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# TEXTILES, COMMUNITY, AND UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT

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TEXTILES, COMMUNITY, AND UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT

BY

MARY ELIZABETH CORRIGAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE

IN

TEXTILES, FASHION MERCHANDISING AND DESIGN

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2014

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS  
OF  
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2014

## **ABSTRACT**

Rhode Island is home to many historical societies, small museums, and historic houses that include textiles in their collections. The University of Rhode Island (URI) Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design department (TMD) offers a masters program in historic textiles and costume. The density of small cultural institutions that have textile or costume collections in Rhode Island provides an opportunity for the URI TMD Department to position itself as a locus for engagement, education, and research in Rhode Island and beyond. University-community collaboration is not a new development. States founded land-grant universities to serve as resources for their communities, though the definition of the community to be served and the types of service to be provided have evolved over time. Within university contexts, promotion and tenure systems codify engagement, and major granting agencies are supporting engagement within university settings, between universities and other cultural institutions, and between local, state, and regional organizations.

This thesis describes the results of a project aimed at identifying potential linkages between the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island Cultural Institutions (RICI). Changes in the attitudes of the academic community and philanthropic organizations are examined, specifically related to ideas of outreach and engagement, using the current and potential relationships between RICIs and TMD as context. Participants showed interest in strengthening contact with TMD at URI, though an “academic as expert” model was revealed in participant anxiety related to accessions, storage and exhibition practices. Semi-structured interviews and site visits with participating institutions allowed ideas for inter-institutional partnership to

develop without predetermined “outreach” activities planned. With this data and supporting literature on community engagement, a model for institutionalizing and sustaining community engagement is proposed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Blaire Gagnon for her patient guidance and support as this project evolved. I would also like to thank committee members Margaret Ordoñez and Ronald Onorato for their interest and guidance, and Dr. Linda Welters for suggesting potential participants.

Every participant who gave their time for this project has my deepest gratitude, and I hope that their investment of time and energy will be in some way repaid by an increase in community engagement in Rhode Island.

I am especially grateful for the support of my family, especially my mother, who was the first to encourage my interest in textiles. I would also like to acknowledge the encouragement and friendship of Hilary Baker, Megan DeSouza, Megan Martinelli, Jennifer Pisula, and Ray Schultz. Most of all, I would like to thank my husband Mark for his tireless encouragement, 24-hour computer help, and unquestioning belief in me since the day we met.

## PREFACE

This thesis has been prepared using the Manuscript Format as proscribed by the University of Rhode Island Graduate School. It will be submitted for publication to the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*.

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MANUSCRIPT

*Will be Submitted to Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*

**Textiles, Community, and University Engagement**

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## INTRODUCTION

As a public land-grant institution, one of the University of Rhode Island's missions is research and public service.<sup>1</sup> Each college and department at the university addresses this mission and implements it in its specific area of study. The University of Rhode Island Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design (TMD) department is home to the Textile Gallery, a Textile Conservation Laboratory, and the Historic Textile and Costume Collection (HTCC). The Textile Gallery showcases student and faculty-curated exhibits. The conservation lab provides graduate students an opportunity to gain experience treating both HTCC textiles and contract work with individuals and institutions. The HTCC has a threefold mission of teaching, research, and exhibition, and everyday clothing and textiles made and worn by generations of Rhode Islanders is one of the HTCC strengths.<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island was an important textile producer through the Second World War, and the HTCC has become a valued repository for textiles, apparel, and related ephemera with local provenance. The combination of textile scholars, graduate students developing skills for museum work, and a textile collection with a Rhode Island focus housed in the state's flagship public university makes the TMD department uniquely situated to foster symbiotic relationships with local cultural institutions to promote public engagement and its scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate, "Mission" University of Rhode Island, <http://www.uri.edu/home/about/mission.html> (accessed December 29, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> University of Rhode Island, "Historic Textile and Costume Collection" University of Rhode Island, <http://www.uri.edu/hss/tmd/Collection.html> (accessed April 14, 2014).

University-community collaboration is not a new development. While land-grant universities were founded with the intent that they would serve as a resource for their communities, the definition of the community to be served and the types of service to be provided have evolved over time.<sup>3</sup> State-funded universities pioneered community outreach programs working with social services or ecological conservation. Twenty years ago, the literature on university programming also focused on outreach. Ralph S. Foster Jr., William I. Sauser Jr, and Donald R. Self's *Marketing University Outreach Programs* discusses case studies of projects at the local, regional, and national levels.<sup>4</sup> Their survey of university programs outlines typical outreach goals and target audiences—from Elderhostels where retirees engage in intensive weeklong courses to agricultural extension programs.<sup>5</sup> These are typical university outreach programs where the university develops programming and presents it to an outside group for consumption. While outreach generally refers to an organization developing programs for an audience, currently, universities are re-evaluating the “service” component of their missions and shifting to engagement, which encourages “mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.”<sup>6</sup>

Current university initiatives towards engagement rather than outreach are gaining increased scholarly attention though an understandable delay exists between

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3 Carole A. Beere, James C. Vortuba, and Gail W. Wells, foreword to *Becoming an Engaged Campus: A Practical Guide for Institutionalizing Public Engagement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

4 Ralph S. Foster Jr., William I. Sauser Jr., and Donald R. Self Jr., *Marketing University Outreach Programs* (New York: Hayworth Press, 1994).

5 Foster, Sauser, and Self, *Marketing University Outreach Programs*.

6 Amy Driscoll, “Carnegie's Community-Engagement Classification: Intentions and Insights.”

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/elibrary/Driscoll.pdf>

initiating projects and disseminating outcomes in scholarly publications.<sup>7</sup> For example, Tulane University's strategy for recovering from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 placed community engagement at its center. Tulane is collecting data from faculty, students, and alumni about the project that will benefit not only Tulane's programming, but also inform other university engagement initiatives.<sup>8</sup> Since much of the rhetoric of engagement emphasizes institutional support, the literature does not include many models for establishing individual engaged communities. Notable exceptions include Christina F. Kreps' study of changes in museum training at the Museum Pusaka Nias in cooperation with the University of Denver's Anthropology Museum Studies Program.<sup>9</sup>

Corrine Perkin's analysis of the Bendigo Art Gallery "Beyond the Rhetoric" of promoting engagement projects provides a nuanced discussion of ethical and political negotiations necessary to avoid "tokenistic and unsustainable projects."<sup>10</sup> Diane M. Doberneck, Chris R. Glass, and John Schweitzer surveyed how faculty in different fields communicate their engagement research and the language used by administrators to communicate university engagement.<sup>11</sup> The authors then developed a

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7 Rolando D. Herts, "From Outreach to Engaged Placemaking: Understanding Public Land-grant University Involvement with Tourism Planning and Development," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 17, no. 1 (2013): 97-111.

8 Vincent Illustre, Anna M. Lopez, and Barbara E. Moley. "Conceptualizing, Building, and Evaluating University Practices for Engagement," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 16, no. 4 (2012): 129-63.

9 Christina F. Kreps, "Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23, no 1 (March 2008): 23-41.

10 Corinne Perkin, "Beyond the Rhetoric: Negotiating the Politics and Realizing the Potential of Community-Driven Heritage Engagement" *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, nos 1-2 (January-March 2010): 107-22.

11 Diane M. Doberneck, Chris R. Glass, and John Schweitzer, "From Rhetoric to Reality: A Typology of Publically Engaged Scholarship," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 14, no. 4 (2010): 5-30.

typology of publicly engaged scholarship that addressed the variety of terms and the disciplines that employ them. The variety of labels used to describe engagement not only “signifies a welcome maturing and deepening of the engagement movement in the disciplines,” but also reflects the increasing pressure for universities to prove their worth to society by articulating these activities.<sup>12</sup>

As universities reexamine and redefine their mission of service to their community, a reassessment of the term “community” is also in order. Literature on university-community engagement notes that the university's context is only one part of the environment in which inter-institutional engagement takes place.<sup>13</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a community as a group of people identified by themselves or others as members of a community based on a shared interest, activity, or location.<sup>14</sup> This broad definition allows for inclusion of passive and active communities. A “community of practice” is a group of individuals who all participate in the same activity or occupation and have a common interest in a given field.<sup>15</sup> Communities of practice can include professional organizations and inter-institutional collaborative relationships. A “community of affinity” lies between the very general definition of “community” and the idea of an active “community of practice.” A community of affinity consists of individuals either participating in a given field or interested in the field.

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<sup>12</sup> Doberneck, Glass, and Schweitzer, “From Rhetoric to Reality,” 6.

