

Oregon Museums Association 2018 Conference, Hood River, Oregon

University Collections, Access, and Lessons for the Rest of Us

Monday, September 10, 2018, 3-4:15pm

University and college art collections occupy a unique position as resources for hands-on learning and centers of critical thinking. In this session, representatives from several of Oregon's universities and colleges will converse about their institution's collections and how students are involved. Subjects of this conversational panel will include the unique opportunities offered by collections for hands-on learning, challenges and benefits of working with undergraduates, and translating lessons learned for non-university museums.

Please contact eleanorsandys@gmail.com for questions, or if you would like to use the content herein for publication or coursework.

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3:00pm

Introduction

Welcome! Before getting into the session, I'd like to do quick introductions. I am Eleanor Sandys, Registrar & Research Specialist for the Oregon Arts Commission, and I will be moderating the panel. The presenters here today are Jonathan Bucci, Colleen Gotze, and Sarah Kenney.

Panelist Intros

Sarah Kenney moved to Portland in 2006 to work at the Museum of Contemporary Craft having completed a Bachelor's degree in Textile Design and Design Management in

Manchester, England. Sarah has worked with education and non-profit organizations for over 14 years, and has a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and Policy from Portland State University. In her current role with Portland State, Sarah serves as the Executive Administrative Coordinator for Planning, Construction and Real Estate. In this role, Sarah manages a number of programs, one of which is the campus art collection.

Colleen Gotze has been the Registrar and Program Coordinator at the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College since 2010. Before moving to Portland, she was Registrar at the CCS Hessel Museum at Bard College, and prior to that, Development Associate at Independent Curators International in New York. While pursuing a Master's degree in Art History at Richmond, The American International University London, she held an internship in the curatorial department of Dulwich Picture Gallery, and prepared research notes for the American Federation of Arts exhibition catalogue *Rembrandt to Gainsborough: Masterpieces from Dulwich Picture Gallery*. She got her first museum job in 1993 at the college art gallery at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Jonathan Bucci is Curator of Collections and Exhibitions at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University where he has worked for the past 12 years. Prior to his position there, he was Assistant Director and Curator of Collections at the American University Museum in Washington, DC. He has extensive experience with managing collections and developing exhibitions within an academic setting. Over the years he has worked with students and faculty on a wide range of projects.

3:05pm

Why this topic matters

The objects, the tangible material evidence of culture, is one of the main things that drew me to the museum profession. As a collections professional, I love the material objects. I also have the privilege of directly working with collections objects. But so many people don't... and they don't even know the objects exist. It's like that saying about a tree falling in the forest—if an object exists in a box on a shelf and no one is there to experience it, does it still have meaning?

So something I think about a lot is collections access. I'm talking about access in two ways. First, in terms of growing peoples' ability to access the objects and artworks in our museums, beyond exhibitions. Objects and artworks—the actual tangible material things—offer unique ways of thinking about culture, history, the natural environment, the ways that people think about the world and about each other.

Second, I mean growing access in terms of the diversifying the audiences that have historically visited museums. And this includes working to include younger adults. According to the [National Endowment for the Arts Survey of Public Participation in the Arts](#), out of all U.S. adults, 18-24 year olds, as well as those 75 and older, are least likely to

visit an art museum or gallery or an historic site. And the percentage of 18-24 year olds that reported visiting these places dropped between 2008 and 2012. So we need to look to spark the passions of these younger people.

Universities are uniquely positioned to use their collections as resources for hands-on learning. On college campuses, critical thinking is actively pursued. There is a ready-made audience and a distinct community for exhibitions and programming. Undergrads are seeking new experiences and looking to college resources to help them successfully traverse their coursework.

- So how are universities involving students and providing access to their collections? What are universities doing that other museums might learn from? What are the benefits and challenges of working with undergrads? How can non-university museums engage college students?

- Today we'll talk about these questions and more. The panelists will each share about their institution's collection and briefly how they work with students. Then we'll get into the conversation. There will be time for questions from the audience towards the end.

