Lecture 4 – Museums intro

i290-rmm
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Collection Management Systems – the center of scholarly ecosystem

- Digital Assets and Content
- Field Data Collection
- Field Station Sensor Network
- Exhibitions
- Molecular Lab Information Management
- Archives and Libraries
- Outreach and Data Sharing
- Education
- Geospatial Services
- Taxonomy and Thesauri
- Collection Management Systems
- Archives and Libraries
What is a collections management system?

• Core resource/Repository of collections information
• Not a digital asset management system, but must support collections with digital objects/work, etc.
• Supports the business of managing objects in a collection; akin to a finance system used to manage an museum’s finances
• Information captured supports what museums do day-to-day
• A means to mitigate uncertainty (about what is known about museums’ collections)
What is a collections management system?

Tool to enable convergence among museums, archives, libraries

• Helps define uniqueness
• Helps define where value lies
• Tool to help delineate what the museum knows/doesn’t yet know
• Mechanism for establishing/maintaining trust: curatorial, educational, public, administrative
• Means to help enforce policy
• Place to author/maintain legal documents
What is a collections management system?

- Traditional approach is inward looking business model. CollectionSpace trying to change this to a collaborative model.
- Tension: Admin functions vs. Publication functions
  - Collection cataloguing and access
  - Need to share: i.e., the means to contribute to something outside the institution coupled with the means to manage internal needs such as collections care
- Sharing => Interoperability, which means two things:
  1. Machines needs to speak the same language
  2. Humans need to assign agreed labels
What is a CollectionObject?

Objects in a collection have a plethora of data associated with them. *CollectionObjects* help manage an object’s information and associations.
CollectionObject is the hub around which an object’s information is associated and linked.
Stuff vs. Activity

• All collections have *stuff*.
• Stuff must be documented for:
  – Discovery
  – Access
  – Legal requirements, auditing, etc.
• *Aboutness* describes intrinsics of stuff
• *Activity* is often more important
Common themes

- Spectrum defines baseline for management
- Most collections do cataloging, accession, etc. (must, to be a museum).
- All need controlled vocabularies, but vary in which they use.
  - AAT, TGN, ULAN, Nomenclature (more later)
  - Local term lists, domain-specific vocabularies
  - Most life-science collections require taxonomy, taxonomic identification
Activities

• Museum internal activities
  – Object Entry (Intake), Accession, Object Exit
  – Loans (In and Out)
  – Exhibits

• Research activities
  – Research queries and visits
  – Citations of objects, publication references
  – Expeditions, collecting events

• Outreach, education, and other uses
  – Dissemination
  – Class visits and curriculum support
  – Cultural preservation programs

• Relationships
  – between objects, places, events, entities, etc.
UC Berkeley
Collection Management Systems

• Berkeley Language Center’s Archival Catalog & Circulation System (Berkeley Language Center)
• CineFiles (Pacific Film Archives)
• **SAGE (UC Botanical Garden)**
• History of Art Visual Resource Collection (HAVRC) (Department of History of Art)
• Specimen Management System for California Herbaria (SMASCH) (University & Jepson Herbaria)
• Slide & Photograph Image Retrieval Online (SPIRO) (Architecture Visual Resources Library)
• PAHMA Collections (BNHM Consortium, Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology)
• Biocode Specimen Database (BNHM Consortium)
• Essig Specimen Database (BNHM Consortium, Essig)
• HERC Specimen Database (BNHM Consortium, HERC)
• UCMP Specimen Database (BNHM Consortium, UC Museum of Paleontology)
• MVZ/Arctos Specimen Database (BNHM Consortium, MVZ)
• Plus … Bancroft Special Collections and many others
Intake/Object Entry

• Pre-acquisition
• Initial description
• Tombstone data
• Donor record
• Decision to acquire: yes/no
• Record is dynamically built using pre-entry record as basis
• Additional information added as a result of:
  – research
  – exhibition
  – publication
Accession/Deaccession

- Legal research (conflicts, rights, regulations)
- Scholarly research (verify artist, history, etc.)
- Budgetary research (cost to acquire)
- Strategic research (relation to collection needs)
- All lead to a recommendation, decision
- Want to capture motivations for pursuit of item, knowledge gained through research, document recommendation and decision
Cataloguing

• Life of the object
• Legacy descriptions
• Often about the process more than result
• Object metadata
  – Attributes
  – Documentation of historical significance, etc.
  – Spiritual or cultural significance
  – Dollar value
  – Security
  – Access
Conservation activities

• Motivators: pre-/post-travel (loans), insurance.
  – Need to know condition, history of condition
  – Determination: needs conservation or not?
• Preservation and care
  – Direct actions taken to change the condition of an object
  – Planned treatments, care
  – What kind of gloves do I need to wear?, etc.
  – Can be enormous, detailed documents related to treatment
Loans (in/out)

- Core collections management activity
- May be about exhibition planning
- Rights
- Legal Terms
- “Whose paperwork?”
- Fixes information within a context: duration, name of exhibition, venues, etc.
Loans and Exhibition Planning

• Loans start with curatorial research: what works does museum need to bring in?
  – Contacts at other institution, terms, facility reports

• Loans are usually made for an exhibition
  – Connected to the exhibition planning process
  – Loans occasionally done for storage, not exhibition

• After loan agreement done, additional workflows
  – For rights management (eg. photography, promotional use of images, etc.)
  – Negotiation of legal terms for loans; whose paperwork: theirs or ours?
More info around loans

- Transportation logistics & care
- Packing/Unpacking
- Insurance
- Condition reporting
- Issue of receipt
- Condition reports
- Return dates, and tracking
Tracking Loan History

• Need to track this history of loans:
  - Have we loaned this object before?
  - Are we loaning this out too much?
• Sometimes this is done within the collection management system, other times elsewhere
• Major variation in the amount of loans: Met loans thousands, Walker loans fewer
• Balance of trade issues
Special Conditions of a Loan

- Lighting conditions, humidity, etc.
- Special conditions governing the loan get sent off very early in the process
- Verifying that the conditions are being respected
- Where does the history of loan conditions get stored?
- Information that reflects the history of the object
- Most institutions don't record this information
Location/Movement

• Leverages Location Authority (location names normalized, correspond to real physical locations).

• Process
  1. Request for movement
  2. Search for record
  3. Determine current location
  4. Determine future location
  5. Secure item (Go to Transport)
  6. Condition report
  7. Movement Method
Audit

• Checking whether an object is there and if not, figuring out why, how big is the problem, etc.

• How big: informal audit, formal audit
  – Location inventory - every 10 years
  – Location audit - every year
  – Entry method: “Found in collections”

• Quality assurance, condition assurance

• Pull all the objects with mediocre condition report (and audit them)

• Who touched an object (and/or its metadata)
More Spectrum Procedures

- Conservation and collections care
- Object condition checking and technical assessment
- Rights management
- Use of collections
- Valuation control
- Inventory control
- Object Exit, Deaccession and disposal
- Loss and damage
- Insurance and indemnity management
- Risk management