<sup>13</sup> Frank A. Fear, Cheryl L. Rosaen, Pennie Foster-Fishman, and Richard J. Bawden, “Outreach as Scholarly Expression: A Faculty Perspective” *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 6, no. 22 (2001) 21-34.

<sup>14</sup> “Community” 5 b. *Oxford English Dictionary*; Brad King, “Chapter 5: New Relationships with the Formal Education Sector” in *The Manual of Museum Learning* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2007): 97.

<sup>15</sup> Doberneck, Glass, and Schweitzer, “From Rhetoric to Reality,” 9.

While the first step for university-community engagement is for one group to identify the community it wishes to collaborate with, the current institutional contexts of both communities need to be recognized for engagement to work. Frank A. Fear, Cheryl L. Rosaen, Pennie Foster-Fishman, and Richard J. Bawden look at engagement as one part of their academic life, but also articulate that the university context is only one part of university-community engagement. In particular, they highlight that “Whatever its form, collaboration of any kind requires reconceptualizing traditional academic expectations and roles – those associated with the 'academic as expert' model.”<sup>16</sup> The engagement model does not seek to dismiss the expertise of professionals and academics, though it is important to create an environment where all participants feel comfortable sharing ideas and opinions, and decisions do not ultimately privilege the academy or large institution.

Thus, when scholars, departments, and universities consider potential inter-institutional connections, they must address their own institutional context as well as the communities they seek to collaborate with. This study sought to identify current and potential points of contact between TMD and Rhode Island cultural institutions (RICIs) as a precursor to developing a model of engagement. While I found that TMD and RICIs are part of a community of affinity I also discovered that the “academic as expert” model is a structuring element in this community of affinity that should be addressed to achieve the promise of true community engagement. These issues are

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<sup>16</sup> Fear, Rosaen, Foster-Fishman, and Bawden, “Outreach as Scholarly Expression,” 22.

important to “developing substantive roles for the community in creating the institution's plans.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Amy Driscoll, “Carnegie's Community-Engagement Classification: Intentions and Insights.”  
<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/elibrary/Driscoll.pdf>



## METHODS AND FIELDWORK

This research project sought to identify potential opportunities and/or barriers to collaboration between the University of Rhode Island Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design graduate program and Rhode Island cultural institutions as an emergent form of university-community engagement. Central to developing a model of sustainable engagement is understanding the relationships between the institutions and their relationship to the trend of community engagement. To this end, this study sought to understand national trends in the field of university-community engagement, community engagement at URI as an institution, the perspective of TMD graduate alumni on TMD pedagogy and engagement as well as their experience with engagement as professionals in the field, and the current environment for RICIs and community engagement.<sup>18</sup>

To understand national trends, I reviewed published research on and the awarding of grants related to community engagement. I reviewed URI websites related to experiential learning and engagement, URI's Academic Plan, and the President's Transformational Goals for evidence of URI's commitment to engagement. Three TMD graduates were interviewed for their insights on both TMD and RICIs. Thirteen RICIs were contacted and eleven visited.<sup>19</sup> This study was submitted for IRB review, but was considered not under the purview of IRB.<sup>20</sup>

Rhode Island cultural institutions with textile and costume collections or whose interpretive mission relates to Rhode Island's textile history were identified

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendices C and D.

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix A.

with the assistance of faculty in the TMD program. In total, I contacted 13 Rhode Island cultural institutions and visited 11. These cultural institutions fall into two main categories: county historical societies that contain textile collections with local provenance and historic homes with collections associated with prominent Rhode Islanders, like Revolutionary War General Nathaniel Greene, whose pre-war home contains objects used by the Greene family. I contacted sites via email addresses found online, and after a brief description of the study, asked to meet with someone who could speak with me about the site, preferably someone who was familiar with the site's textiles.<sup>21</sup> I spoke with directors, curators, archivists, and volunteers, and collected data through site visits, semi-structured interviews, and a review of cultural institution websites and promotional literature. Site visits included a tour of public spaces and storage spaces if accessible. When possible, I tape-recorded and transcribed interviews and fieldnotes, coding and organizing data according to themes.<sup>22</sup>

Though the literature on engaged scholarship warns against designing and implementing engagement programming within the “academic as expert” structure, little scholarship has addressed the processes by which programs become implemented. I did not want to place myself within the “academic as expert” frame, but understood that my association with URI and TMD as a graduate student researcher might place me within this frame. Therefore, I attempted to compose interview questions that would not make participants uncomfortable and sought to

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix E.

<sup>22</sup> Maria J. Mayan, *Essentials of Qualitative Inquiry* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2009); Charmaz, Kathy, “Grounded Theory as an Emergent Trend” in *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008): 155.

conduct myself in the field as the seeker of knowledge.<sup>23</sup> For example, I did not ask participants: “what collections management software do you use?” because the site may have only paper records or the study participant may be unfamiliar with the record-keeping practices of their organization.

Regardless of these precautions, my research found that the “academic as expert” model was evinced by staff and volunteers of Rhode Island cultural institutions and framed our interactions. Conversations with TMD alumni now working at large institutions reflected the difficulties of inter-institutional collaboration. Although I saw my relationship to this study as the student researcher, I was viewed as a representative of an academic program that has provided professional advice in the past; thus, I was placed within the hierarchy of the community of affinity. These institutions operate within networks that include universities as resources to be called upon for help. Moreover, while university faculty and curators of prestigious institutions were described as experts, they were also as sources of criticism. This framing resulted in conversations focused on feelings of often perceived, not real, inadequacies related to collections management, but did not negate the potential for future engagement.

Being cognizant of the small size of this community, this paper avoids direct identification of RICCI participants. Although the University of Rhode Island Institutional Review Board determined this study to be outside of its purvey, my goal is to expand collaborative engagements, and the discussion of the “academic as expert” model underlines the need for pseudonyms. Participating sites have been assigned numbers.

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<sup>23</sup> See Appendix D.

## ENGAGEMENT

### *University Context*

Universities have historically developed programs that focused on community outreach, and cultural institutions have developed programs to better serve or increase their target audiences. New, broader definitions of community engagement are more common across institutional levels and disciplines as people become comfortable with engagement as a goal. Within university contexts, we see engagement becoming codified within promotion and tenure systems, and major granting agencies are supporting engagement within university settings, between universities and other cultural institutions, and among local, state, and regional organizations. Moreover, these funded projects have sought to build student capacity and increase collections accessibility. In 2011, the University of Delaware's Museum Studies Program in conjunction with the Tri-State Coalition of Historic Sites was awarded \$650,572 by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to fund community collaborative programs.<sup>24</sup> This regional initiative and increasingly sought-after “Collections SWAT” program are not only providing students with valuable skills they will use in their careers, but the regional focus encourages networking and community building through inter-institutional activities.<sup>25</sup> These projects also provide opportunities for capacity building: institutions in relation to fulfilling their mission, and students as participants in a community of practice.

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<sup>24</sup> “News and Announcements,” University of Delaware, accessed March 2012. <http://www.udel.edu/museumstudies/announcements.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Sustaining Places, “Collections SWAT Team Project” Sustaining Places. <http://sustainingplaces.com/swat-team-project/> (accessed February 12, 2014).

The process of institutionalizing engagement at Northern Kentucky University is described by Carole A. Beere, James C. Vortuba, and Gail W. Wells as “public engagement” because it reframes the relations between the university and the community from the outreach model and instead emphasizes partnership.<sup>26</sup> Beere, Vortuba, and Wells devote most of their writing to the “alignment process” because historically universities have promoted research. Support for faculty research has been institutionalized, so to successfully promote public engagement, universities need to allow for engagement and its scholarship to be treated the same way as research.<sup>27</sup> Beere, Vortuba, and Wells describe briefly the process of developing university-community partnerships, a process that they called “*Vision, Values, and Voices* (VVV).”<sup>28</sup> University-community projects are initiated with a committee chaired by the university's president and including both university and community representatives. This committee holds meetings on and off campus to discuss the university's and community's strengths, weaknesses and goals.<sup>29</sup> The VVV then uses the minutes from these meetings to develop a plan for program development.

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Tulane University “reinvented itself, both in response to community needs and in order to survive, with a special emphasis on creation of an undergraduate curricular public service requirement.”<sup>30</sup> This university-wide strategy was initiated by a “skeleton team of administrators” and later evolved

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<sup>26</sup> Beere, Vortuba, and Wells, *Becoming an Engaged Campus*, 13-14.

<sup>27</sup> Beere, Vortuba, and Wells, *Becoming an Engaged Campus*, 31, Amy Driscoll, “Carnegie's Community-Engagement Classification: Intentions and Insights.” <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/elibrary/Driscoll.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Beere, Vortuba, and Wells, *Becoming an Engaged Campus*, 55.