3:10 pm

Panelist presentations

- Jonathan Bucci, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University
- Sarah Kenney, Portland State University
- Colleen Gotze, Cooley Gallery, Reed College

3:30pm

Conversation

E: Thanks for sharing a little about your institutions and the collections-related work that you do!

Topic 1 – How undergraduate students are engaged

Our first topic for conversation is how undergraduates are engaged at your institution. Before we delve in I want to ask: Do you think of students as a primary audience for your collection?

Among these universities, there is really a range of how collections are accessed and how students are engaged. There are class visits, one-on-one access, research, internships, work study positions, mentoring, and committees or working groups.

I'd like to start with talking about some different ways of working with students. Let's start with engagement at the class level.

Jonathan, how do you work with classes at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art?

Follow up: You mentioned that Willamette University has museums studies classes. Are these classes engaged differently?

Sarah or Colleen are there museum studies courses at your institutions?

Colleen, we saw images of the viewing space that Reed has. How do you use that space for class and student access? [collections storage *and* display]

Also in the university setting is a focus on research. Do you find that students and/or professors utilize the collection for research?

Let's turn to student engagement in collections management activities.

Sarah, you are in a unique position in that Portland State University does not have a museum (yet) or positions devoted full time to its growing art collection. In this setting, can you talk about the role that students play in collections management?

Jonathan, can you talk about your stepped internship/work study approach to working with students?

Colleen, you also work with student interns for collections management work. When we talked previously you mentioned that you provide access not just to collections, but also to knowledge. Can you talk about your work with student interns? [Mentorship]

3:45pm

Topic 2 – Students and Collection: Mutual Benefit

We've touched on many benefits that both university and students get from working together – research creates more robust knowledge of collections, interns and work study students contribute a great deal of time to getting projects completed, students benefit from hands-on training and access to professionals with experience and knowledge [professional network]... and even help write policy.

- What are your thoughts on physical access and being close to artwork or objects versus digital access or via pictures in a book?

Are there any benefits for either students or institution that should be emphasized or that we haven't touched on yet?

Do you think particular types of students can benefit more from working with a collection – such as art history majors or museum studies students?

Something we haven't talked about is the senior art major exhibition you do annually at the Hallie Ford Museum, Jonathan. I think of particular interest is the studio visits [advise students on the practical knowledge of how to display their work]. When I was in grad school I did research around a project that paired a non-university museum with an arts college community. I discovered that art students felt that the museum could really be of service to their community by giving space for students to exhibit their work and access to the curators for feedback on their portfolio. Collections managers could also help by talking about materials, maintenance and installation.

3:55pm

Topic 3 – Lessons for Non-University Museums

We've covered how you engage students, and the mutual benefits of engagement for student and institution. Now I'd like to turn the conversation to a third topic: lessons for non-university museums.

As we've talked about, university museums and collections are unique in terms of communities served, physical location, academic and financial resources... So what can we learn from the experience of university collections professionals for non-university museums?

What are some possible points of engagement between non-university museums and undergraduate students?

- Museum studies classes or program
- Contact administrative assistant of specific programs (not professors)
- Identifying specific classes that would be interested in what your museum collects
- Career services
- Student interest groups (for example, museum clubs)
- Growing knowledge of your museum on campus

- When talking about undergraduate internships, a question that comes up is: Is it worth the effort and time? Would one of you like to speak to this?

- Do you have any thoughts on internships for credit versus not-for-credit? And paid versus unpaid work in museums?

- Are there any other tips you'd like to share with non-university museums about working with undergraduates, or about collections access in general?
- Match project with student's interests

- Has anyone in the audience worked with students? Would you like to share your experience?

4:05pm

Questions from Audience

4:15pm

Thank you and goodbye

Just a Few Resources

College art night at Phoenix Museum <http://www.phxart.org/event/77a85981-d574-3d1a-9eb5-2dda6e783224>

College night at the High Museum of Art
<https://www.midtownatl.com/do/college-night-at-the-high1>

8 US Colleges Lending Their Art Collections to Students
<https://hyperallergic.com/413897/college-art-collections-student-loans/>

Why Do Colleges Have So Much Art?
<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/why-do-colleges-have-so-much-art/506039/>