

Putting University Collections to Work in Research and Teaching

UMAC's 9th International Conference

10th -13th September 2009, Berkeley, California

Introduction

University museums and collections occupy a critical nexus within the university, serving as they do all of the university's primary missions of research, teaching and public service, which correspond roughly to the user groups of students, faculty and non-academics. Having devoted the 8th International UMAC conference to the public face of university collections, we turn this year to consider their relationships to and roles in research and teaching.

According to the 1952 *Polski Słownik Archiwalny* – the Polish Archival Dictionary – the archive is:

“... an institution called upon to guard, collect, sort, preserve, keep and render accessible documents, which, although they are no longer useful on a daily basis as before, nonetheless merit being preserved.”

It is worth considering the relevance of this definition to the status of university museums and collections. The archival role of public museums, their responsibilities to preserve the material heritage they contain, seems clear enough. In the case of university museums and collections, however, the description of being “no longer useful on a daily basis as before” is seldom accurate. Very frequently, the objects held in academic collections are still quite actively used in research and in the classroom. The dividing lines among the accumulation of objects in individual faculty laboratories, departmental teaching collections and fully-fledged university museums are blurry. Indeed, university museums are full of objects, specimens and artifacts that entered the university in the course of faculty research and teaching activities. In justifying the relevance (and in some cases even the continued existence) of university collections, their ongoing utility in relation to the teaching and research missions can be paramount.

We particularly welcome presentations from the full range of university collections: universities are very different from public museums in containing research materials that may be lodged in formal museums, departments, and individual faculty labs and offices, and that span the full disciplinary range of the university. This multiplicity of collections, and the slippage among them, has created challenges and opportunities that may be analyzed and even celebrated as part of the unique culture and history of university museums. How do collections respond to changes in their user communities, to conflicting demands by different user groups, or to changing research technologies? Collections of historical scientific instruments are good examples of artifacts that have shifted from being research tools (in the sciences) to objects of research themselves (in the humanities). How might these sorts of transformations be encouraged? What are some examples of renewed scholarly or scientific activity that have resulted from either new museum initiatives? How can preservation as a primary mission be balanced with active research and providing classroom access? We encourage papers that give an historical perspective to these questions, papers that address instances of current programs, difficulties and successes, and papers that suggest new models for developing the research and teaching potential of museum collections for diverse user communities.

- Where are university collections and museums placed within the administrative structure of the university? Are they allied to one particular department or discipline, or are they freestanding in their research affiliations? How has administrative placement affected research uses, demands by different user groups, and other functions of the museum? How can collections make themselves more visible to new scholars and students so that they can maximize their research potential?
- All disciplines change over time, asking new questions, employing new methods and exploring new objects. Inevitably this means that the relationships of material collections to their disciplines also shift. How have these changes affected the research potential of collections? One dramatic instance in recent decades has been the emergence of increasingly sophisticated forms of DNA analysis, which have changed not only the nature of cladistics but also transformed the relevance and viability of natural history collections.
- Interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary collaborations are now at the forefront of most research, even in the humanities. How have such collaborative research programs affected the use of collections?
- How are collections used for teaching? Are there accessibility issues that must be solved? In particular, how are they made available to undergraduates for research as well as teaching or display purposes? Are there instances where public or community groups become involved in the teaching or research functions of the museum? How can university museums and collections best convey the findings of current research to students and the general public? Can and should the research mission of a museum be integrated into its public mission?

Further information will be provided on UMAC's Website:

<http://publicus.culture.hu-berlin.de/umac/2009/>

Call for Papers

UMAC is currently inviting submissions for oral and poster papers focusing on the Conference's theme *Putting University Collections to Work in Research and Teaching*.

Papers may be presented in three forms:

- a) 15 minute formal talks
- b) 10 minute informal 'experiences'
- c) posters

Authors of papers will be asked to participate in a discussion session following the presentation. The language of the conference will be English.

If you would like to offer a paper, please send an abstract (in English) to: Mark Meadow, Chair of the 2009 Review Committee, meadow@arthistory.ucsb.edu, or Cornelia Weber, UMAC Chair, chair@umac.icom.museum. Abstracts will be accepted electronically until **March 31, 2009**. If you wish to present a paper please supply us with the following information:

- Title of submitted paper
- Type of paper: 15 minutes, 10 minutes or poster
- Name(s) of Author(s)
- Affiliation(s) & full address(es)
- Email, phone & fax of corresponding author
- Abstract in English (not to exceed 300 words)
- Support equipment required

All submissions will be considered by the Review Committee who will assess each abstract for relevance to the theme and clarity of ideas and expression.

Authors of papers accepted will be asked to give UMAC the right to publish the paper on UMAC's Website and in the conference proceedings University Museums and Collections 3/2010 (see: <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/umacj/>). All presenters must supply a digital copy of their paper on arrival in Berkeley and before their paper is presented.