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THE ART OF REMOVAL: AN ANALYSIS OF DEACCESSIONING IN CLOTHING
AND TEXTILE TEACHING COLLECTIONS

BY

KRISTIN MORGAN DEITOS

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

2016

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS
OF
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2016

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of deaccessioning and disposal policies and procedures in clothing and textile academic collections. As a collections management tool, deaccessioning, or the removal of an object from a collection, is a recognized part of museum stewardship. High profile controversies have increased interest in the ethics surrounding deaccessioning and disposal, yet little scholarship explores the realities of the processes in relation to ideal museum practices. Smaller museums and collections with unique missions are often left to interpret policy guidelines and literature meant for large museums. Clothing and textile teaching collections are institutions that vary in teaching mission and internal structure from the typical large art museum. This in turn affects their policies, criteria, justification, and procedures of deaccessioning. This thesis discusses the information provided from interviews with thirteen clothing and textile teaching collections staff on their deaccessioning policies and practices, including motivations/justifications, criteria for object selection, disposal methods, successes, and challenges as a compendium of the act. This study found that clothing and textile teaching collections' staff are engaging with deaccessioning and disposal, creating formal policies and procedures, and informing their choices with literature on museum best practices. Ten out of thirteen academic clothing and textile collection's staff interviewed use deaccession and disposal to better serve their mission and collection objectives. The lack of collections management literature focused on these collections serves as a hindrance in systematic deaccession and disposal. Further research and development of collections management guidelines are vital for the support of these unique collections.

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“The time has come to stop the endless debates on deaccessioning in theory, for it is already happening in practice”¹

Part I: INTRODUCTION

Deaccessioning, the permanent removal of an object from a collection, is one of the most controversial and divisive practices in the museum field. While provoking discussion and debate for the last several decades, the practice is now widely upheld as an important tool for museum sustainability. Deaccessioning and the subsequent disposal of an object serves as a way to improve a collection by refining, upgrading, or focusing it to better serve its mission. When conducted according to established ethical standards and sound policies, deaccessioning is regarded as a museum best practice.²

More than just the opposite of accessioning, Marie Malaro, a prominent scholar on law, ethics, and museums, notes that deaccessioning is not only an object's documented removal from a collection, but also incorporates the disposal of that object.³ Disposal is the physical removal, or mode of transferal, of the deaccessioned object from a collection.⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) includes disposal in its definition of

¹ Bendor Grosvenor, "Deaccessioning in Practice: How to Make Sure We Get It Right," in *Museums and the Disposal Debate: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc), 182.

² John E. Simmons, *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2006), 52.

³ Accessioning is the formal act of legally accepting an object or objects to the category of material that a museum holds in the public trust, or in other words those in the museum's permanent collection. "Accessioning Activity," American Alliance of Museums, accessed Jan. 22, 2016, <http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/continuum/acquisitions-activity.pdf?sfvrsn=4>; Marie C. Malaro, "Deaccessioning: The American Perspective," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 10, no. 3 (1991): 273.

⁴ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 4.

de-accessioning as the “removal of an entry from the accessions register of a museum, library, etc., usually in order to sell the item concerned.”⁵ In contrast to the OED definition, methods to dispose of deaccessioned objects can range from a transfer to another collection, repatriation, trade, destruction, to selling.⁶ The sale of a deaccessioned object is not the only method of disposal; yet, most literature and ethical debates on the process of deaccessioning are based upon the disposal method of selling an object.

Opposition results from controversies surrounding poorly managed deaccession and disposal led by questionable motives and the unrealistic notions of museums being “permanent repositories in which things will be forever preserved.”⁷ Most notably, contentions surrounding the sale of high value museum artwork push these debates into the public realm. As a result of repeated controversies, deaccessioning is still viewed by some as a negative or unethical action. These events continually prompt the assessment of museum policies worldwide and foster discussions on museum ethics. Accordingly, a plethora of literature on best practices and ethics of deaccessioning and disposal has been published by scholars and museum associations.

Such best practice guidelines, published and demanded by museum accreditation organizations, are rooted in ethical concerns and primarily focus on legal and financial considerations.⁸ They neglect the assessment of the artifacts or fail to delineate

⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, "De-Accession, V," Oxford University Press, accessed <http://www.oed.com/>.

⁶ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 2.

⁷ Jessica Hadfield, "Deaccession and Disposal: The Theory in Context," in *Museums and the Disposal Debate: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh, UK: MuseumsEct Ltd, 2011), 86.

⁸ Those organizations are the American Alliance of Museums (AAM, formally the American Association of Museums), The Association of Art Museum Directors

procedures of disposal in a practical way. As the field-wide and public ethical debate focuses on elements of controversy from the deaccession sales of large fine art museums, so the literature follows suit.⁹ A multitude of different types of museums, including art, history, and anthropology, along with libraries and archives engage in deaccessioning practices. Yet, most guidelines of deaccessioning and disposal are strikingly similar in policy literature. Little scholarship explores the variations or simply the realities of the implementation of such standards and policies in a range of museums and collections. According to Nick Merriman, “while a considerable amount of research has been done on the ethics of deaccessioning, the actual practice remains somewhat unclear.”¹⁰ Museums and collections are left to interpret and develop deaccession policies, as prescribed by scholars, demanded by accreditation organizations, and expected by the public, to fit their size and unique mission.

This thesis presents a study of the development and practice of deaccessioning on a collections level. It specifically addresses the unique objectives of clothing and textile teaching collections and the success and challenges of such environments. Research to expand the understanding of deaccessioning and disposal realities in policies, motivations, selection criteria, and procedures in all types of museums and collections is relevant because it fills a gap in the field’s ability to address the practices as they align with the ideals and guidelines put forward by the stewards of best museum practice. As

(AAMD), The International Council of Museums (ICOM), and American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)

⁹ Fine art collections include those artifacts usually referred to as art: paintings, sculptures, and drawings. Geoffrey Lewis, "Attitudes to Disposal from Museum Collections," in *A Deaccession Reader*, ed. Stephen E. Weil (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997), 110.

