Museums can be defined as objects organized in some specific intellectual environment. The purpose of this course will be to acquaint students with the range of recordkeeping systems that have been used by museums to document those collections. Records maintained in a museum's archive should include both those records that document individual objects in the museum's collections as well as those that document the business of the museum in acquiring, preserving and interpreting those objects. In this course, we will take the view that both types of records are properly considered part of the museum's archives, rather than restricting the institutional archives to the administrative records alone. In reality, the responsibility for custody of these two types of records will vary according to the individual museum.

Evidence of the origins of many modern American museums as private collections can be seen in this emphasis on the objects themselves and the relative autonomy of the curatorial departments - both of which significantly influence the institutional recordkeeping systems. However, these long-held attitudes are changing, with increased public expectations of museums as educational institutions, external mandates restricting the collection of natural and man-made objects and public accountability for non-profit organizations. Perhaps of greatest importance to the management of museum archives is the increased use of electronic communication in all aspects of the museum, including its administration, the development and delivery of public programs and the research carried out by its staff.

Course Goals

Beginning with an overview of the history of museums, students will study techniques of examining the organizational structure of a museum, including functional analysis, in order to determine what records are created by the museum in the course of its business, which of those records are essential to the museum and where those records are likely to be in the museum. Students will learn how to examine policies governing the activities of the organization, both internal and external, for their influence on records creation and retention.
This course will change the way students look at museum exhibitions, particularly challenging their acceptance of those exhibitions as static and unbiased. The course will also provide an opportunity to apply previously learned archival theories to a specific institutional setting.

**Course outline**

Following an introduction to the history of museums, from the private collections of the Renaissance to the public institutions of the late 19th century, the course will focus on the organizational structure of 20th century United States museums, their stated and observed rationale for collecting and research, techniques and philosophy of exhibitions of those collected materials and the evolving role of museums in public education. In examining museums and their organization in the late 20th century, students will consider the changes wrought by the increased use of electronic communication of many of the transactions and records of continuing value to the institution, the public’s expectation of electronic access to collection information, and the changes in intellectual property agreements, particularly the ownership of electronic research information. Three major types of museums will be discussed: art museums, natural history museums and local history museums.

Adapting Helen Samuels’ functional analysis of colleges and universities as a basis for identifying and appraising institutional records of continuing value, this course is built on the belief that the basic functions of museums are to

- Convey knowledge
- Manage collections
- Conduct research
- Sustain the institution
- Authenticate objects

**Course requirements and grading: Student responsibilities**

Each student will be responsible for reading the weekly required texts, selecting at least one additional text from either the recommended readings or some other material of their own discovery, and preparing all readings for class discussion. Students will inform their colleagues of their choices, by posting their citations to the class listserv. The course will be part lecture on the theory of museum recordkeeping systems, illustrated with actual examples from museum practice and case studies, and part directed discussion, building on students’ comments on the readings.

---

Hint: As a method for dealing with the volume of readings, select an aspect of museum functionality that interests you, then read with that topic in mind. This may help focus your readings and class discussions.

A significant portion of the student's grade will be based on his or her participation in class: any student not participating in the class discussions will receive no higher than a "B" for the course. The remainder of the grade will be based upon the assignments below.

The final grade will be based on the following:
- Class participation and discussion 30%
- Exhibition reaction paper 10%
- Policy paper 30%
- Final paper 30%

The first paper will be a 2-3 page paper written following a visit to any museum in the area. Students are to select a particular museum exhibit and comment on the bias, implicit or explicit, in the selection and presentation of the material in the exhibit. Students will discuss the intent and purpose of the exhibit's designer and then report on visitors' reaction to the exhibit. This paper will be due in week 2.

The second paper will be 8-10 pages and will discuss museum policies dealing with some aspect of recordkeeping systems. Students are to create a policy document and write an accompanying document summarizing the literature dealing with this policy. Students will additionally write an accompanying memo explaining the policy, such as might be used to justify the policy to the museum’s director or as a cover letter accompanying the policy to the museum’s staff. Sample policies might include requests for permission to use the archives, requests for permission to publish archival material from the collection, requests to mount archival material from the museum's collection on another website, policies on staff collecting and consulting, ownership of personal papers created within the context of the museum or deaccessioning. This paper will be due in week 7.