<sup>29</sup> Beere, Vortuba, and Wells, *Becoming an Engaged Campus*, 55-56.

<sup>30</sup> Illustre, Lopez, and Moley. “Conceptualizing, Building, and Evaluating University Practices for Engagement,” 129.

into the Renewal Plan that has repositioned Tulane University's relationship with community organizations.<sup>31</sup> The success of this Renewal Plan was contingent on the inclusion of stakeholders at all levels within the university community and continued efforts to include students and non-university community members in program development through the Center for Public Service.<sup>32</sup> This process shows that although engagement programming may be initiated by an institution, the current models of community engagement privileges the development of a sustainable, multidimensional institutionally supported partnerships based in reciprocity.<sup>33</sup>

Engagement and its focus on access to collections are important issues within universities. The Indiana University Art Museum was awarded a \$500,000 Mellon Grant to encourage all university departments to use the museum's collections in their courses.<sup>34</sup> Philanthropic organizations that award funding to universities have begun to quantify the level of community outreach and engagement as a criterion for funding. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education now includes criteria for measuring community-engaged scholarship in addition to faculty research and standardized test results of students in order to evaluate an institution's reputation.<sup>35</sup>

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31 Illustre, Lopez, and Moley, "Conceptualizing, Building, and Evaluating University Practices for Engagement," 131.

32 Illustre, Lopez, and Moley, "Conceptualizing, Building, and Evaluating University Practices for Engagement," 136.

33 Illustre, Lopez, and Moley. "Conceptualizing, Building, and Evaluating University Practices for Engagement," 129-63, Amy Driscoll, "Carnegie's Community-Engagement Classification: Intentions and Insights." <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/elibrary/Driscoll.pdf>

34 Sarah Boyum, "IU Art Museum receives grant to fund art courses, academic position," *Indiana Daily Student*. <http://idsnews.com/news/story.aspx?id=87267> (accessed December 29, 2013).

35 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. "Community Engagement Classification" Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching,

The University of Rhode Island is actively working to broaden its mission and goals to include community engagement. This is evidenced through the Academic Plan, the development of new departments with specific hires related to experiential learning and engagement, and a current survey to find ways to support it at the faculty level and institutionalize its value. In 2010, URI's Office of the Provost articulated the University's five-year institutional plan for academic priorities with the Academic Plan. URI's Academic Plan outlines broad goals that are compatible with community engagement and engaged scholarship.<sup>36</sup> “URI must take full and systematic advantage of the most advanced educational tools and practices. We must provide expanded opportunities for experiential learning (research, creative work, and scholarship), as well as opportunities to learn and work across disciplines and fields of knowledge.”<sup>37</sup> URI's Center for Career and Experiential Education currently facilitates internship, volunteer, and service programs for URI undergraduate students.<sup>38</sup> This Office was created in the Fall of 2013 from Career Services and the Office of Experiential Learning and Community Engagement to facilitate student access to experiential learning opportunities. Another facet of this institutional alignment towards engagement is the University of Rhode Island's application for Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. In January 2014, a survey was emailed to faculty to assess

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[http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community\\_engagement.php](http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php) (accessed December 29, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> University of Rhode Island. “Academic Plan, 2010 – 2015: Charting Our Path to the Future: Toward a Renewed Culture of Achievement” University of Rhode Island, [http://web.uri.edu/academic-planning/files/academic\\_plan\\_handbook.pdf](http://web.uri.edu/academic-planning/files/academic_plan_handbook.pdf) (accessed February 7, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> University of Rhode Island. “Academic Plan, 2010 – 2015” (accessed February 7, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Center for Career and Experiential Education. “About ELCE” University of Rhode Island, <http://web.uri.edu/experience/about-elce/> (accessed February 7, 2014).

engagement as part of the university's application process. Because URI is part of the community of affinity explored in this study, the mandate for applying for this classification indicates that URI, as an institution, is invested in exploring and sustaining community engagement, which places URI in the wider academic trend of community engagement. Institutional support is key for the development of the community of affinity that I studied into a community of practice.

Within the museum field, technology is changing or at least challenging the established barriers to public access to collections.<sup>39</sup> Digitization of collections and online exhibits increase expectations for public access to collections.<sup>40</sup> This push for access puts pressure on sites that have limited means to make their collections available online. Faculty access to university collections for inclusion in class lectures and projects is vital for university collections to remain relevant as university resources. The documentation and collection infrastructure necessary to provide this kind of access requires both experienced staff and a comprehensive digitization strategy.

TMD is currently engaged with local Rhode Island cultural institutions, but this is largely personality driven and not systemic or institutionalized. TMD has a dedicated exhibit space in Quinn Hall that is currently its most outward-facing presence, but no required or elective TMD graduate courses specifically focus on community engagement. The TMD department is uniquely positioned for

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<sup>39</sup> Nina Simon, "Participatory Design and the Future of Museums," *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*. (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2011): 19-33.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew MacArthur, "Get Real! The Role of Objects in the Digital Age" *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*. (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2011): 56-67.



collaborating with RICIs because the HTCC presents challenges similar to those faced by the collections held by RICIs. By engaging with RICIs, graduate students will have more opportunities to share innovations and issues brought out by working closely with the HTCC and building real world skills in collections management. For TMD students learning how to manage textile collections through work with the HTCC, the opportunity to engage with other collections and understand the real-world context of small cultural institution can be a vital experience. Learning how to work within an institution and applying principles in an experiential learning context builds student and institutional capacity.

Some cultural institutions may be unaware of the existence of TMD and the potential for institutional linkages. A 1976 thesis written by Heather Borrie, a graduate of TMD, suggested that an undergraduate program in museum studies be developed at URI. Her survey of RICIs found both the “need and desire for the unification of Rhode Island's historic resources.”<sup>41</sup> More recently, Kira L. Moynihan interviewed eight participants from five New England cultural institutions to develop a guide to collections management, exhibition, and stabilization and repair.<sup>42</sup> These studies and current faculty relations with local institutions suggest that TMD at URI and Rhode Island cultural institutions are natural partners in a community of affinity, yet there is no institutionally supported framework to insure that this community becomes an active community of practice.

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<sup>41</sup> Heather Elizabeth Borrie, *A Proposal for a Museum Education Program at the University of Rhode Island*. Masters Thesis, (University of Rhode Island, 1976), iv.

<sup>42</sup> Kira L. Moynihan, *Care of Textile and Costume Collections*. Masters thesis, (University of Rhode Island, 2011).

To explore the TMD graduate program context and its relation to Rhode Island cultural institutions, three alumni currently or previously engaged with RICIs were interviewed. These interviews focused on their experience of inter-institutional engagement both as graduate students in the TMD department and throughout their careers. We also discussed their thoughts on the current state of engagement in Rhode Island and their suggestions for TMD to foster inter-institutional engagement. As noted in the literature, the university context is only one part of sustained university-community engagement. The institutional and inter-institutional contexts of RICIs also are important to consider as part of the planning process for sustained collaborative projects. It is important to note here that the idea of sustainability is central to current trends in community engagement. Moreover, this definition is not to be confused with ecological definitions.<sup>43</sup>

### *Rhode Island Context*

Participants in this study expressed increased interest in inter-institutional collaboration in Rhode Island, and each initiative has its own organizational structures, hierarchies, and goals. Project scopes vary, though none focus specifically on the textiles housed in RICIs. Current initiatives range from state-wide projects such as the RHODI project, Preserve Rhode Island, and the Ocean State Library digitization task force, to smaller collaborations like Newportal, which focuses on collections in Newport County. These projects and organizations were frequently discussed during site visits, and each addresses different needs of RICIs, from digitization initiatives to cooperative advertising and events. Participants in this study were eager to talk about

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<sup>43</sup> Amy Driscoll, “Carnegie's Community-Engagement Classification: Intentions and Insights.” <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/elibrary/Driscoll.pdf>, 2008.

collaborative projects and how their individual sites connected to these larger initiatives. TMD alumni also were interviewed to encourage diverse opinions from community stakeholders. Through this dialog, I began to see the inter-institutional connections that already exist within this community.