¹⁰ Nick Merriman, "Museum Collections and Sustainability," *Cultural Trends* 17, no. 1 (2008): 5.

noted by John Simmons in his collections management handbook, *Things Great and Small*, published by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), collections management policies and procedures are ineffective if they are outdated, ignored, too complex, too simple, or do not serve the mission of the museum or collection.¹¹ Including small and unique institutions in the on-going discussion of policy and procedure is imperative, as they too engage with deaccessioning practices and the expectations promulgated through best practice literature.

Clothing and textile teaching collections represent two types of collections that have been underserved in the larger museum literature: 1) educational collections and 2) historic textile and costume collections. Teaching collections, as education driven institutions, have differing missions than that of a museum, whose primary focus is exhibition or public engagement. Many institutions have teaching collections, but they are often described as separate and secondary to the larger, “more valuable” collections.¹² This dissimilarity in mission should be reflected in collections management policies and procedure according to the literature.¹³ However, little information has been documented regarding educational collections, and similarly costume and textile collections; perhaps because the predominant museum field has historically categorized costume as “less valuable” objects. Textiles, as part of the decorative arts sector, often are noted as the “neglected stepchild” of the art world. While many art museums contain textile and costume collections, textile objects repeatedly are viewed as inferior when compared to

¹¹ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 2.

¹² As teaching collections are discussed, it should be noted that this term does not include university museums, as their missions are different than teaching collections.

¹³ Sara Tam, "In Museums We Trust: Analyzing the Mission of Museums, Deaccession Policies, and Public Trust," *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 39, no. 3 (2012): 873.

objects defined as “fine art.” In addition, the use of these objects in scholarly fields of study lags significantly behind that of other art objects.¹⁴ Though textiles are increasingly scholastic, the deviation of value is reflected in the lack of literature on textiles, especially with regard to collections management. Further, these organic objects are sensitive to degradation through un-regulated storage, handling, and exhibition. As textiles are notably one of the most difficult and fragile collection objects, understanding and sharing knowledge of how these collections employ deaccessioning is a consequential starting point for further research.

This study explores deaccessioning through the perspective of clothing and textile teaching collections, as one of the most underserved areas in collections management literature, and more specifically, neglected in deaccessioning literature. As an investigation into the language of policy, motivation, selection process, disposal, and outcomes of deaccessioning practices, this study responds to the need for information and is inspired by a trend in deaccession literature that disseminates research through case studies, or more specifically post-mortem analyses of recent deaccessions.¹⁵ Investigations into “successful” or unique deaccessioning challenges are still vastly outnumbered by generic commentary on the ethics of current deaccessioning controversies. While scholars agree on public transparency for collections engaging in deaccessioning, limited assessments of the internal practices exist. As has been noted in

¹⁴ Christa C. Mayer Thurman, *European Textiles*, vol. 14, Robert Lehman Collection (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), vii.

¹⁵ Such case studies include those of the Brooklyn Museum and Glenbow Museum. Daryl Betenia et al., “No Longer the Devil’s Handiwork: Deaccessioning at Glenbow,” in *Museums and the Disposal Debate*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: Museums ETC, 2011); Stefanie S. Jandl and Mark S. Gold, “The Practical and Legal Implications of Efforts to Keep Deaccessioned Objects in the Public Domain,” in *Museums and the Disposal Debate*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsETC, 2011).

several essays, if all deaccessioning practices should be particular to a collection's or a museum's mission, so the literature should follow in describing the unique challenges they encounter.¹⁶ Case studies can inform policies and procedures of those institutions with similar missions or objectives. Comparative case studies provide realistic examples of the current deaccession practice in a particular sector and serve those collections interested in creating, reviewing, or amending collections management policies. To understand the development of this study, one must first understand the history behind the current practice.

Historic Development of Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning, presumably, has been a museum practice since the beginning of collections. However, the process was generally unregulated and practiced at the discretion of the institution.¹⁷ To understand the current ethics on deaccessioning, one must first understand the development of museums in America. According to Julianna Shubinski, how deaccessioning became a standard element of collections management in the late twentieth century can be understood as a consequence of a number of factors including significant changes in the institutional and economic environment and increasing expectations of public accountability.¹⁸

Museums were first established in America during the late eighteenth century as for-profit enterprises; museums of curiosities provided more entertainment than

¹⁶ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 54.

¹⁷ Malaro, "Deaccessioning: The American Perspective."

¹⁸ Julianna Shubinski, "From Exception to Norm: Deaccessioning in Late Twentieth Century American Art Museums" (Master's Thesis, University of Kentucky, 2007).

education. These institutions were founded often from private collections and displayed unique and rare objects to draw in an audience. The painter, Charles Willson Peale, opened one of America's first museums, Peale's Cabinet of Curiosities in Philadelphia, in 1786. This diverse collection included Peale's portraits of George Washington and the bones of a North American woolly mammoth he himself excavated.¹⁹ According to Stephen Asma, the early American museum was where "the bizarre was collected together with sober specimens with no real order or organization."²⁰ Motives for the establishment of museums in early America ranged from education to luring profit from crowds willing to pay to see exotic wonders.²¹ The missions and collecting models of these early museums reflected the vision of an individual or a private group of founders. The result was a diverse array of museums that collected and exhibited a variety of objects.²² Harold Skramstad notes, "If there was a distinguishing feature of American museums from the outset, it was their diversity."²³ As popular taste and scholarship changed through time, so did these museums.

Later in the mid-nineteenth century, affluent members of society, intent on enlightening the general public, began acquiring a multitude of objects to establish industrial, scientific, and fine art museums. These institutions existed to collect and protect objects associated with social history or "heritage." However, the protection or conservation of these objects was often an afterthought, rather a side effect of the

¹⁹ Harold Skramstad, "An Agenda for American Museums in the Twenty-First Century," *Daedalus* 128, no. 3 (1999): 110.

²⁰ Bob Mondello, "A History of Museums, 'the Memory of Mankind'," NPR, accessed Feb 6, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97377145>.