The third paper will be 20-25 pages and will discuss the significance of recordkeeping systems in relation to specific areas of museum accountability, such as the restoration of looted art, the repatriation of cultural objects, the museum accreditation process, deaccessioning, exhibition design or cooperative scientific databasing. The methodology used in this paper could be a case study of the process of the record of a particular object as it moves through the recordkeeping system. A 1-2 page summary of this paper will be due in week 4. This paper will be due in week 11 and should be accompanied by a short statement of where it might be published along with your recommendations on what alterations might be needed in order to make it more acceptable for the publication chosen. Be prepared to discuss your paper in week 12.

NOTE: Each student will be expected to meet at least once during the course with the instructor in order to discuss his or her progress and work on the assignments.
**Course requirements and grading: Incompletes**

No incomplete grades will be given for this course, unless there were emergency circumstances affecting a student's ability to meet course requirements.

**Course requirements: style manual**

Students should adhere to the latest edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* in the preparation of their papers. Papers should use at least 1.5 line spacing.

**Course requirements: Book purchases**

The items chosen represent a portion of the available literature on this topic. While copies of the material listed will be available on reserve in the SIS library, students are strongly encouraged to read the articles and chapters in situ, in order to become familiar with the overall content and style of these journals and the essay collections. Students should also browse the selected organizational websites for general information about these organizations and their services, as well as the increasing number of online publications mounted at these sites.

The following will be available for purchase from the University of Pittsburgh bookstore:


The following book may be purchased from the Society of American Archivists. See http://www.archivists.org for ordering information.


**Other Resources**

Museum Studies Database Center for Museum studies. Maintained at the Smithsonian Arts & Industries Building, this online database contains "bibliographic citations to
theses and dissertations on museum theory and practice, and to articles indexed from the ALI-ABA proceedings and course of Study in Museum Administration, and from the Journal of Museum Education." To search this database online, follow link from the Research/Bibliographies Catalog to the Museum Studies Database heading at http://www.siris.si.edu/index.html.

Museum Learning Collaborative, including bibliographies and course syllabi. http://mlc.lrdc.pitt.edu/mlc


American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) “a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to advancing knowledge, understanding and appreciation of local history in the United States and Canada.” http://www/aaslh.org/

Useful journals

History news
International journal of cultural property
Museum International (UNESCO)
Museum management and curatorship (now International Journal of Museum Management and curatorship)
Museum News
Museums Journal, which now includes Museums Bulletin.
Museologist

Course schedule

Week 1 – Introduction

Introduction to the course, its methods, requirements and goals.
Introduction to the history of museums and their changing purposes.

Theme: Museums are object-based collections with a responsibility to collect, preserve and interpret. Understanding the origins and organization of museums is essential to appraising a given museum's archives.

Recommended readings


**Week 2 – Recordkeeping systems in Museums**

NOTE: Exhibition reaction paper due. Be prepared to discuss your paper in class.

Theme: Different types of collections generate different types of records. How have museums recordkeeping systems changed as museums have developed? Why are museums different from libraries and what is the responsibility of museum archivists?

What has influenced the evolution of museum registration systems? What are the specific functions of registration systems and how do they vary across different types of museums? Can accession records be used for accountability?

What institutional mandates are there to keep records and for what reasons? What is more important - the record or the object? How will digitization of records - and images of the objects themselves - transform recordkeeping systems and accountability?

**Required readings**


**Recommended readings**


Examine the 3 recent reviews by the American Association of Museums of the US museum environment (the 1968 *Belmont Report*, the 1984 *Museums for a new century*, and the 1994 *Museums count*, based on the 1989 National Museum Survey). Do they provide a mandate for recordkeeping as part of the definition of museum science?
Week 3 – Functional analysis of museums as a tool for appraisal of records

Theme: Introduction to functional analysis of museums. Understanding the function and operation of the institution is essential to determining the role and responsibility of the museum archivist. In understanding the organization of an institution, one must be aware of the changing public expectations of what educational or entertainment opportunities are offered by a museum.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


Pearce, Susan M. *Archaeological curatorship.* London: Leicester University Press, 1996. Part 2, pp. 67-129, "the formation of the museum archive" discusses the collection
management functions of all aspects of archaeological collections, not just the accompanying documentation.