In 2012, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded The Rhode Island Historical Society a grant to create the RHODI Project, or Rhode Island History Online Directory Initiative. This project aims to increase public access to cultural resources in Rhode Island. All of the participating sites in this study are included in the RHODI website. Preserve Rhode Island's Historic Sites Coalition serves as a resource for the preservation of historic buildings in Rhode Island, including nine sites in this study. In Newport County, five institutions, including two participating in this study, are planning an inter-institutional digital collections database to create the Newportal archive. The Historic Sites Coalition also organizes The Rhody Ramble, where families can pick up a passport and collect stickers at 25 historic sites in Rhode Island.<sup>44</sup>

Institutions participating in these projects are benefiting not only by their inclusion in the RHODI website, for example, but these collaborative projects strengthen networks for the community of affinity and provide opportunities for increased access to funding, more cooperative projects, and increased visitorship. The HTCC is included in the RHODI directory.<sup>45</sup> To explore the TMD graduate program's

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<sup>44</sup> Preserve Rhode Island, "Rhody Ramble – Family Guide to Historic Sites," Preserve Rhode Island, <http://www.preserveri.org/content/marketing-family-programs-project-2012> (accessed December 29, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Rhode Island History Online Directory Initiative. "University of Rhode Island, Historic Textiles and Costume Collection." Rhode Island History Online Directory Initiative. <http://rhodi.org/directory/item/university-of-rhode-island-historic-textiles-and-costume-collection> (accessed March 1, 2014).

context and its relation to Rhode Island cultural institutions, three alumni currently or previously engaged with RICIs were interviewed. These interviews focused on their experience of inter-institutional engagement both as graduate students in the TMD department and throughout their careers. We also discussed their thoughts on the current state of engagement in Rhode Island and their suggestions for TMD to foster inter-institutional engagement. As noted in the literature and above, the university context is only one part of sustained university-community engagement. The institutional and inter-institutional contexts of RICIs are an essential part of the planning of collaborative projects.

RICI participants saw this study as opportunity for collaboration, especially since no other project focused on textiles. This combined openness to collaboration and textile-specific focus of TMD create a niche for inter-institutional projects focused on textiles within this community. TMD at URI can encourage dialog and sustain an engaged network for projects. However, the “academic as expert” model frames these inter-institutional collaborations and became a structuring influence on my fieldwork. Participants spoke about their institutions and how they saw their site in relation to other institutions. Anxiety, a common theme that emerged from interviews, revealed how participants positioned themselves and their institutions. Participants consistently described perceived shortcomings within a framework of expected minimum standards as defined by larger institutions and museum professional organizations.

## ANXIETY

Inter-institutional projects in Rhode Island are part of the growing trend towards engagement and increased public access to collections, but participation in these initiatives does not mean that all institutions and community members have the same attitude towards this interaction.<sup>46</sup> Increasing institutional visibility opens institutional practices to potential criticism for falling short of established museum practices. Anxiety specifically related to textiles is common because textiles can be fragile, perishable objects, compared to other objects in the care of a RICI. The professional standards of the museum field and larger institutions also are applied to textiles, but small cultural institutions may not have access to textile conservators, or have the equipment, but not confidence or experience, to care for their textiles.<sup>47</sup>

In the museum field, various professional organizations propagate standards for professional ethics. The International Council of Museum's *Code of Ethics for Museums* sets forth the “minimum standards of professional practice and performance for museums and their staff;” and a full text of the code is available online.<sup>48</sup> While the details of best practices for collections can be debated, documents like the ICOM *Code* and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Reference Guide *Developing a Collections Management Policy* provide guidance for formal policies. The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) has sample collections documents

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<sup>46</sup> Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*. (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> Kreps, “Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice,” 23-41.

<sup>48</sup> International Council of Museums *Code of Ethics*, International Council of Museums, <http://archives.icom.museum/ethics.html> (accessed February 14, 2014)

available on their website, including collection policies and loan policies.<sup>49</sup> Access to these materials has not resulted in widespread conformity to museum standards, “which is at least partly a consequence of the top-down, expert and outsider-driven approaches to museum development and training.”<sup>50</sup> Kreps' argument for “appropriate museology” is directed towards remediating the “academic as expert” model and developing “self-reliance and responsibility” within cultural institutions, regardless of their size or resources.<sup>51</sup>

Collections managers and textile conservators are luxuries that many small cultural institutions can ill afford, especially if their other objects or, often, the preservation of the building itself are a higher priority. Sites that are volunteer-run depend on the interests and skills of volunteers to shape projects. If a RIC has textile collections but no interested volunteer, textiles can be forgotten, sidelined, or misinterpreted as a part of an institution's interpretive mission. The conflicting desires to be good stewards but knowing that the experts from other institutions are going to judge them without providing tools/assistance, can hinder collaboration between academia and small cultural institutions. This “academic as expert” model gives authority to academic and professional standards and stifles collaboration rather than advancing common goals. Participants displayed this anxiety when they appeared to brace for my disapproval. They would recount positive and negative encounters with other institutions, and explain continuing projects to improve their institutional

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49 American Association for State and Local History “Sample Collection Documents” American Association for State and Local History, [http://resource.aaslh.org/resources\\_tags/sample-collection-documents/](http://resource.aaslh.org/resources_tags/sample-collection-documents/) (accessed February 14, 2014).

50 Kreps, “Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice,” 25.

51 Kreps, “Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice,” 27.

realities. Participants' anxiety manifested through the perceived power relationships between RICIs and large institutions. The “academic-as-expert” model also can be used here to describe the inter-institutional hierarchies between RICIs and professional organizations and prestigious collections.

All of the sites in this study were chosen because they had textiles. These sites also have other objects, but at least one participant cautioned me that their site might not be appropriate for my study because they did not have a textile collection (see Table 1). Site 2 had several textiles on display, and these were positioned with great importance to their interpretative mission, but they were not considered a “collection.” Describing their textiles as part of a “collection” was puzzling to some participants because of the knowledge of documents like ICOM's “minimum standards,” which perhaps discourage small institutions in self-identifying their objects as “collections.”<sup>52</sup> From my perspective, “collections” was not a provocative term, but I started asking participants about specific kinds of textiles. Learning how to speak in terms relevant to these RICIs, highlighted the difference between classroom and museum environments.

Participants in this study frequently discussed potential collaborative projects in terms of the out-dated “outreach” model of university-community interaction, making references to problems students could correct, rather than using more collaborative language. Understanding the way community members view themselves within inter-institutional projects does not preclude changes in perceived institutional roles, but does need to be recognized and addressed as part of the planning process.

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<sup>52</sup> International Council of Museums, *Code of Ethics*, International Council of Museums, <http://archives.icom.museum/ethics.html> (accessed February 14, 2014).

*Table 1: RICIs and Their Collections*

Site 1	19 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing, quilts
Site 2	20 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing, military uniforms, baseball uniforms
Site 3	19 <sup>th</sup> - and 20 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing
Site 4	18 <sup>th</sup> - and 19 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing, household textiles, military uniforms
Site 5	coverlets, 20 <sup>th</sup> century clothing
Site 6	18 <sup>th</sup> -, 19 <sup>th</sup> -, and 20 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing, accessories, flat textiles, household textiles
Site 7	20 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing, accessories, embroidery, household textiles
Site 8	19 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing
Site 9	18 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing
Site 10	19 <sup>th</sup> -century clothing, quilts, household textiles,
Site 11	19 <sup>th</sup> - and 20 <sup>th</sup> - century clothing, quilts, coverlets, household textiles

### *Accessions*

Accessions policies are developed by cultural institutions to provide a framework for the addition of objects to a collection. These policies specify the institution's criteria for including an object in a collection, with the final decision-making process ideally overseen by an accessions committee. Without a formal accessions policy, institutions do not have guidelines to allow them to decline donations that do not conform with their interpretive mission. With a robust accessions policy, the institution is less likely to become overwhelmed with objects that do not contribute to the institution, or they cannot care for.



The University of Delaware's Sustaining Places website notes that 80 percent of small collections in Delaware were not inventoried, making disaster planning impossible and reducing public access to collections.<sup>53</sup>

ICOM's *Code of Ethics* states that the minimum standards for documenting objects within a collection include “full identification and description of each item, its associations, provenance, condition, treatment and present location.”<sup>54</sup> An accession number assigned to the object is part of a series of practices that create collections. For example, a pair of socks has one accession number, with the right and left socks assigned A and B. The accession number includes the year the object was added to the collection and a donor identification number. The person in charge of accessioning objects in the collection creates a file for the Deed of Gift (if the socks were donated) or receipt and information about where and by who the socks were purchased, used, or was made. Before they are placed in storage, the socks are vacuumed, photographed, labeled with the accession number, and stored in an environment designed to mitigate deterioration or infestation. This scenario assumes many things about a collection: someone is in charge, it has a numbering system, object's provenance is known, the people at the site and in charge of the collection want the socks, and finally, that appropriate storage is available.