²¹ Shubinski, "From Exception to Norm," 2-4.

²² Tam, "In Museums We Trust," 856.

²³ Skramstad, "An Agenda for American Museums," 110.

collecting spree. Early collections of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were repositories for artifacts, where objects were stored and largely ignored. Museums as spaces for collecting, processing, and storing remained largely unchanged until the mid-twentieth century.²⁴

After the initial surge of acquisitions, American museums gradually began to favor quality over quantity. The emphasis on blind collecting changed after WWII. The resulting economic shifts and the general loss of acquisition funds impacted the development of a more measured scientific collecting approach that became known as collections development.²⁵ Museums began to acquire objects and funds primarily through private donations. This development is distinct to the American museum culture. Throughout this study, comparisons to the European museum culture will be noted. European museums are mostly state organizations with public funding; whereas, well over 90 percent of the objects in United States museums have been donated.²⁶ This economic and historic shift to a reliance on donors for museum support and acquisitions is what marks American museums from other cultural models and distinguishes American ethical debates on deaccessioning and disposal. Through a new dependence on the public, museums became tailored to their supportive communities. Institutions in the United States have since been grounded in the tradition of public service. A museum, supported by the public, carries out its mission to collect and exhibit objects for the benefit of the public, a fiduciary duty.

²⁴ Sydney J. Shep and G. E. Gorman, "Redefining the Collection in the 21st Century," in *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*, ed. Sydney J. Shep and G. E. Gorman (London: Facet Publishing, 2006), 182.

²⁵ Ibid., 183.

²⁶ Malero, "Deaccessioning: The American Perspective," 41.

This concept of public trust has both legal and ethical dimensions. Under US law, nonprofit and government collecting units are public trust entities with an obligation to administer their collections for the benefit of the public. By law, their fiduciary responsibilities include the care of collections, adherence to the mission of the institution, and the expectation to follow higher standards such as ethical codes.²⁷ Most people, and especially donors, inherently believe that the purpose of museums is to preserve collections and hold objects in trust for perpetuity. Differing views on deaccessioning policies stem from divergent interpretations of a museum's mission, public trust, and this idea of “perpetuity.” These conflicting viewpoints, which will be investigated further in this study, illustrate why no current consensus on the issues of deaccessioning and disposal exist.

As part of collections development, new methods of registration called for museums to adopt policies and strategies to determine what they could and could not collect.²⁸ With the formation of strict accession policies, museums became more selective in what they acquired. As a result of the new policies, “less significant” objects in often overcrowded storage areas began to be removed from collections, and the process of deaccessioning in American museums commenced.²⁹ Modern attitudes towards deaccessioning have changed greatly with stricter policies and the professionalization of museum staff. For example, in 1927 AAM secretary Laurence Vail Coleman wrote, “On occasion worthless material may be accepted and later thrown away rather than give

²⁷ Office of Policy and Analysis Smithsonian Institution, *Concern at the Core: Managing Smithsonian Collections: Executive Summary* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution, 2005), 165.

²⁸ Shep and Gorman, "Redefining the Collection in the 21st Century," 183.

²⁹ Shubinski, "From Exception to Norm," 1.

offense by refusing it.”³⁰ Today, it is widely recognized that the best control a museum has over deaccessioning is a good accessions policy.

Most recently, collection development has given way to collections management. This more dynamic approach includes integrated policies and procedures of how museums plan for, collect, process, store, use, evaluate, and conserve objects.³¹ The principal facets of collections management policies include accessioning, cataloging, security, storage, and deaccessioning. Deaccessioning, however, did not become an established formal practice in collections management until the last three decades of the twentieth century. Prior to that time, the ways in which museums dealt with their collections were not a matter of any widespread concern or even any particular public interest.³²

This formalization was partly a response to a public controversy surrounding the sale of artwork at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met) in 1972. In a brief summary, the Met sold paintings against the wishes of the donor Adelaide Milton de Groot. The donor’s gift agreement specified that if the Met did not wish to keep the works for perpetuity, the artworks were to be contributed to other museums. John Canaday reported the incident in a *New York Times* article entitled, “Very Quiet and Very Dangerous.”³³ Within a year of this incident, the newspapers’ definition of deaccessioning grew from “the polite term for sold” to the “barbaric museum jargon for preparing to sell.”³⁴ This negative and distorted introduction of deaccessioning practices to the public sphere

³⁰ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 51.

³¹ Shep and Gorman, "Redefining the Collection in the 21st Century," 182.

³² Stephen E. Weil, "Introduction," in *A Deaccession Reader*, ed. Stephen E. Weil (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997), 3.

³³ James Canaday, "Very Quiet and Very Dangerous," *New York Times*, Feb. 27, 1972.

³⁴ OED, "De-Accession, V."

caused museums and collections to become defensive, and consequently, more transparent about their deaccessioning and disposal processes. The ramifications of these distorted views will be discussed further in following chapters.

A museum's fundamental mission to preserve and build collections for the benefit of present and future generations can be challenged when it seeks to remove objects from the collections. The public transparency of such "unethical" actions or violations to public trust in a public space was the catalyst for scholarship and debate on deaccessioning procedures. Yet, not until 1984, more than a decade after the initial controversy, did AAM first made the adoption of a written collections management policy a prerequisite for a museum seeking accreditation or reaccreditation.³⁵

Modern accreditation standards of museum associations now serve as the mediator between museums and public interest. These best practice standards have significant influence on the way in which collections are managed and used. According to the AAM's website, accreditation is the museum "field's mark of distinction. Since 1971, accreditation offers high profile, peer-based validation of your museum's operations and impact. Accreditation increases your museum's credibility and value to funders, policy makers, insurers, community and peers."³⁶ Over the last few decades, AAM and other accreditation organizations have updated, refined, and promoted ethical guidelines on the act of deaccessioning to adapt to current scholarship so that museums under their organization uphold their ideals of public trust.

³⁵ Weil, "Introduction," 4.

