

The Collections at the University of Vienna

About the project

After a short orientation period of four months the University of Vienna started a project in January 2007 with one employee who has been working full time since July. The mission of this project is to find out which and how many collections the University of Vienna accommodates and to present them to the public.

What do we mean with “collections”?

We are considering all teaching and research collections, including materials such as coins, stones, plaster casts, animal preparations and skeletons, plants, models, instruments, documents, letters, photographs and slides as well as audio- and video tapes.

Plaster casts
Department of Classical Archaeology



Identifying the collections

Most important for identifying the collections was the opening balance sheet from 2004. Information given in this document could only be partially used because it just examined the material value of the collections; therefore a lot of collections, especially slide collections, have not been considered at all. Looking at websites of the departments and institutes of the University of Vienna was quite helpful but most of the departments do not mention their collections on their homepages or even have a special website. That was why there was written a circular in January 2007 which was sent to departments where university collections were assumed asking for an appointment to have a look at the collections. By the end of January 2007 the first collections were visited.

This process of identifying the collections has not been finished and the definite number of collections at the University of Vienna is still unknown.

Presentation

Presenting the Collections is a very important task because a lot of collections are unknown even within the departments where they are stored. In August 2007, a folder was printed in English and German giving general information about the project and the collections, which is available at the porter of the University. As a next step we would like to present our website which will offer a list of all collections, announcements of events in the collections and information about the activities of the project. Furthermore, we have also been thinking about creating a virtual exhibition.

In addition, we are planning lectures and guided tours through selected collections.

Providing assistance to custodians

In the course of visiting various collections and talking to custodians, it turned out that most of the people who were responsible for a collection were professors who are looking after the collections additionally to their normal teaching and research work. We have found out that it would be very helpful offering them information concerning collection management including inventory (databases, digital asset management systems), conservation, preservation and presentation.

Activities

That was why we decided to organize semi-annual meetings for the custodians with lectures about different topics, such as “University Museums and Collections worldwide” or “Digital Collection Management”. These meetings also serve as a platform for the custodians to make requests, suggestions and to exchange their experiences.

Since 2005, there has been the possibility for staff members and members of the alumni association of the University of Vienna to visit some of the collections and facilities within guided tours. These activities have been organized by the department of public relations and event management and are taking place four times a semester.

The Collections at the University of Vienna

As the project considers not only collections that are in possession of the University of Vienna, but also collections stored at the University, the project is called “University Collections *at* the University of Vienna”.

Collections being outsourced

There are collections that are completely or partially on loan to a museum, for example the Globe Collection of the Department of Geography and Regional Research which is now stored in the Globe Museum at the Austrian National Library. These collections are also included in the list.

Where are the collections stored?

Most of the collections at the University of Vienna are stored in repositories and are not accessible for the public. Some departments present their collection in showcases,



only few departments have an own collection room where lectures are held, too. Two departments have exhibition rooms where their collection is presented and which can also be visited by interested public.

Show room
Department of Pharmacognosy

Conclusion

It is conspicuous that a lot of university collections are nearly unknown. Therefore it is very important to present and promote the unique qualities of the collections to the public and to provide a forum for the exchange of information, activities, cooperation and good practises between the curators to create an awareness of the importance of these collections.