A formal accessions policy and accession committee can guide institutional policies for documenting objects that are found in the collection and also with determining when it is legally and ethically appropriate to deaccession an object.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Sustaining Places, “Collections SWAT Team Project” Sustaining Places. <http://sustainingplaces.com/swat-team-project/> (accessed February 12, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> International Council of Museums, *Code of Ethics*, International Council of Museums, <http://archives.icom.museum/ethics.html> (accessed February 14, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> American Alliance of Museums, “Alliance Reference Guide:

Formal collection policies, or lack thereof, were a frequent topic during site visits. Specific institutional policies were not the focus of my questions, yet participants at five sites told me what kind of accession policies, collections records, or collections management software their institution had. Moreover, they frequently suggested accession issues as an initial project to promote inter-institutional engagement. The University of Delaware's Collections SWAT program specifically focuses on this kind of project, and the program's success indicates not only that this is a systemic issue for small museums, but also that TMD could look to the Collections SWAT program as a possible model for engagement with RICIs.

The majority of sites had at least an informal accessions policy where staff or volunteers could refuse donation of objects that were not related to their site's interpretive mission. Yet, sites where the building had served many different purposes, such as family home, tavern, boarding house, school, etc. during its history, tended to have accumulated objects from the building into collections that perhaps were not related to the site's current mission. For example, at site 11, a mid-twentieth-century sleeping bag was found in a storage box of nineteenth-century quilts. The director did not know where the sleeping bag's origin, but theorized that it might have been left at the site, which had formerly been a boarding house. The other possibility was that during the early years of the site's operation as a cultural institution, fundraiser yard sales were held, and leftover objects sometimes were placed in the site's storage area. The director's knowledge of this institutional history contextualized the errant sleeping

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Developing a Collections Management Policy” American Alliance of Museums. <http://aam-us.org/docs/continuum/developing-a-cmp-final.pdf> (accessed February 14, 2014).

bag, but without formal accessions and deaccessions policies, the director was not certain what to do with it.

In addition to TMD faculty, participants mentioned other institutions like Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) as resources for general collections issues and questions regarding particular objects. These institutions and their representatives' advice were positioned by participants as justification for their solutions to collections issues. The Director of Site 11 told me that a RISD curator had visited their site to help identify, date, and prioritize the conservation of their furniture collection, placing RISD within a hierarchy of experts. The RISD curator discovered that one of the site's most important pieces, a “crude, hand-made chair” was being used in an office. The chair had been found in the building, was not accessioned as part of a “collection,” and was thus being used by museum staff and volunteers. The curator advised them that it should no longer be used as a piece of office furniture.

At Site 3, I was unable to discover what kind of accession documentation the site had for objects in the collection. While I was being shown through the textile storage area, I noticed that the boxes were labeled with printed forms that had a blank for donor information. I asked the volunteer, if the site had any textiles with a known provenance. We looked at a few of the labels, but found no donor names. She explained that she “didn't know about specific donors, if it's on the sheet, then that's who it is. All of the pieces are local.” The volunteer appeared to be offended at my question, or embarrassed that she could not answer my question.

Participants often told me detailed information about a textile, but if this information was documented anywhere or only carried in the memory of the person who could recognize the handwriting of a particular donor or knew a specific object's history was unclear. This information is important to collections that are composed of objects with local provenance; however, because of the lack of systematic inventorying and accessioning of objects, it can easily be lost between generations of staff and volunteers.

Participants were hesitant to show me their accession records, while almost all participants were very generous with their time. At four sites, participants told me what collections management software their site used, but at the majority of interviews, the topic did not come up. See Appendix B. At two sites, participants told me that their institution had no formal deaccessions policy, which was especially stressful for those sites that have very limited storage space.<sup>56</sup> Staff at site 7 actively solicits loans of local objects for exhibitions and also regularly receives boxes of family papers from community members.

### *Storage*

Participants consistently raised issues of storage organization and temperature control because every site has collections storage at least partially located inside historic buildings. For institutions with limited funding, exhibits and public spaces are understandably a higher priority than storage. Unorganized storage areas make inventorying or accessioning objects difficult and exhibit planning overwhelming. Participants were quick to point out issues with storage conditions and thus demonstrated knowledge of best practices. Yet the “academic-as-expert” model

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<sup>56</sup> Site 3 interview and site 11 interview.

framed conversations as participants apologized for not being able to adhere to standard museum practices.

With overflowing permanent exhibits and no extra space in storage at Site 11, the site Director told me they struggle to balance their desire to preserve the material culture of their community with the knowledge that they have limited space to store objects. When she showed me the storage area, she apologized for not having detailed labels on all of the textiles in storage, a space that also includes furniture, ceramics, paper archives, and tools. “I’m glad it’s you, and not like the RISD conservator who I’m like; I would just be mortified.”<sup>57</sup> This statement embodies not only a fear of judgment, but idea that students would be less intimidating than curators from large institutions in relation to collaborative projects. Moreover, anxiety was expressed by staff and volunteers, regardless of the actual conditions of their storage and exhibition space. Even at Site 7, a well-funded site with an accessions policy and climate-controlled storage areas, staff were quick to point out things they wanted to improve and were open to collaborative opportunities.<sup>58</sup>

Cultural institutions that serve as repositories for objects with local provenance have a staggering range of objects and a strong sense of obligation to be the best stewards of community material culture. Site 2 has no staff member or volunteer who works with their textiles, though they have textiles on display.<sup>59</sup> Because cultural institutions' missions include providing community access to local history, maintaining historic buildings, and attracting visitors, a specific focus on textiles in their collections can seem a low-priority project. Collecting is a continuous act, and

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<sup>57</sup> Site 11 interview.

<sup>58</sup> Site 7 interview.

<sup>59</sup> Site 2 interview.

community engagement is vital to ethical stewardship.<sup>60</sup> As interviewed Alumni with experience with RICIs noted, institutions tend to have an insulating effect, where it is easy for stakeholders to lose sight of the larger community because of day-to-day obligations.<sup>61</sup> As Amy Driscoll noted upon reflection on the inaugural selection of institutions for the Carnegie Foundation Engagement Elective Classification: “[t]here are generally significant barriers left over from both internal and external perception of the campus as an ‘ivory tower,’ and those barriers must be addressed for authentic community partnerships to develop.”<sup>62</sup> Thus this insulating effect is true not only for cultural institutions, but also universities and departments within universities.

Community engagement is one strategy to overcome institutional barriers to inter-institutional relationships. I shared my knowledge, primarily when a participant appeared upset. For example, at Site 11, the director found a pair of mittens sealed in a plastic bag. They said “plastic, bad, bad, and the pin!” they exclaimed, as they discovered a yellowed slip of paper with initials and a date attached with a rusted pin. “See, this shouldn’t be like this.” She was upset that the textile had been taped in plastic since 1961 and registered to me that she would not have stored the mittens in that way, thus forestalling any potential criticism of her knowledge of care. I pointed out that because the textile had been undisturbed until she saw it and deciphered the tag, the provenance of the object was preserved, and the textile was still in very good condition. She was able to identify not only the donor, but the person the textile had

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<sup>60</sup> Amy V. Margis and Linda T. Grimm, “Collecting for a College Museum: Exchange Practices and the Life History of a 19th- Century Arctic Collection,” *Museum Anthropology* 34, no. 2 (2011): 109-27.

<sup>61</sup> Interviews with Alum 1 and 3.

<sup>62</sup> Amy Driscoll, “Carnegie’s Community-Engagement Classification: Intentions and Insights.” <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/sites/default/files/elibrary/Driscoll.pdf>, 2008.

been used by because of her knowledge of the institution's collections. She then asked my opinion on what should be done with them now that they had been rediscovered, and we talked about several options for storage and labeling them. Sarah saw that the previous curator who had taped up the mittens fifty-two years before was, like herself, trying to preserve the material culture of the community by making sure the documentation was not separated from the mittens. Sarah reflected “see, they were doing what I'm doing.” Rather than focusing on the potential damage of the storage technique, we then talked about how museum practices change over time and that a valuable piece of information had been preserved by the action of the previous curator. As mentioned above, information about best practices does not always result in the confidence or ability to execute best practices.<sup>63</sup>

At Site 9, the participant gave me information about the collection, but did not invite me into storage areas or show any textiles. The volunteer told me to read the materials I was given and then contact them if I had questions about the collection. Some information is included on specific pieces on their website, but public access to collections was clearly not a priority, or perhaps they were avoiding any judgment. Outreach programs developed by university initiatives or professional organizations can alienate the very community that the university is trying to build relationships with. This top-down approach has been challenged since the 1960s advent of the “new museology,” but the academic-as-expert model is still a frequent feature of projects formulated by universities and professional organizations.<sup>64</sup> Top-down guidelines can make people feel less capable instead of empowered with knowledge of best practices.