³⁶ "Accreditation," American Alliance of Museums, accessed Feb 6. 2016, <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/assessment-programs/accreditation>.

Modern scholarship on collections management represents a new shift in attitude towards the role of deaccession and disposal, as part of what Merriman defines as “a sustainable museum.”³⁷ The 2008 severe economic recession in the United States created an economic climate in which funding sources were, and still are, scarcer than ever for non-profits. As a result, collections are trying to do more with less. Museums across the nation are laying off staff, canceling exhibits, raising admissions prices, and closing extra days or even entire months.³⁸ Without interested audiences or benefactors, museums have difficulty thriving. The financial crisis forced museums into what the Brooklyn Museum calls a “new economic reality.”³⁹

The retention of each and every object in a collection involves an ongoing expense for the museum. In 1988, the annual operating cost of one square foot of storage space was estimated at thirty dollars, and approximately 90 percent of an art museum’s collections are in storage.⁴⁰ This puts museums in an intriguing dilemma of how to care for a multitude of objects with decreasing funds, while maintaining public support and trust. To keep their doors open, museums choose to curtail their collections.⁴¹ Recent scholarship suggests the relevancy of deaccessioning in such a climate.⁴² Current

³⁷ Merriman, "Museum Collections and Sustainability."

³⁸ Jorja Ackers Cirigliana, "Let Them Sell Art: Why a Broader Deaccession Policy Today Could Save Museums Tomorrow," *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal* 20 (2011): 370.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 385.

⁴¹ Eileen Cunniffe, "The “D Word” and 21st-Century Museum Management," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, accessed Jan 2, 2016, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2014/08/14/the-d-word-and-21st-century-museum-management/>.

⁴² Terri Anderson, "Too Much of a Good Thing: Lessons from Deaccessioning at National Trust Historic Sites," in *Museums and the Disposal Debate: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc 2011), 233-34.

emphasis on sustainability and effective use and management of collections has resulted in broader recognition of the benefits of disposal.⁴³

The early twenty-first century has been a transitional time with respect to the collecting and deaccessioning practices of American museums. In recent years, the greater museum field has experienced a shift, with an increased focus on the provenance of objects acquired by museums, as well as an ever-expanding scrutiny of objects held in museum collections.⁴⁴ However, much of these collection management strategies, especially deaccessioning, have been applied after museum storage areas had been abounded by means of the earlier aggregate acquiring. Massive backlogs in conservation work and the long-term storage of irrelevant material have become an increasingly costly task and a financial burden.⁴⁵ Many museums impose these policies retrospectively, which leads us to the current paradigm in deaccessioning. Museums do not want to make deaccession decisions that will cause regret later, but also cannot jeopardize the care of valuable collections that are being overwhelmed by objects that cannot be utilized.⁴⁶

Museums have transformed over the last couple of decades from dusty places focused on the past, into forward-looking engines of social engagement and agents of change. This adaptive nature has led American museums in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century to change their business practices in response to an increasingly competitive environment. One of the reasons that the issue of disposal has been so

⁴³ Peter Davies, "Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma," in *Museums and Disposal Debate*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsETC, 2011), 35.

⁴⁴ Karen D. Daly, "Provenance Research in Museum Collections," in *Museum Registration Methods*, ed. Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allmam Gilmore (Washington, DC: The AAM Press, 2010), 73.

⁴⁵ Merriman, "Museum Collections and Sustainability," 6.

⁴⁶ Anderson, "Too Much of a Good Thing," 234.

difficult for museum professionals is that the profession has argued for decades a “presumption against disposal” because museums hold objects in trust on behalf of the public.⁴⁷

With disposal comes a field-wide fear of alienating people who have donated to museum collections.⁴⁸ Daniel Reibel in *Registration Methods for the Small Museum* strongly states, “the museum has to carefully consider what impact any deaccession will have on its relationship with its donors and the community. Every deaccession represents some failure on the part of the museum.”⁴⁹ Further, previous poor practice has resulted in important objects being thrown away, and some museums have been vilified in the press for selling off important artworks.⁵⁰ Such financially motivated disposal risks damaging public confidence in museums.

Despite the controversy, a compelling case for the practice of deaccessioning as a sustainable practice subsists. In the present, the American museum field is ever more alert to issues of legal responsibilities, the public’s expectations of museums, and ethics codes for institutions and individuals. Policy guidelines therefore have become increasingly important for the practice of deaccessioning in all museums.

⁴⁷ Tiffany Jenkins, "Just Say No: You Cannot Be Too Careful in Embracing Disposal," in *Museums and the Disposal Debate*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsETC, 2011), 76.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁹ Daniel B. Reibel, *Registration Methods for the Small Museum*, ed. Thomas A. Mason, 4th ed., American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), 72.

⁵⁰ Jenkins, "Just Say No."

Plan of Presentation

This research explored how deaccessioning and disposal are viewed as a viable collections management tool that balances the weight of public trust, ethical standards, and institutional needs and policies within clothing and textile teaching collections. To begin, Part Two, the review of literature, is divided into four chapters to address the practice as it concerns this study. As little has been written on textile deaccessioning, the review of literature must encompass a broad scope of deaccession literature to understand the practice at large before examining clothing and textile teaching collections. Chapters One and Two of this study investigate the role of deaccessioning in the museum field, and Chapters Three and Four examine the current literature on clothing and textile teaching collections. Chapter One explores the different types of deaccessioning as it pertains to institutional management, motivations, conditions, and criteria. Building upon these varying definitions, Chapter Two investigates details surrounding different accreditation best practice guidelines, the controversies that shaped them, and how they inform current deaccessioning policy and procedures. Chapter Three discusses the history of teaching collections and what we know about current collections management practices. Finally, Chapter Four investigates the unique conditions surrounding clothing and textile collections management and deaccessioning. Part Three lays out the methodology of the qualitative study. Part Four discusses the results of the study as a compendium of clothing and textile teaching collection deaccession and disposal policies and procedures. Part Five is the conclusion and presents topics for further research.

