names. For example, in the United Kingdom 16 providers are listed as offering 24 programs with very little in common regarding nomenclature. It is possible to undertake Museums and Collections Management, Heritage Management, Museums and Gallery Management, Arts Management, Cultural Management or Arts and Museum Management programs. It is also possible to undertake Museum Studies, Heritage Studies, Cultural Heritage Studies, Art Gallery and Museum Studies, Gallery Studies or Museum and Gallery Studies. There are also presumably more specialised programs available under the banner of Cultural Memory, Archaeological Heritage and Museums, Conservation and Museology.

In the United States there is a similar plethora of variably named programs, but there is a slight popular preference for the generalised term, museum studies. The ICTOP website lists 30 U.S. institutional providers. There are similarly named programs to those available in the United Kingdom. In the U.S., however, it is also possible to undertake programs in Non-Profit Management, Heritage Resources Management and Community Arts Management. There are also programs available in Historical Administration, Public History and Visual Arts Administration.

Australia, with its relatively small population and tertiary education sector, has seen a proliferation of programs in recent years. There are multiple programs in Museum

³ E.g. C. Malt, *Museology and museum studies programs in the United States: Part one*, „Museum Management and Curatorship”, 1997, 6, p. 165–172; J. Simmons, *ibidem*.

⁴ H.H. Genoways, *Museum studies programs are not prepared for the Ph.D.*, „Curator”, 1996, 39, p. 6–11; I. Marovic, *Museology as a field of knowledge*, „ICOM Study Series”, 2000, 8, p. 5–7; J. Rounds, *Is there a core literature in museology?*, „Curator”, 2001, 44, p. 194–206.

⁵ See <http://www.city.ac.uk/ictop/courses.html>, accessed 1 January 2006.

Studies and programs in Sustainable Heritage Development, Cultural Heritage and Art Curatorship. The majority of these have commenced in the last 10 years.

From this diversity the following general observations are possible.

1. The majority of programs are delivered from a cultural heritage and/or art history academic perspective.

2. The majority are delivered at postgraduate level.

3. The majority have a component of workplace experience

From a cursory exploration of their on-line promotional material, it is unclear how many of the universities with museum studies programs also maintain university museums and collections. Clearly, however, some universities that offer museum studies have no campus museums. This does not detract from the quality of their programs as many universities have developed extensive networks with external institutions, associations, corporations and government and community groups. This can enable opportunities that cover „item 3” above. In fact, some universities offer programs in full partnership with large city, state or national museums. This paper argues, however, that those universities that do maintain their own museums have a range of additional possibilities not available to those that do not.

A clearer picture of the relationship between museum studies programs and university museums will emerge after some research, currently being designed and soon to be implemented.

Functions of campus museums

Investigations into university museums⁶ and many publications about university museums⁷ inevitably cite the three principle functions of university museums as teaching, research and outreach, or modifications of those themes. The first two are most frequently cited as closely allied to the core business of a university.

Objects contain unique information and collections contain unique contextual data. These are of great pedagogical value to the skilled teacher and rich sources of data for the inquisitive researcher. Most university collections were initiated either as a result of research activity or as a support for teaching programs, or possibly some combination of both these functions. Teaching and research primarily serve an internal campus audience at least in the initial phases of collection development. This can change as collections grow in significance. A research collection may become a comparative framework for scholarly investigations and thus attract external researchers. They may

⁶ E.g. University Museums Review Committee, 1996. *Cinderella Collections: University Museums and Collections in Australia*. Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, Canberra; A. Simpson, R. Boyes, B. Gollan, P. Gofton, M. Schneider, R. Searle, A. Stewart-Zerba & G. Ridsdale, 1996. Museums and collections: Maximising their contribution to teaching and learning, research and community service [in:] F. Broadbent (ed.), *A year of challenge: The 1996 Action Learning Program*. Tertiary Education Institute, p. 1–18. The University of Queensland, Brisbane.