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<sup>63</sup> Kreps, “Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice,” 32.

<sup>64</sup> Kreps, “Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice,” 23-41.

Anxiety related to storage and exhibition are intertwined at many RICIs. Every cultural institution included in this study is housed in a historic building, some from the late seventeenth century. The ideal of maintaining consistent temperature and humidity to preserve textiles, while recognized, often is difficult to achieve. At Site 11, the Director described strategies for dealing with drafty windows. “I have to turn the heat off come January 15<sup>th</sup> because I'm heating the outdoors.”<sup>65</sup> These historic buildings are important to the community and institution, and renovation to adapt spaces for suitable textile storage and exhibition, may be of low priority. Storage issues can inhibit all aspects of collection's management: from object accessioning, locating objects in storage, and exhibit planning and rotation.

### *Exhibition*

Anxiety related to textile exhibitions focused on permanent exhibitions, lack of confidence in handling textiles, lack of appropriate display mounts, and the limitations of historic buildings in relation to professional museum guidelines. Almost every site visit included a tour of exhibition spaces. Participants at multiple sites reassured me that they knew that textiles can be damaged by light exposure and uncontrolled temperature and humidity, but explained the realities in their institutions often made meeting these conditions difficult. The physical environment of many RICI exhibit spaces also can prevent collaboration with larger institutions. TMD alumni now working at large institutions discussed the barriers to collaboration with smaller institutions because of the policies that larger institutions have to protect collections.<sup>66</sup> One alum, now working at a large institution, mentioned that small museums

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<sup>65</sup> Site 11 Interview.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Alum 1 and 3.



sometimes request the loan of textiles, but they cannot loan objects to smaller institutions because loan policies require secure and stable exhibit spaces.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, collaborative exhibits would often be limited to larger institutions that can guarantee safe environments. While showing me through a permanent exhibit with textiles, the Director of Site 11 pointed out that the nineteenth-century dresses displayed on manikins had been on continuous display for years, and they remained on display because they did not have staff or volunteers who felt comfortable taking the dresses off of the manikins and putting them back in storage, let alone deciding on other dresses in the collection to replace them. Lack of confidence in their object-handling skills is another barrier to RICIs engaging with other institutions or proposing collaborative projects.

At Site 5, a historic house, beds were covered with historic coverlets and quilts, that were rotated twice a year for the bedding that was stored on a closet shelf. The curator explained to me that these were the only bed coverings in the collection, and they could not afford reproductions or additional historic bedding. I thought this was a good example of adapting best practices to the realities of a specific institution, but the curator was quite upset that some of the bedding continued to degrade while on display.

When I visited Site 10, the Society President pointed out changes made to the way certain textiles were exhibited based on the advice of TMD faculty. Site 10 has an active volunteer group that maintains the exhibits with seasonal volunteer days. The textiles on permanent display are moved and vacuumed at least once a year, and at that time, the textile's condition is assessed and a determination made if it could remain on

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Alum 1.

exhibit. During conversations with a volunteer at Site 10 who has special interest in textiles, she mentioned several times that she had contacted TMD faculty for advice. She also reassured me that in cases where the advice had not been followed, it was because of time or financial constraints. She was eager for my opinion on the exhibits and advice on how to improve them. We discussed the conflicting desires to keep popular objects on display and to not have them on permanent display to protect their condition. She wanted me to see the efforts they were making to care for their collections and that they had reached out to the TMD department.

Historic buildings are frequently present in communities as loci of cultural heritage, but the needs of objects collected by RICIs can be difficult to resolve with the preservation of the historic building. Object loan policies require that exhibition spaces protect textiles, with requirements for light levels, temperature and humidity fluctuation, and security. This institutional barrier limits RICIs that cannot meet these requirements from collaborating with other institutions and reproduces institutional hierarchies.

## A MODEL FOR ENGAGEMENT

University-community engagement requires support from all institutional levels to be sustainable, and the literature on engagement focuses on this institutional alignment, but literature on the specific process of program development is sparse. The collaborative nature of engagement projects makes strict frameworks unwieldy or inapplicable, as each community has to identify and pursue specific goals. For the purposes of this study, a model can be abstracted from the specific context of RICIs and URI to give a general outline for projects. From community identification, contact, discussion and analysis, recommendations for sustaining community engagement have been developed. See Appendix F. As the data from this study have been coded for themes, the topics most frequently discussed can guide initial discussions for program development. Participants suggested potential projects ranging from curatorial research on objects their collections to the development of workshops on collections care and emergency management policies. RICIs want to develop collaborative age-appropriate exhibits and programs because school field trips are a substantial source of income. Combining these suggestions for project ideas and current TMD course goals would be one way to increase community engagement (see Appendix F).

Presenting the results of this study to the TMD faculty is the first step to increasing engagement and encouraging dialog about potential inter-institutional collaborations in alignment with URI's Community Engagement goals. Opportunities to strengthen community engagement can come from the TMD community without reverting to an outreach model, wherein the university would develop programing for

the community instead of with it. With classrooms and an auditorium available for gatherings of community members, staff and volunteers of RICIs can network with faculty and students. By hosting opening receptions for the Textile Gallery exhibitions, lectures, or special tours for the community of affinity identified in this study, TMD would facilitate face-to-face opportunities for collaboration and discussion.<sup>68</sup> Community members need time and space to discuss goals and concerns, with the decision-making process as democratic and transparent as possible.<sup>69</sup> Continuing dialog and evaluation of community projects are key for preventing “an expert-driven top-down approach.”<sup>70</sup> While each participant was asked what kind of information they would like to receive regarding this study, only three responded with ideas, including being invited to a presentation on the completed study or having a presentation hosted at their site.<sup>71</sup>

The creation of a committee composed of TMD faculty, graduate students, RICI staff, and volunteers is key to encouraging community engagement and developing collaborative projects. This committee could organize opportunities for community members to gather and share ideas, fostering an environment of reciprocity and sustainability. This committee can facilitate graduate students to assist RICIs in seasonal historic housekeeping, exhibit installation and deinstallation, in addition to research projects. Funding for projects is available through philanthropic

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<sup>68</sup> See Appendix F.

<sup>69</sup> Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, “New Challenges, New Priorities: Analyzing Ethical Dilemmas from a Stakeholder's Perspective in the Netherlands” *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 26, no. 2 (May 2011): 113-128. see also Kreps, “Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice,” and Beere, Vortuba and Wells, *Becoming an Engaged Campus*.

<sup>70</sup> Perkin, “Beyond the Rhetoric: Negotiating the Politics and Realizing the Potential of Community-Driven Heritage Engagement,” 117.

<sup>71</sup> Site 10 interview, Site 11 interview, Interview with alum 1.

institutions and professional organizations. The National Endowment for the Humanities offers several grants including the Humanities Collections and Reference Resources and Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections.<sup>72</sup> The Rhode Island Council for the Humanities offers both monthly mini grants and major grants to support institutions developing humanities programs for the public.<sup>73</sup> The Costume Society of America offers a Small Museum Collections Care Grant.<sup>74</sup> Researching and helping RICIs apply for appropriate grants would be a valuable experience for graduate students preparing to work in the museum field.

Every participant in this study expressed openness to future inter-institutional engagement. Some even seemed very excited to expand the professional network of their institution. Participants shared potential strategies for initiating and sustaining community engagement.<sup>75</sup> Through my research, participants told me that they were interested in strengthening relationships with TMD, but there was also a strong sense of anxiety that permeated my interactions with them. Textiles, which are such an important part of Rhode Island's economic and cultural history, are treated with trepidation by many of the institutions surveyed in this study, and the “academic-as-expert” model was expressed through participants' comments about previous

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<sup>72</sup> National Endowment for the Humanities, “Humanities Collections and Reference Resources” National Endowment for the Humanities, <http://www.neh.gov/grants/preservation/humanities-collections-and-reference-resources> (accessed March 10, 2014), and “Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections” <http://www.neh.gov/grants/preservation/sustaining-cultural-heritage-collections> (accessed March 10, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, “Grants” Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, <http://temp.rihumanities.org/grants/> (accessed March 10, 2014).

<sup>74</sup> Costume Society of America, “Small Museum Collections Care Grant,” Costume Society of America. <http://www.costumesocietyamerica.com/grantsawards/smallmuseum.html> (accessed March 10, 2014).

