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Special Collections and Student Curators: Public History through Primary Sources

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Special Collections and Student Curators: Public History through Primary Sources

Abstract
Musselman Library's Special Collections and College Archives at Gettysburg College has worked with over 70 student curators on art gallery exhibitions and public history exhibits. These curatorial experiences provide hands-on interactions with artifacts and artworks and high-impact collaborations among students, interns, archivists, librarians, historians, digital projects specialists, gallery directors, conservators, and preparators. The final result is often breathtaking and always informative. This presentation discusses practical recommendations and workflows for well timed, well researched, and effectively installed student curated exhibits.

Keywords
Special Collections, College Archives, college history, Gettysburg College, library conference, public history

Disciplines
Archival Science | Library and Information Science | Public History

Comments
This presentation was given at the ACLCP 2018 Spring Conference for the Associated College Libraries of Central Pennsylvania as part of the program High Impact Practices: Conversations about Making a Difference in Harrisburg, PA on March 9, 2018.

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Special Collections and Student Curators

Public History through Primary Sources

Carolyn Huber Sautter, Director of Special Collections and College Archives
Musselman Library, Gettysburg College

ACLCP 2018 Spring Conference – March 9, 2018
Special Collections and College Archives
Staff and Exhibit Partners

- Director of SC & CA
- College Archivist
- Digital Projects & Collections Manager
- Conservator
- Special Collections Assistants
- Interns/Student workers
- Faculty
- Schmucker Art Gallery Director
- Schmucker Art Gallery Preparator

Exhibit Venues for student curated shows
- Special Collections Reading Room
- Gettysburg College’s Schmucker Art Gallery Project Space
Timing is Everything

- Excellent Content
- Student talent
- Campus Interest/Support
- Topical Anniversary
- Audience Potential
- Curricular ties
- Public History Minor
Student Curated Exhibits in Special Collections Reading Room
(1-3 student curators)

• *Slaves, Soldiers, Citizens: African American Artifacts of the Civil War Era* (Africana Studies Student Worker)

• *Slow to Heal: The Evolution of Medicine from the Civil War Era to WWI* (Fortenbaugh Exhibit Intern)

• *Owl & Nightingale Players, 1914-2014: One Hundred Years of Drama* (Theatre Arts Alums)

• *Old Gettysburg Back to Thee: Student Social Memory through the 1960s* (Spec Coll Student Workers)

• *Right to Serve Right to Lead: Lives and Legacies of the USCT* (Brian C. Pohanka Intern – Civil War Institute)
Timetable

- Idea
- Collaborators
- Learning Goals
- Research
- Storyboard
- Permissions
- Promotion
- Installation
- Refinement
- Documentation
Slaves, Soldiers, Citizens: African American Artifacts of the Civil War Era

Scott Hancock’s Slavery, Rebellion & Emancipation class

President Janet Riggs ’77 and Lauren Roedner ‘13
Student Curated Exhibits of Special Collections Materials in Schmucker Art Gallery
(1-24 student curators)

Art + Politics
Curated by students in Shannon Egan’s “Art and Public Policy”
November 19 – December 10, 2011

The Gettysburg Cabinet
Curated by students in “Wonders of Nature and Artifice: the Renaissance Quest for Knowledge”
Felicia Else, Dept. of Art and Art History and
Kay Etheridge, Biology Dept.
November 16 – December 8, 2012

Visualizing War
Curated by Andrew Egbert ’13, Natalie Sherif ’14 and
Alexandra Ward ’14
August 29 – September 29, 2012

Judy Chicago: The Birth Project
Curated by Francesca DeBiaso ’12
January 25 – March 8, 2013

Andy Warhol: Polaroids & Portraits
Curated by Emily Francisco ’14
August 30 – September 28, 2013

Field and Factory: Chinese Revolutionary Posters
Curated by Molly Reynolds ’14
November 1 - December 6, 2013

Method and Meaning: Selections from the Gettysburg College Collection
Curated by students in Yan Sun’s “Methods in Art History”
November 7 – December 12, 2014

Art, Artifact, Archive: African-American Experiences in the Nineteenth Century
Curated by students in Shannon Egan’s “Art and Public Policy”
January 23 – March 7, 2015

Pray for the People Who Feed You: Voices of Pauper Children in the Industrial Age
Curated by Rebecca Duffy ’15
September 9 – October 24, 2015

The Figure in Art: Selections from the Gettysburg College Collection
Curated by students in Yan Sun’s “Methods in Art History”
November 6, 2015 – March 4, 2016

Bodies in Conflict: From Gettysburg to Iraq
Curated by Laura Bergin ’17
September 9 – October 22, 2016

Methods of Nature: Landscapes from the Gettysburg College Collection
Curated by students in Yan Sun’s “Methods in Art History”
November 4 – December 9, 2016

Flora and Fauna in East Asian Art
Curated by students in Yan Sun’s “Methods in Art History”
January 26, 2017 – March 9, 2018
Class Curated Exhibits of Special Collections Materials in Schmucker Art Gallery

Art + Politics

Methods in Art History
Collaboration for Exhibit Support

Special Collections Staff
• Selection Pool
• Initial Class Visit
• Research Assistance with Research & Instruction Department
• Mounts/Frames for Exhibit items
• Transportation of Exhibit items

Faculty Members
• Syllabus
• Semester Timetable
• Research Guidance for Pieces
• Exhibit Catalog Introduction

Gallery Staff
• Catalog design
• Installation
• Promotion of Exhibit
• Catalog printing
• Gallery opening
• Exhibit tours
Gettysburg Cabinet of Curiosities

Curated by students in two courses

*Wonders of nature and artifice: the Renaissance quest for Knowledge*

Felicia Else, Associate Professor
Department of Art and Art History

and

*Exploration of the Marvelous: Art and Science in the Renaissance*

Kay Etheridge, Professor
Biology Department
Wonders of Nature and Artifice

http://wonder-cabinet.sites.gettysburg.edu/2017/
Collaborative Lessons

• Listen and think creatively
• Look for the natural fit to curriculum
• Draw from talent already present
• Discuss a feasible timeline
• Anticipate and facilitate ways for collaborators to balance the expected steps with all the unexpected challenges
  – Communicate progress throughout
  – Address challenges together
• Give credit where credit is due
• Collaboration is synergy – welcome help
• Document successes and lessons
• Celebrate exhibit catalog as example of student scholarship
• Assess impact of experience (numbers and student reflections)
FLORA AND FAUNA IN EAST ASIAN ART

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