**Week 4 – Convey knowledge. Who is the audience? Bias and accountability.**

NOTE: Outline for final paper due. Be prepared to discuss your topic.

Theme: Who is the audience? Who makes the selection of which past is to be exhibited? What does a museum document through exhibitions? Who is the audience for museums and to what extent are museums accountable to and influenced by that audience? What are the social influences, resulting in the "History Wars" which limit the authority of museums in their choice of exhibition content?

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


Pearce, Susan M. *Archaeological curatorship*. London: Leicester University Press, 1996. Especially her "The contemporary context", pp. 7-64 which begin with the history and development of the museum exhibition of archaeological artifacts (in the United Kingdom) and concludes with a discussion of ethics and politics.


**Week 5 – Convey knowledge. Museums as educational institutions**

NOTE: Be prepared to give a progress report on your policy paper, which is due in week 7.

What is the nature of formal and informal education within museums? Is the museum delivering what is expected by the audience? How has that expectation changed over time? What sort of visitor interaction do museums design for? Modern museums provide onsite interpretation through docent-led tours, in addition to simplified labels. For off-site users, the Web delivers another experience. What user evaluation techniques are museums using and what effect does those evaluations have on the development of public exhibitions?

Required Readings


Museums and the web, organized by Archives and Museum Informatics. Conference proceedings online at [www.archimuse.com](http://www.archimuse.com)


**Recommended Readings**


*Museum News*. Entire issue of 72(1), January/February 1993 deals with the museum as an educational institution.

**Week 6. Manage collections. Relationship of policies to records.**

By identifying museum policies for the creation and use of collection-based and administrative records, how can that information be used to identify which records have continuing value to the institution? Collection objects have life cycles which also influence the nature and continuing value of the records associated with them. What tools, such as thesauri, procedural and data standards, have been developed to enable consistent access to collection information, both within and amongst institutions?

**Readings**


Recommended Readings


Booth, B. "Integrating fieldwork and museum records - a case study" in Dust to dust: Field archaeology and museums, Society of Museum Archaeologists, conference proceedings 11:39-41 (1986)


**Week 7. Manage Collections. Preservation, Including Facilities Management**

NOTE: Museum policy paper due. Be prepared to discuss your paper in class.

Theme: Is it real?
Appraisal of records should precede the decision to preserve records. What parallels are there in preservation assessment theory to appraisal theory and how can those theories be
applied to appraisal of museum records? Are the responsibilities of stewardship and access mutually exclusive?

Required Readings

"Conserv o grams: procedures, techniques and materials to care for your museum objects." See the National Parks Service list of publications in their Museum Management Program at http://www.cr.nps.gov/csd/publications

Conservation On Line. Stanford University Library Preservation Department. Explore this extensive site for many resources dealing with disaster planning, management and response. http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/disasters


Ogden, Sherelyn, ed. Preservation of library & archival materials: a manual. Andover, MA: Northeast Document Conservation Center, 1999. Also see the NEDCC website at http://www.nedcc.com for the online version of this work plus further information on conservation surveys, including item-level surveys and facilities surveys.


Recommended Readings


**Week 8. Manage Collections. Museum law and external warrant.**

Theme: Records that support the legality of ownership of collections.

What outside influences, including the external warrant of legislation, limit the collecting of artifacts and natural productions? Examples of specific external warrant, especially repatriation of cultural materials and human remains taken from indigenous peoples or looted in times of war. What types of information can archives supply and how valid are they as evidence?

What archival records are necessary for a museum to be able to respond to repatriation requests or the accusation that they have received stolen goods?

**Required Readings**


Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). See http://www.cr.nps.gov/oad/nagpra for information on this legislation, enacted in 1990 which required museums and federal agencies to inventory Native American human remains and cultural items in their collections and to consult with culturally affiliated Indian tribes, Alaska Native villages and corporations and Native Hawaiian organizations regarding repatriation.