⁷ E.g. H.H. Genoways, *Challenges for directors of university natural science museums*, „Curator”, 1990, 42, p. 216–230; A. Simpson, *The Geology Museum, University of Queensland and options for campus based collections* [in:] A. Skates (ed.), *Where are we going. Conference Proceedings, Evaluation in Scientific and Cultural Institutions*, Australian Museum, Sydney, 1991, p. 165–177.

also act as a trigger for new research initiatives, thus supporting an international network of discipline specific scholars on behalf of their host university.

Collections may also attract students with a pre-existing disposition to certain disciplines. In recent times, however, there has been increasing pressure to reduce the object content in teaching programs in many of our universities. This is based on the mistaken belief that on-line delivery of tertiary education programs is just as effective and more cost efficient. Ease of access to research collections has also been partially enhanced through recent digital technologies. Nevertheless, both the teaching and research roles of university collections are primarily discipline specific and internally oriented.

When collections are allocated a display space, developing into museums, they become capable of fulfilling the third function of outreach. University museums can be deployed as the 'shop-front-window' of an institution and a point of vital contact for the external community. They can, therefore, be used for student recruitment and can demystify the host institution for communities that otherwise would have no contact with a university⁸. They may also provide a distinctive focal point for potential interaction with a broad range of disparate communities⁹. They are an open doorway for community access to the campus. Museums often are the place where a school student first engages with the university environment. Visitor experience is an important component of the regard in which a university is held. This indirect contribution to student enrolments is naturally difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

Many universities have developed art collections that decorate the campus. University museums and galleries are therefore often viewed as enhancing the cultural experience of staff and students. This is occasionally noted as a fourth function for university museums. It is, however, the internally focussed equivalent of the 'outreach' function. Some authors have suggested more specialised functions for some university museums, such as ameliorating environmental behaviour¹⁰ and even as therapy for mental illness¹¹. These are essentially highly specialised examples of the outreach or community engagement function.

It is clear that the existence of museums and collections on campus provides an infrastructure of staff and facilities that can be deployed in various ways for the delivery of museum studies programs. Whether these facilities are distributed across campus under the aegis of different faculties or divisions, or if they are combined into a single multidisciplinary facility or cultural precinct, effective and collaborative management structures are vital. Engagement with museum studies may be considered as an extension of the teaching and learning function. It is critically different, however, as university museums under these circumstances provide a pedagogy that extends beyond their

⁸ A. Simpson, D. Yerbury, P. Stanbury, K. Van Dyke & V. Rigg, 2003. *Community engagement and development through university museums*. Charting Uncertainty: Community, Capital and Citizenship. Proceedings, Second International Inside Out Conference, Ipswich, Queensland. 3–5 July, 2003. Published online at <http://www.uq.edu.au/insideout/proceed.htm>

⁹ C. Mayer, *University Museums: Distinct sites of intersection for diverse communities*, „Museumologia”, 2003, 3, p. 101–106.

¹⁰ A. Simpson, *University Museums and Formative Experiences in Natural History* [in:] P.B. Tirrell (ed.), Proceedings of the Third Conference of the International Committee for University Museums and Collections (UMAC), 2005a, p. 103–108. Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, Norman OK, USA.

¹¹ M. Adachi, „*Muse Therapy*” a new concept for museums, „Museumologia”, 2003, 3, p. 117–120.

discipline specific origins. This is financially important to those universities where funding is tied to student enrolment levels. Administrators need to ensure that funds flow back to support those museums that contribute to the delivery of museum studies programs.

Apart from the availability of museum practitioners on campus there are many other practical benefits to engaging university museums in museum studies programs. The availability of exhibition spaces and collection objects provides limitless potential for student learning through structured and unstructured, individual and group projects. There are abundant resources available for the teaching of exhibition design, collection development, information management, research and curatorship, and even marketing and public programs. These can be pursued through a series of significant project specific internships for academic credit.