PART II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Deaccessioning takes place for many reasons ranging from the obvious and logical to the weak and bizarre.”⁵¹

Chapter One: Deaccession and Disposal

Introduction

“Museums are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artifacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.”⁵² To be relevant to a community, a collection grows over time through the acquisition of items.⁵³ The process of accessioning brings an object into the permanent collection of a museum. Thus, the process of permanent removal of an accessioned object is termed deaccession.

Over the years, the word deaccession has come to encompass many connotations. For this study, deaccessioning is the documenting process of permanently removing an object of a museum collection from its legal custody. If the aim of a deaccession is the permanent removal of the item physically from the institution, deaccession is then followed by disposal. In some literature, the term deaccession and disposal are interchangeable, or the term deaccession is meant to encompass both deaccession and disposal. While deaccession and disposal are most often practiced together and inextricably intertwined, for clarity they will be discussed as individual processes throughout this review of literature.

⁵¹ Steven Miller, "'Guilt-Free' Deaccessioning," in *A Deaccession Reader*, ed. Stephen E. Weil (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997), 93.

⁵² "Code of Ethics for Museums," Museum Association, accessed Jan. 22, 2016, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>.

⁵³ Hadfield, "Deaccession and Disposal," 85.

Many compelling cases for the practice of deaccessioning and disposal exist. Current emphasis on sustainability and management of collections, as well as recognition of the infeasibility of expanding museums physically as collections grow, has resulted in broader recognition of the benefits of deaccessioning and disposal.⁵⁴ As Thomas Messer, the former director of the Guggenheim museum puts it, “a museum, no more than an individual, cannot constantly ingest without occasional excreting.”⁵⁵ The evolution of a collection is vital, and museums must continue to collect, through educated judgments, objects of value for both present and future audiences.⁵⁶ John Simmons in the AAM’s collections management handbook, *Things Great and Small*, asserts, “Collections are dynamic, not static.”⁵⁷ Practically, however, it is not feasible in the long-term for museums to continue to acquire items without becoming larger and less manageable. Jessica Hadfield explains that this places collecting institutions in a paradoxical situation; needing to continue to acquire objects, but at the same time needing to consider the disposal of objects that were at one time judged to be suitable for the permanent collection.⁵⁸ Many museums over the course of time have collected material that is 1) clearly outside the scope of their mission, 2) may be deteriorated beyond a useful life, or 3) could be better used by other collecting institutions. Managing collections is a rigorous and costly task, and some museums simply do not have the resources to properly care for

⁵⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁵ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 51.

⁵⁶ Hadfield, "Deaccession and Disposal," 95.

⁵⁷ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 52.

⁵⁸ Hadfield, "Deaccession and Disposal," 85.

or make accessible all of their collections.⁵⁹ Museums are not, and cannot be, infinite. For example, if resources are being spent on objects that do not fall within a collection's mission, have no relevant or known provenance, or are in poor condition, those wasted resources are not supporting the objectives of the museum or collection.⁶⁰ Further, if an institution insists on keeping objects it does not have the resources to care for, it runs the risk of damaging such objects; damage limits future scholarship and cultural appreciation. Therefore, informed and responsible choices have to be made. Deaccession and disposal are not easy processes, and the decisions are not to be taken lightly. According to Errol van de Werdt, "A deaccessioning and disposal operation can only succeed with good preparation, planning and support within the organization."⁶¹ This chapter explores further the question "What is deaccessioning?" by investigating the different categories of deaccessioning and disposal, and the literature's discussion of motivations, justifications, and criteria of such practices.

Deaccessioning

"Deaccessioning is a policy, practice, and process. As a policy, it is approved by a museum's governing authority and is usually formalized in various documents. As a practice, it happens. As a process, it should unfold in an intellectually and procedurally

⁵⁹ Martha Morris and Antonia Moser, "Deaccessioning," in *Museum Registration Methods*, ed. Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore (Washington, DC: AAM Press, 2010), 100.

⁶⁰ Betenia et al., "No Longer the Devil's Handiwork: Deaccessioning at Glenbow," 226.

⁶¹ Errol van de Werdt, "Deaccessioning in Perspective," in *Museums and the Disposal Debate*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsETC, 2011), 446.

logical, legal, and disciplined way.”⁶² To fully discuss and analyze deaccessioning in clothing and textile teaching collections, we must first understand how deaccessioning functions as a policy, practice, and process. As a policy, deaccessioning falls under the umbrella of collections management.

Deaccession Policy

Collections management is the comprehensive care of a collection of objects to preserve, protect, develop, and make available for use. Five core documents make up the fundamental documentation for museum operations: mission statement, institutional code of ethics, strategic institutional plan, disaster preparedness/emergency response, and collections management policy.⁶³ Museum best practices imply that collections management policies should include sections detailing accessioning, cataloging, security, storage, and deaccessioning.⁶⁴ These policies help clarify values and goals, and make clear what actions are and are not acceptable. They serve as a guide to staff and as a source of information for the public by articulating museum philosophy and standards regarding the development and management of its collections.⁶⁵

⁶² Steven Miller, "Subtracting Collections: Practice Makes Perfect (Usually)," in *Museums and the Disposal Debate*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsETC, 2011), 396.

⁶³ "Core Documents," American Alliance of Museums, accessed Nov. 11, 2015, <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/assessment-programs/core-documents/documents>.

⁶⁴ "Collections Stewardship," American Alliance of Museums, accessed Nov. 13, 2015, <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/collections-stewardship>.

⁶⁵ Ildiko Pogany DeAngelis, "Collections Management," in *Museum Registration Methods*, ed. Rebecca A. Buck and Jean A. Gilmore (Washington, DC: American Alliance of Museums, 2010), 84.

In a sustainable museum, all operational documents must be cohesive and represent the type of museum it is.⁶⁶ For museum staff to make intelligent decisions regarding deaccessions and disposals, the museum or collection must first have clearly articulated collecting goals, inspired by the respective mission statement, code of ethics, and strategic plan. Deaccessioning practices are inescapably intertwined with accessioning ones, and both must be in consonance with the larger structure of an institution's overall collections management policy.