<sup>75</sup> Site 6 interview, Site 8 interview, and Site 10 interview.

consultations with larger institutions. Participants were very forthcoming about their sites' goals and strategies for serving their communities, and even those sites that were actively collaborating with nearby institutions were interested in expanding their network of local collaborative institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Universities are reevaluating their relationships with their communities, increasingly favoring engagement as a strategy for meaningful and sustained collaborations. While the recognition of engagement and its scholarship is integrated into institutional priorities, the importance of engagement in faculty tenure and promotion documents is not yet commonplace. The practice of institutionalizing community engagement in a university setting requires that the existing contact points between institutions be recognized and addressed. Participants in this study were generally interested in strengthening contact with TMD at URI, though an “academic as expert” model was made manifest in participant anxiety related to accessioning, storage, and exhibition practices. Site visits and semi-structured interviews with participants at eleven RICIs illustrate that these institutions are active participants in inter-institutional collaborative projects to increase public awareness of their existence, such as cooperative marketing and inter-institutional digitization projects. Though they are involved in many ongoing projects, this study did not reveal an existing textile-focused project, positioning TMD at URI to initiate textile-focused engagement.

As a representative of a university program focused on textiles, I was aligned with the academy as expert by many of the small cultural institutions I visited. Through my conversations with participants, I tried to position myself as someone who wanted to learn about their institution, not someone who was judging them in

comparison to museum standards. Graduate students, though aligned with the academy within the “academic-as-expert” model, can bridge the gap between larger institutions and RICIs.

While this study sought to identify potential opportunities and/or barriers to collaboration in this community of affinity, the attitudes and collaborative networks that emerged from contact with Rhode Island cultural institutions harmonize with the goals of community engagement. This study did not provide an initial framework for inter-institutional engagement because I did not want to unilaterally set an agenda, but as the Tulane university study shows, once a program is established, dialog and community-determined goal setting is still possible as the community matures.<sup>76</sup> To this end, recommendations for ways TMD can sustain community engagement within this community of affinity are included in Appendix F. Additionally, a syllabus outline for a new graduate course in collections management is included in Appendix G.

By engaging with RICIs, TMD at URI can become a more active member in a community of affinity and support sustainable collaboration and development of a community of practice. The current academic focus on university-community engagement and URI's application for Carnegie Engaged Campus Classification position the TMD department to foster an environment of engaged and empowered stakeholders that will continue the work of generations of dedicated scholars, collectors, volunteers, and museum staff to preserve Rhode Island's cultural heritage.

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<sup>76</sup> Illustre, Lopez, and Moley. “Conceptualizing, Building, and Evaluating University Practices for Engagement,” 129-63.



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## APPENDIX A

THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF RHODE ISLAND  
DIVISION OF RESEARCH  
AND ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE  
70 Lower College Road, Suite 2, Kingston, RI 02881 USA  
p: 401.874.4328 f: 401.874.4814 [uri.edu/research/tro/compliance](http://uri.edu/research/tro/compliance)



DATE: January 23, 2013

TO: Blaire Gagnon, PhD, MS,  
FROM: University of Rhode Island IRB

STUDY TITLE: [413110-1] Cultural Institutions, Sustainability, and Community Engagement  
IRB REFERENCE #: HU1213-094  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF NOT RESEARCH  
DECISION DATE: January 23, 2013

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. University of Rhode Island IRB has determined this project does not meet the definition of human subject research under the purview of the IRB according to federal regulations. Therefore, your project does not require IRB review or oversight.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office.

If you have any questions, please contact us by email at [compliance@ds.uri.edu](mailto:compliance@ds.uri.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

<i>INSTITUTION</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>WEBSITE</i>
<b>Babcock Smith House</b>	124 Granite Street Westerly, RI 02891	<a href="http://www.babcock-smithhouse.com/BabcockSmithHouse/contact-us.htm">http://www.babcock-smithhouse.com/BabcockSmithHouse/contact-us.htm</a>
<b>Block Island Historical Society</b>	18 Old Town Rd Block Island, RI 02807	<a href="http://block-island.villagesoup.com/p/block-island-historical-society/76307#.UZKUdrWyCV4http://">http://block-island.villagesoup.com/p/block-island-historical-society/76307#.UZKUdrWyCV4http://</a>
<b>Blithewold Mansion, Gardens and Arboretum</b>	101 Ferry Road (Rt. 114) Bristol, Rhode Island 02809	<a href="http://www.blithewold.org/">http://www.blithewold.org/</a>
<b>Little Compton Historical Society</b>	548 West Main Road (Route 77), Little Compton, RI 02837	<a href="http://www.littlecompton.org">http://www.littlecompton.org</a> <a href="http://www.blithewold.org">http://www.blithewold.org</a> <a href="http://block-island.villagesoup.com/p/block-island-his">http://block-island.villagesoup.com/p/block-island-his</a>
<b>Nathanael Greene Homestead</b>	50 Taft Street Coventry, RI 02816	<a href="http://www.nathanaelgreenehomestead.org">http://www.nathanaelgreenehomestead.org</a>
<b>Newport Historical Society</b>	82 Touro Street, Newport, RI 02840	<a href="http://www.newporthistorical.org">http://www.newporthistorical.org</a>
<b>Newport Restoration Foundation</b>	680 Bellevue Newport, RI 02840	<a href="http://www.newportrestoration.org">http://www.newportrestoration.org</a>
<b>Pettaquamscutt Historical Society</b>	2636 Kingstown Road (Rt 138) Kingston, RI 02881	<a href="http://www.pettaquamscutt.org">http://www.pettaquamscutt.org</a>
<b>Smith's Castle</b>	55 Richard Smith Drive in North Kingstown, RI 02852	<a href="http://www.smithscastle.org">http://www.smithscastle.org</a>
<b>Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society (Paine House)</b>	7 Station St., Coventry, RI 02816	<a href="http://www.westernrihistory.org">http://www.westernrihistory.org</a>
<b>Museum of Work and Culture</b>	42 South Main Street Woonsocket, RI 02895	<a href="http://www.rihs.org/museums/museum-of-work-and-culture/">http://www.rihs.org/museums/museum-of-work-and-culture/</a>

<i>INSTITUTION</i>	<i>CONTACT PERSON</i>	<i>INTERPRETIVE FOCUS</i>	<i>OPERATION</i>	<i>ACCESSIONS / DEACCESSIONS POLICY</i>	<i>EXHIBIT ROTATION</i>	<i>TEXTILE PERSON</i>	<i>SCHOOL GROUPS</i>	<i>COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE</i>
<b>Babcock Smith House</b>	Linda Chaffee	Volunteer-run, interp focus on family and region	May - October	no	?	Wanda Butler, volunteer	yes, tours and camps	?
<b>Block Island Historical Society</b>	Pamela Gasner	Historical Society, formerly a hotel	summer	no	yearly	no		PastPerfect
<b>Blithewold Mansion, Gardens and Arboretum</b>	Tree Calahan	Historic Home with interp focus on family	year-round	?	yearly	no	yes, tours and camps	?
<b>Little Compton Historical Society</b>	Marjory O'Toole	Historical Society, formerly tavern, schoolhouse	limited winter hours	yes	yearly	no	yes	PastPerfect
<b>Nathanael Greene Homestead</b>	Richard Siembab	Historic Home with interp focus on family	April - October	?	?	no	yes	?
<b>Newport Historical Society</b>	Bert Lippencott, Jen Robinson	Historical Society	year-round	yes	yearly	Jen Robinson	no	PastPerfect
<b>Newport Restoration Foundation</b>	Bruce MacLeish, Kristin Costa	individual interp focus	March - November	yes	yearly	Kristin Costa	yes	?
<b>Pettaquamscutt Historical Society</b>	Patricia Ahl, Eleanor Langham	local history	year-round	?	?	no	yes	?
<b>Smith's Castle</b>	Jan Breault	local history	May - October	?	?	no	yes	?
<b>Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society (Paine House)</b>	Brenda Jacob	Historical Society, no interp focus on family, house has had many uses	april - november	?	yearly	Lisa, volunteer	yes	?
<b>Museum of Work and Culture</b>	Ray Bacon	local history	year-round	?	?	no	yes	?