Because of their interdisciplinary potential¹², university museums that are integrated into museum studies programs have the potential to experiment with unusual subject matter, innovative interpretation strategies, novel education programs and challenging and experimental curatorial concepts. They can be a template where museum practice and theory interact in new ways generating new museological concepts. This is often not possible in many of the larger public museums that are required to satisfy a broadly based mainstream constituency. University museums can provide fertile training arenas for future museum practitioners.

Museum Studies at Macquarie

Macquarie University commenced an undergraduate degree program in museum studies in 2002¹³. It is a double degree program that combines speciality areas of study in disciplines of relevance to many museums (e.g. palaeontology, biology, indigenous studies, history) with core subjects in museums and information management. The program is targeted at students who seek a broad-based liberal degree with both science and arts components. There are very few museum studies undergraduate programs world-wide, but the construction of a double degree allows focussed undergraduate training in a number of selected academic disciplines. Not all the students enrolling in the program are necessarily seeking a vocational outcome in museums. Some are simply seeking to be equipped with a broad range of skills and knowledge in a rapidly changing employment marketplace.

In 2004, Macquarie University introduced a postgraduate diploma and Masters program in Museum Studies. Students enrolling in these programs are seeking a vocational outcome. The postgraduate program recognises that in a changing economy, an increasing number of students want programs with an emphasis on work-place based learning. The programs consist of three modules, a coursework module, a workplace experience module and a research project module. To complete the postgraduate di-

¹² B.I. Murphy, *Encircling the Muses: the multi-disciplinary heritage of university museums*, „Museumologia“, 2003, 3, p. 9–16.

¹³ A. Simpson & R. Mawson, *Macquarie University's undergraduate degree in museum studies*, „Museumologia“, 2003, 3, p. 133–138.

ploma students need to successfully undertake two of the three and to complete a Masters program all three modules must be undertaken successfully.

The range of museums and collections available at Macquarie has been outlined elsewhere¹⁴. The delivery of both undergraduate and postgraduate programs is supported by a University Art Gallery with an exhibition schedule that aims at capturing the full range of university intellectual endeavour. There is a Sculpture Park that provides opportunities for exploring with students issues of aesthetics and public spaces¹⁵. There is an Australian History Museum with a focus on the topics of federation, Australians at war, immigration and the republican movement that provides learning experiences on the representation of history in museums. The Biological Sciences and Earth Sciences Museums enable students to investigate the public communication of science through exhibition design and public programs. The Museum of Ancient Cultures has a very active schools outreach schedule. This enables museum studies students to experience the development of curriculum specific programs first hand. The university has the 'Lachlan Macquarie Room'. This is a small, on-site recreation of a historic room that is the basis of a significant digital archive of historical materials. Despite the lack of a display space, the university's herbarium enables teaching opportunities in cataloguing, information management and natural history. The university also employs an Archivist and Conservator who make their skills as practitioners available to the teaching and learning context.

Objects, collections and skilled museum professionals have allowed us to develop a range of student projects that bolster the operation of our university museums. The following are recent examples that capture some of this potential.

A Masters student researched and curated an exhibition in the University Art Gallery.

A Postgraduate Diploma student redesigned and installed displays of teaching specimens in one of the science laboratories.

A Masters student undertook an extensive research project on the art collection of the Institute of Early Childhood Education at Macquarie. This led to the production of a series of extended labels to aid interpretation.

One exhibition by an Honours student on the changing nature of the 'Anzac' myth was installed in the University Library's temporary exhibition space in collaboration with the Australian History Museum.

Two Honours student exhibitions were established in the Earth Science Museum during 2005. One entitled „Extinctions are forever” focussed on extinction events throughout the fossil record. Another focussed on the profusion of various life forms at the base of the Cambrian Era popularly referred to as the 'Cambrian Explosion'. Both of these projects highlighted work undertaken by the university's palaeontology group. The museum studies projects entailed effective exhibition communication of complex scientific phenomena. Apart from researching and designing the exhibition, one student developed a comprehensive education program for young children including writing and illustrating a book and developing an associated education kit. The program was run as part of the University's contribution to the 2005 „National Science Week” in Australia.