A museum's collecting activities relate to the purpose of the institution.⁶⁷

According to the American Alliance of Museums,

Accessioning is the formal act of legally accepting an object or objects to the category of material that a museum holds in the public trust. Because it commits staff time, space and other resources to the proper care of this material, it is important that acquiring material for the collections be done in a thoughtful, inclusive way that reflects the best interests of the museum and its audiences, and can be sustained by the available resources.⁶⁸

An accessions policy, as part of the collections management policies, guides the museum's authority figures in the acquiring of objects that they intend to retain for the foreseeable future. Marie Malaro notes this policy includes guidelines and procedures that are informed by the mission of the institution. Indiscriminate accessioning can create muddled and incohesive collections.⁶⁹ Accessions policies, therefore, should be consistent with the goals of the museum.

⁶⁶ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 110.

⁶⁷ Richard Dunn, "The Future of Collecting: Lessons from the Past," in *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, ed. Simon J. Knell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 62.

⁶⁸ "Accessioning Activity."

⁶⁹ Marie C. Malaro and I. P. DeAngelis, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections* (Smithsonian Books, 2012), 60-64.

Like accessioning, strong deaccession policies are echoes of the pillars of the specific institution's core documents. John Simmons makes use of the following figure (Figure 1) to emphasize museum documentation congruity.

FIGURE 1.

Deaccessioning Policy

Source: John Simmons, "The Deaccession Dilemma: Law, Ethics, and Actions," (Connecting to Collections Care, 2015) Webinar.
http://www.connectingtocollections.org/the_deaccessioning_dilemma_laws_ethics_and_actions/.

I.

As each of these policies bears equal weight, a strong or any deaccession policy is not an answer to a weak accessions policy. According to Merriman's museum sustainability study, "the rate of museum acquisitions far outstrips that of disposal."⁷⁰ The use of deaccessioning is not desirable as an action to remove objects from the collections that

⁷⁰ Merriman, "Museum Collections and Sustainability," 23; "The Deaccession Dilemma: Laws, Ethics, and Actions"

were accessioned inattentively. Rather, much like the pruning of a tree, care in the development of policy (both accessioning and deaccessioning) needs to be taken to ensure that each item is useful towards executing the museum's mission and is worthy of preservation for the long-term. According to Morris, to assure the highest level of public accountability, museums must codify policy and procedure for deaccessioning and accessioning, and these policies must be fully effectuated by their governing body and staff.⁷¹ A deaccessioning policy normally includes the criteria necessary for deaccession and the formal procedures or steps that should be taken to carry out the deaccession.

Deaccession Practice Criteria

As noted above, as a practice, deaccessioning happens. To better understand the practice, the question "why does it happen?" must be addressed. Deaccessioning normally begins with two basic justification inquiries: 1) what utility does this particular object have in the execution of the museum's mission, and 2) if it does not have any discernible utility, is there any other compelling reason as to why it should be retained?⁷² Museums define the usefulness of objects in different ways. Weil notes that if deaccessioning came down solely to utility, one could contend that deaccessioning is inappropriate for the museum that makes scholarship its primary goal. The fact that an object may no longer be suitable for public display might be irrelevant in terms of its potential for research. Likewise, the fact that an object might be duplicative or otherwise redundant would not necessarily diminish its utility for some collections. Similar objects

⁷¹ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 100.

⁷² Weil, "Introduction," 5.

might, for example, be useful to different forms of research.⁷³ Thus, all motivations for deaccessioning concerning utility should be justified by the fact that this object does not belong in the permanent collection because it diverts resources away from the care of objects that are central to the enactment of the institution's mission and activities. This is why a museum or collection's mission should dictate the codified deaccession policy and procedures.

As noted previously, museums are expected to adapt to new scholarship, resources, and a local community's needs. The expected growth and change of a collection over time is often the motivation for deaccessioning. Table 1 lists specific motivations for deaccessioning that result from growth and change in a collection.

TABLE 1.

Deaccession Motivations

Change in the museum's mission or focus
A reduction in the museum's resources
Inability to afford to care for items
Lack of storage space
New information regarding an object's provenance
New conservation standards.

Source: Adapted from Weil, "Deaccessioning in American Museums, I," 64.

These motivational examples still fit under the umbrella question of object utility. Objects that fall under these categories, again, divert resources from the fulfillment of mission objectives, and according to the literature, can be justifiably eligible for the process of deaccession. The reasons or conditions museums give for removing collections

⁷³ Weil, "Deaccessioning in American Museums: I," 64.

can be discussed at length, but of equal importance is the framework within which the action of deaccessioning occurs.

According to Van de Werdt, "In practice, the deaccessioning of objects must be executed and documented on an object-by-object basis."⁷⁴ No uniform method for the selection of a potential object for deaccession exists; each situation must be considered individually. With particular facts and circumstances, one also must consider the object's relationship to the total collection.⁷⁵ The deaccessioning process begins, in most institutions, through a review of collections, when it is determined that an object meets one or more of the institution's deaccessioning criteria. A review might be mandated by a deaccession policy as it helps define the scope of collections and clarifies the status of a particular object within a larger collection.⁷⁶

Deaccession criteria, also known as selection criteria, are conditions for justifiably removing an object from a collection. Again, these conditions are normally developed from museums' mission and other collections management policies. Some institutions list several or, in some cases, only one or two criteria to determine whether an object should be deaccessioned. Moving forward, it should be clearly noted that only accessioned objects can be deaccessioned, or need to go through the deaccession process. Objects found-in-collection, loans, or other objects not part of a permanent collection are subject to other policies that will not be discussed as part of this literature review.

⁷⁴ Van de Werdt, "Deaccessioning in Perspective," 437.