## APPENDIX C

### RICI EMAIL AND QUESTIONS

Hello,

My name is Mary Elizabeth Corrigan and I am a graduate student at the University of Rhode Island in the Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design Department. I am working on my thesis titled “Cultural Institutions, Sustainability, and Community Engagement.” I plan to study the relationship between Rhode Island cultural institutions and the Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design department (TMD) of the University of Rhode Island and create a model for strengthening and supporting community engagement between universities and related cultural institutions. As the title of my study suggests, I am interested in the potential to improve the mission of URI's TMD department and participating institutions. I am in the process of contacting 13 Rhode Island cultural institutions and asking them to participate in two site visits and a semi-structured interview. I would like to speak with a staff member or volunteer who can discuss the site and ideally is familiar with any textiles or costumes your site may contain. The initial site visit and interview should take no more than an hour. I would also like to conduct a follow-up visit to allow more time for discussion, or to accommodate busy schedules. I have attached an informed consent document. This document is a formal description of the study, participant requirements, potential risks and benefits, and information about how to leave the study at any time. I have also provided below a list of suggested open-ended discussion questions that will be the basis of the semi-structured interview. (you do not have to fill them out beforehand, they are just for reference.) If you are interested in participating in this project, please read the informed consent document and let me know if you have any questions. If you choose to participate in this study, we can schedule a meeting at your convenience.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Mary Elizabeth Corrigan

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What is your role at this site?

How does your site engage visitors? Who is your target audience?

Do you measure your engagement with your community? If so, how?

Can you tell me a little your site's facilities?

Is there someone who specifically deals with textiles or costume?

Do you think there is an interest in inter-institutional engagement?

Are there any topics or projects that you would like to suggest to promote Engagement?

What kind of follow-up contact or information would you like from me, Dr. Gagnon, or the TMD department as this project continues?

APPENDIX D  
LIST OF ALUMNI

Karen Conopask

Claudia Iannuccilli

Kate Irvin

## APPENDIX E

### ALUMNI EMAIL AND QUESTIONS

Hello,

My name is Mary Elizabeth Corrigan and I am a graduate student at the University of Rhode Island in the Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design Department. I am working on my thesis titled “Cultural Institutions, Sustainability and Community Engagement.” I plan to study the relationship between Rhode Island cultural institutions and the Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design department (TMD) of the University of Rhode Island and create a model for strengthening and supporting community engagement between universities and related cultural institutions. As the title of my study suggests, I am interested in the potential to improve the mission of URI's TMD department and participating institutions. I am in the process of contacting 13 Rhode Island cultural institutions and asking them to participate in two site visits and a semi-structured interview. I am also contacting a purposeful sample of TMD graduate program alumni to incorporate your input into my recommendations.

The semi-structured interview should take no more than an hour. I have attached an informed consent document. This document is a formal description of the study, participant requirements, potential risks and benefits, and information about how to leave the study at any time. I have also provided below a list of suggested open-ended discussion questions that will be the basis of the semi-structured interview. If you are interested in participating in this project, please read the informed consent document and let me know if you have any questions. If you choose to participate in this study, we can schedule a meeting at your convenience.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Mary Elizabeth Corrigan

#### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Can you reflect on your experience of engagement during your time as a TMD graduate student?

Can you speak to how engagement could be institutionalized into the TMD graduate program based on your experience as a student?

As a museum professional, can you see ways you could engage with the program now that you are in the field?

Do you think there is an interest in inter-institutional engagement?

How do you see where your institution fits within this trend?

Are there any topics or projects that you would like to suggest to promote engagement?

What kind of follow-up contact or information would you like from me, Dr. Gagnon, or the TMD department as this project continues?

APPENDIX F  
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Present the results of this study to the Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design (TMD) faculty to encourage inter-institutional collaborations in alignment with URI's Community Engagement goals.
2. To strengthen community ties and provide an environment where opportunities for collaborative projects can develop, TMD should invite staff and volunteers of Rhode Island Cultural Institutions (RICI) to HTCC tours, Textile Gallery exhibition openings, and provide mutually beneficial forums, such as symposia, to disseminate results of research and projects conducted at RICIs and TMD, particularly ones that relate to common subjects such as textiles and collection management. Participants consistently expressed interest in workshops, symposia, and Textile Gallery openings, and TMD can sustain this community by hosting such events. Casual social events are also important for sustaining this community, as noted by TMD alumni, some of the most valuable interactions with fellow RICI community members have been lunches hosted by an auction house.
3. Create a committee composed of TMD faculty, graduate students, RICI staff, and volunteers specifically to encourage community engagement and develop collaborative projects. This committee can facilitate service-learning opportunities for graduate students such as assisting RICIs in seasonal historic housekeeping, exhibit installation, and de-installation.
4. Add assignments to current TMD graduate courses requiring students to work with RICI collections on collaborative research projects. Students will use their skills and

knowledge, gain experience working with different institutions and collections, understand how limited budgets affect operations, and build their professional networks, which can potentially lead to more opportunities for collaborative projects and future job opportunities.

5. Add a new required course for TMD graduate students focusing on collaborative projects. This course would pair first- and second-year graduate students to encourage cooperative, community-based learning. In addition, it will build relationships between first and second year students providing an opportunity for mentoring within the department and a potential structure of building sustainability within the program as first year students transition to be the student leaders of the following year. This may require the course being repeatable for 6 credits.

6. Seek grant and/or internal funding for a graduate assistant position tasked with managing community engagement planning related to the HTCC, faculty and student research, and course projects. Seed money can be sought from the Rhode Island Humanities Council with matching funds from URI. These funds then can be used to set the foundation for larger grants such as from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Institute for Museum and Library Services.

## APPENDIX G: PROPOSED SYLLABUS

### TMD 5XX: COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT CLASS

FORMAT: course meets once per week for three hours

#### **Required Reading:**

American Alliance of Museums, “Alliance Reference Guide: Developing a Collections Management Policy” American Alliance of Museums. <http://aam-us.org/docs/continuum/developing-a-cmp-final.pdf>

American Association for State and Local History “Sample Collection Documents” American Association for State and Local History, [http://resource.aaslh.org/resources\\_tags/sample-collection-documents/](http://resource.aaslh.org/resources_tags/sample-collection-documents/)

International Council of Museums *Code of Ethics*, International Council of Museums, <http://archives.icom.museum/ethics.html>

Simmons, John E. *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*. Washington, D.C. American Association of Museums, 2006.

**\*\*additional reading related to specific project will be determined in the course\*\***

#### **Course Description:**

This course focuses on collections management and community engagement. Students will read literature related to collections management and inter-institutional engagement, in coordination with their participation in an inter-institutional collection management project with a Rhode Island Cultural Institution (RICI). The specific topic for the project will be determined through discussion with RICI representatives, and completed during the semester. Through this process, students will be introduced to ethics, professional organizations, policy development, and the creation and analysis of an inter-institutional collaboration on collection management.

#### **Course Goals:**

1. Museum Ethics
2. Collections management standards
3. Team-based collections management practices
4. Methods of adapting professional standards to individual contexts
5. How to plan and execute inter-institutional project

**Grading:**

Responses to Readings	30 %
Engagement	70 %
Total	100%

**Explanation of Assignments and Course Information:**

**Class Participation:** This course will be taught in a seminar format, discussing assigned readings and preparing for the research project. Participation will be assessed in each class and absences will be noted. This class meets once a week; thus, missing one class is missing an entire week and a full topic of discussion. You are expected to be prepared for class at all times and to participate in all discussions. Participation is 20% of your grade.

**Responses to Readings:** To stimulate discussion and improve reading comprehension, one-page responses to assigned readings or questions will be assigned throughout the semester.

**Engagement:** Because the specific project will be determined through discussion with RIC representatives, participation will be assessed during planning discussions, contributions to the Action Plan, and quality of contribution to the project. The quality of contribution will be based on student's experience and improvement. See additional engagement assessment document.

**Schedule**

**Week 1** Introduction to course and meet with Rhode Island Cultural Institution representatives from site selected by faculty / TMD engagement committee. (See recommendations for committee in Appendix F)

**Week 2** Discussion: Museum Ethical and Legal Issues

**Week 3** Discussion: Museum Policies: Collections, Loans, and Emergency Preparedness plans

**Week 4** Discussion: Environmental Conditions, Collections Care, and Object Handling

**\*Week 5** Site visit: Tour and discussion of potential projects and goals.

**Week 6** Discussion: Developing an action plan (reflection essay due)

**Week 7** Discussion: Storage Strategies

**Week 8** Discussion: Collection Management documentation practices and software  
(workshop plans due)

\***Week 9** Site visit: Finalize Action Plan with RIC I representatives, workshop

\***Week 10:** On-site

\***Week 11:** On-site

\***Week 12:** On-site

**Week 13:** Discussion: project goals and outcomes (reflection essay due)

**Week 14 Final Presentations to TMD faculty, Site Staff and Volunteers, location  
TBD.**

\*NOTE: class will meet at RIC I site on weeks 5, 9, 10, 11, and 12. Travel will be coordinated from campus to RIC I site at first class meeting.