¹⁴ E.g. A. Simpson *et al.* 2003, *op.cit.*

¹⁵ K. Hill, this issue.

In all these cases considerable effort was expended in matching the right students with the right projects to develop new skills through the work place experience. Because of constraints on staff time and resources, none of these projects were likely to have occurred without the availability of museum studies students.

The program also entails the development of extensive networks with external organisations. Links for student project work have been developed with the National Trust, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and a range of museums and galleries including large state institutions and smaller volunteer run museums. These external ventures also entail study tours to regional areas and regions outside of Australia¹⁶. Our initial venture to Thailand included a visit to the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development at Mahidol University, Salaya Campus, west of Bangkok, to visit their Department of Museum Studies. From this arose a proposal to inaugurate an exchange program with Mahidol. Initial activities will focus on staff and student exchange. Discussions on external supervision for staff doing research degrees and shadowing programs for mid-level administrative staff have also been explored. Details of the projects undertaken in partnership with external agencies via the museum studies program will be the subject of separate paper.

The museum studies program is monitored and continually assessed by two groups. The Macquarie University Museums Advisory Committee, as part of a broader brief, designs projects specifically for the Museum Studies program and ensures that the quality of these collaborative ventures is of a high standard. A Museum Studies Advisory Committee, with representatives from past and present students and external museums and other cultural organisations plans the broad strategic development of the programs with museum studies personnel.

Concluding Remarks

As a recently established international network of university museum practitioners, UMAC is uniquely positioned to not only enhance the training of future museum personnel, but also foster the development of new museological practices. UMAC is capable of developing internships, study tours and a range of other professionally formative experiences for students. An international, cross-cultural perspective is an increasingly important aspect in the vocational development of many professions.

Given the high value most societies place on museums as trustworthy institutions, surely the training of future museum professionals is an important issue. University museums are the obvious places where that training should occur. They, more than most other museums, are capable of extending the boundaries and broadening the scope of the modern museum experience. University museums can and should be experimental laboratories from which innovative museum practice extends to the broader museum community.

¹⁶ A. Simpson, *Tsunami and Phuket*, „Museums Australia Magazine”, 2005b, 13(4), p. 13–14.

STRESZCZENIE

Integracja muzeów uniwersyteckich w programach studiów muzealnych

Zbiory uniwersyteckie gromadzą tradycyjnie celem wspierania programów nauczania w ramach określonych dyscyplin akademickich. Duże kolekcje są przedmiotem badań dzięki nabywaniu kolejnych obiektów lub też w ramach podejmowania nowych badań porównawczych. Gdy zbiory rozrastają się w muzea posiadające programy wystawiennicze, mogą one pełnić również trzecią funkcję związaną z powiększeniem zakresu swego oddziaływania lub zaangażowania społeczności na rzecz muzeum. Wprowadzenie wielodyscyplinarnych programów studiów muzealnych pozwoliłoby więc na nadanie muzeom uniwersyteckim roli dydaktycznej, wykraczającej poza konkretne dyscypliny akademickie. To ważne dla tych uniwersytetów, których finansowanie jest związane z liczbą przyjmowanych studentów. Innymi korzyściami czerpanymi z takiej strategii są: pełniejsze wykorzystywanie umiejętności muzealników uczelnianych, większe możliwości współdziałania między muzeami uniwersyteckimi, wykorzystanie stażów podyplomowych do konkretnych zadań projektowych w muzeach uniwersyteckich oraz większy zakres związków z organizacjami poza uniwersytetem. UMAC, jako organizacja międzynarodowa, ma duże możliwości w zakresie promowania wymiany studentów podyplomowych studiów muzealnych. Rozwój międzykulturowych doświadczeń edukacyjnych jest nieoceniony dla pracowników muzeów w zglobalizowanym świecie przyszłości.