⁷⁵ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 54; "Deaccessioning of Art and Attorneys General: Perspectives and Intersections" ed. Cindy M. Lott in *National State Attorneys General Program's Charities Regulation and Oversight Project* (Columbia Law School, 2014) Webinar. <http://web.law.columbia.edu/attorneys-general/policy-areas/charities-law-project/webinars/deaccessioning-art-and-attorneys-general-perspectives-and-intersections>.

⁷⁶ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*; Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning."

Object selection criteria for deaccessioning can be broken down into what Janne Vilkkuna et al from the Jyväskylä University Museum of Finland describe as active and passive deaccessioning.⁷⁷ Passive deaccessioning refers to deaccessioning that is not enacted by a specific motivation mentioned above. Passive deaccession is not systematic, but rather results from the unintentional destruction or loss of an object. This is often caused by an accident or by an external factor. Table 2 lists examples of passive deaccessioning.

TABLE 2

Passive Deaccession Criteria

Theft
Loss of an object
Accidental destruction/human error
Destruction by extrinsic elements/disaster
Self-eradication
Objects that are health hazards

Sources: Adapted from Simmons, “*Things Great and Small*,” 55; Vilkkuna et al., “Disposals in Built Heritage: Destruction or Rational Action,” in *Museums and the Disposal Debate*, ed by Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsETC, 2011); Morris and Moser, “Deaccessioning.”

Unlike passive deaccessioning, which rarely elicits controversy, active deaccessioning is the process that the deaccession debate focuses on, as it requires a judicious decision for object removal. Van de Werdh further breaks down active deaccessioning into two categories: retrospective deaccessioning and structural deaccessioning. The majority of active deaccessioning falls under retrospective deaccessioning. This type of deaccessioning includes criteria that “aim to scrutinize an

⁷⁷ Janne Vilkkuna et al., “Disposals in Built Heritage: Destruction or Rational Action,” in *Museums and the Disposal Debate*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsETC, 2011).

autonomous collection with a particular history in order to ascertain whether it contains incongruous elements.”⁷⁸ These types of criteria are curatorially informed and the objects proactively selected. Table 3 lists specific retrospective deaccessioning criteria discussed in the literature.

TABLE 3

Retrospective Deaccession Criteria

Objects selected as not within the collection’s scope or mission
Beyond the means of the museum to maintain
Not useful for research, exhibition, or educational programs in the foreseeable future
Duplication
Incomplete or unauthentic examples
Found to be part of a set that belong to another institution
Originally acquired illegally or unethically
Objects in poor condition
Objects more appropriate to the collection of another institution
Objects that will generate funds that can be used to acquire other objects or specimens more critical to the collecting plan.

Sources: Adapted from Simmons, “*Things Great and Small*,” 55; Morris and Moser. “Deaccessioning.”

Structural deaccessioning, also a form of active deaccessioning, is a combination of collecting and deaccessioning. Van de Werdt provides the example, “where a collection in its entirety must be accepted, by where only those suitable objects are accessioned. The remaining objects are immediately deaccessioned and disposed of by relocating them within another museum.”⁷⁹ Structural deaccessioning is not necessarily supported by ethics literature and current best practices guidelines as it can complicate

⁷⁸ Van de Werdt, “Deaccessioning in Perspective.”

⁷⁹ Ibid.

donor relations. However, this type of deaccessioning is done in some collections and museums as a means to improve a collection.

Additionally, certain objects in a collection might be subject to a legislative mandate, such as repatriation through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) or Nazi-era art theft restitution. More commonly, objects are subject to review in regard to contractual donor restrictions, or precatory restrictions, that the museum is no longer able to meet.⁸⁰ An example of such restriction would be if a donor gave an object with the stipulation that it must be stored or exhibited a certain way. Some precatory restrictions regulate if the object can be deaccessioned at all or what method of disposal can be employed, as in the 1970s Metropolitan Museum of Art case discussed earlier.⁸¹ This category is both active and passive deaccessioning as the deaccessioning is influenced by external factors, but involves curatorial and legislative involvement. These objects still require the process of identification, removal from the records, and, if necessary, a disposal method selection.

Active deaccessioning criteria are not black and white, and generalizations rarely apply. According to Anderson, in these cases, “there is no right or wrong answer, only justifiable arguments can be made to keep or not keep each of these collections.”⁸² This is where the scope of collections, again, is so important. Distinctions must be made. Weil adds, every proposed deaccession must be both examined on its own unique merits and

⁸⁰ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 104.

⁸¹ Weil, "Deaccessioning in American Museums: I," 54.

⁸² Anderson, "Too Much of a Good Thing," 240.

considered from multiple perspectives to best serve the collection or museum.⁸³ “Few issues that museums face are as multidimensional.”⁸⁴

Deaccession Process

Deaccessioning has been described as a serious and potentially controversial action, and this is one area where collections management policies mandate procedures.⁸⁵ The deaccession process explains how practitioners execute deaccession and disposal objectives. Formalized deaccession procedures, suggested by museum ethics literature, are codified actions that guide museum personnel through the process of deaccession from the selection of the potential object to the eventual approval or disapproval of the deaccession. The “why?” of the deaccessioning practice has been examined through a discussion of motivation and criteria; now the “how?” or actions of the process will be investigated in this section.

Processes should be in alignment with the museum or collection’s size, type, objectives, and most importantly resources. One of the many challenges documented when museums are considering deaccessioning are issues with staff, time, and resources. “Disposal is costly and time consuming if it is to be carried out appropriately.”⁸⁶ Anderson, of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, describes her experience with the challenges of the deaccession process.

⁸³ Weil, "Introduction," 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁵ Steven Miller, "Deaccessioning: Sales or Transfers," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 10, no. 3 (1991): 56.

⁸⁶ Helen Wilkinson, "Collections for the Future: Report of a Museums Association Inquiry," (Museum Association, 2005), 24.