United States Information Agency (USIA) website on International Cultural Property Protection. For background on background on the problem of international pillage of artifacts and the U.S. response; information about relevant laws, bilateral agreements and U.S. import restrictions; recent news stories and magazine articles, see [http://www.usia.gov/education/culprop/index.html](http://www.usia.gov/education/culprop/index.html)


**Recommended Readings**


Institute of Art and Law and the Journal of Art Antiquity and Law.  [http://www.pipemedia.net/ial](http://www.pipemedia.net/ial)


**Week 9. Manage collections. Intellectual property and personal papers in museum archives.**
Progress report on your Accountability paper. Be prepared to discuss your paper in class.

What is the effect of organizational structure on determining what records have continuing value to the institution? What is the impact of institutional policies on what constitutes personal papers and how those policies are enforced? What are institutional policies on intellectual property and ownership of research-related information? How does the loss of the "documentary safety net" with the increased use of electronic communication at all stages of the process of science affect the capture and retention of museum records?

Many museums, acting to protect their administrative position against potential conflict of interest cases, include an explicit statement on the institutional ownership of all data and collections acquired by a staff member while in the employ of the museum. While abuse of inside information, or knowledge acquired in the course of collection-related research is probably more prevalent in art museums than natural history museums, probably due to the greater opportunity for monetary gain, policies in intellectual property need to be articulated and enforced.

Required Readings


**Week 10. Manage collections. Computerization of recordkeeping systems and electronic access to collection surrogates and collection information**

What is the impact of the conversion from paper to electronic recordkeeping systems? Discussion of access vs. ownership debate in archives. Paper-based systems of collections records, often maintained according to some loosely defined internal standard, do not always survive the translation to the corresponding electronic system. How can archival records, including policy manuals, be used to help reconstruct some in-house procedure? What new concerns about rights management arise from the electronic access to collection records?

---

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


**Project.** Los Angeles, CA: Getty Information Institute, 1998. See also AMICO (Art Museum Image Consortium) online at [http://www.amn.org/AMICO](http://www.amn.org/AMICO)


**Week 11. Conduct Research. Authenticate Objects**

NOTE: Major paper due.

What are the records of research? How are museum archives used to authenticate objects? What resources can be used to answer the question "Is it real?"

"The late Bernard Berenson said at the end of his life, of which seventy-odd years had been largely spend in problems of attribution, that it did not matter who painted a picture as long as it was a real picture." 3

**Required Reading**


---

Week 12. Professionalism and Continuing Education

What constitutes research in museum archives? Is there a museum profession and how do you train for it? Similarity between these discussions and those of the archival profession. Discussion of professional associations and educational resources.

What is the changing nature of museum staff and their responsibilities to museum collections and activities? Has the striving for recognition of museum science as a profession altered their attitude toward the work to be done? In 1967, Washburn compared museum curators with librarians, who in the process of pursuing professional status had turned into "a service organization - a body of technicians capable of organizing and serving the ultimate professional user, but incapable of utilizing for their intended purpose the very material purveyed." Noting that the "day of the scholar-librarian is about over" he goes on to remark that archivists "being less subject to public scrutiny and demands, have been slower in following the trend set by librarians. Many scholar-archivists, though the academic professionals using the archives tend to treat them as though they existed solely to serve the scholar in the manner that gas station attendants exist to serve the automobilist."

Required readings


---


**Recommended Readings**


# Course Rationale

# Course Goals

# Course Outline

# Course Requirements and Grading: Student Responsibilities

# Course Requirements and Grading: Incompletes

# Course Requirements: Style Manual

# Course Requirements: Book Purchases

### Other Resources

# Course Schedule

## Week 1 – Introduction

---

## Week 2 – Recordkeeping Systems in Museums

---

## Week 3 – Functional Analysis of Museums as a Tool for Appraisal of Records

---

## Week 4 – Convey Knowledge. Who is the Audience? Bias and Accountability

---

## Week 5 – Convey Knowledge. Museums as Educational Institutions

---

## Week 6 – Manage Collections. Relationship of Policies to Records

---

## Week 7 – Manage Collections. Preservation, Including Facilities Management

---

## Week 8 – Manage Collections. Museum Law and External Warrant

---

## Week 9 – Manage Collections. Intellectual Property and Personal Papers in Museum Archives

---

## Week 10 – Manage Collections. Computerization of Recordkeeping Systems and Electronic Access to Collection Surrogates and Collection Information

---

## Week 11 – Conduct Research. Authenticate Objects

---