If I have learned nothing else from working on a number of deaccessions, it's that it can be incredibly tedious, time consuming, and an enormous amount of work. Prior to submitting a deaccession request, we need to collect the information we know, confirm the information we don't and then try to fill in the gaps. When the records are incomplete, as they so often are, the deaccessioning process is the last opportunity to make the information as complete as possible. It can be frustrating to spend this time on improving information for collections that we aren't planning to keep. However, we must maintain at least a photograph and enough descriptive information to identify the proposed deaccession in case questions come up about it again in the future, and in my experience they often do.⁸⁷

Unlike information published on accessioning methods, in American literature on deaccessioning, no clear set of steps is given for those interested in developing formal procedures. The UK's Museum Association published "Disposal Toolkit" in 2014 that includes a "deaccession flow chart" to guide the deaccession and disposal process.⁸⁸ While American accrediting associations have yet to publish such guides of action, the most basic plan dictated by these associations includes 1) following a clear policy, that interprets the mission, to guide the selection of objects, 2) an authoritative review either by curators, governing board, or other committee, and 3) the transparency of actions for the public.⁸⁹ Table 4 details actions or processes discussed in various literature that a deaccession policy might require staff to do as part of formal deaccession procedures.

⁸⁷ Anderson, "Too Much of a Good Thing," 245.

⁸⁸ Museum Association, "Disposal Toolkit: Guidelines for Museums," PDF, (2014), <http://www.museumsassociation.org/collections/disposal-toolkit>.

⁸⁹ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*; Kathleen Byrne, E-Book PDF "Nps Museum Handbook, Part Ii: Museum Records," (National Park Service, 1998), <http://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/MHII/MHII.pdf>; Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning."; Hadfield, "Deaccession and Disposal."

TABLE 4

Deaccession Processes

Review or create the scope of collections
Review the museum's deaccession criteria
Organize facts and figures both pro and con concerning the deaccession while considering the mission of the museum and its public trust responsibility
Provide written curatorial justification linked to the collecting plan—outlining the decision criteria that apply
Ascertain that the museum had the authority to dispose of the object by reviewing the donor documentation and confirming the museum's ownership
Confer with legal staff
Obtain a written appraisal by one or more qualified third parties for objects with estimated values—especially if there is any uncertainty about provenance or authenticity
Obtain authorization for the deaccession decision from the appropriate authority; document the deaccession
Photograph the objects for the record
Create a written statement for the permanent record explaining the reason for the deaccessioning decision and how it supports the museum's collection goals
Remove accession numbers or other marks that identify the object as museum property
Notify the donor, if appropriate, before determining choice of disposal method

Sources: Simmons, "*Things Great and Small*"; Byrne, "NPS Museum Handbook"; Hadfield, "Deaccession and Disposal"; Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning".

According to Van de Werdt, while the steps and the personnel involved will vary, the process must be carried out in a transparent, precise, and responsible manner that is accountable to the public through open communication.⁹⁰ Some museums prefer to conduct deaccessioning and disposal discreetly, as a way of avoiding negative publicity. In these situations, due to the current ethical environment, the institution must be

⁹⁰ Van de Werdt, "Deaccessioning in Perspective."

prepared to explain the decision publicly if called upon to do so. Simmons suggests that the public is better served when the museum operations are transparent and open to scrutiny.⁹¹

The American ethics guidelines are indefinite on the topic of the deaccession procedure and process due to the variables of mission, staff, time, and resources. However, case studies in the literature have proven useful for the in-depth review of process. After the deaccession process has been completed, the next step is to determine the appropriate method for the disposal of the object.

Disposal

“Once you get beyond the tough deaccessioning decision, simply getting rid of the object is not as simple as it may seem.”⁹² The physical removal of an object from a collection, or disposal, is often the most controversial stage of deaccessioning. According to John Simmons, disposal can be a sticky legal and ethical issue if not approached methodically and with caution. When mismanaged, disposal can cause public concern, negative media attention, and even sanctions.⁹³ Peter Davies urges that negative issues are not reasons to avoid disposals. Rather, they are reasons for policies and procedures to be clear and reflect the values of the institution.⁹⁴ According to a Smithsonian report, “to prevent improprieties and protect the public interest, policies universally maintain that items should not be divested except under stringently defined circumstances, and subject

⁹¹ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 53.

⁹² David W. Barr, "Legacies and Heresies: Some Alternatives in Disposing of Museum Collections," in *A Deaccession Reader*, ed. Stephen E. Weil (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997), 99.

⁹³ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 54.

⁹⁴ Davies, "Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma," 35.

to rigorous procedures.”⁹⁵ Collections have different obligations and are surrounded by different sensitivities, thus different disposal policies and procedures are required.⁹⁶ Like deaccessioning, disposal can be discussed as a policy, a practice, and a process.

Disposal Policy

According to Davies, disposal policy offers guidance, checks, standards, and potential benefits.⁹⁷ The titled “deaccession policy” of an institution often includes a formalized list of acceptable means of disposal and guidelines to the circumstances that favor one method over another.⁹⁸ In addition to the preferred method(s) of disposal, motivations or disposal principles often are embedded in disposal policies to help guide the institution through the selection and execution of disposal method. Motivations can again be derived from the type of museum and its objectives. Simmons notes some disposal policies, especially those of art museums, state that the most important outcome is to maximize the monetary return to the museum, thereby increasing its ability to purchase new acquisitions. Others, for example historical or anthropological museums, often choose methods of removal that may bring in less money (or none at all), but enable the material to go to another museum or collection. The type of object and its monetary or intrinsic value often determines the best approach for disposal. However, most large institutions’ deaccession policies do prioritize a disposal method that allows the object to

⁹⁵ Smithsonian Institution, *Concern at the Core*, 167.

⁹⁶ Barr, “Legacies and Heresies,” 99.

⁹⁷ Davies, “Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma,” 35.

⁹⁸ Disposal policy most often found in the titled deaccession policy in a museum or collection’s collections management documentation; Simmons, *Things Great and Small*.

remain in the public domain as part of the assumed fiduciary responsibilities of a museum.⁹⁹

Disposal Practice Criteria

Like deaccessioning, no uniform method exists for the disposal of objects; each situation must be considered individually as the needs and objectives of the museum must be weighed. To answer the question of “why” the practice of disposal happens, outlined in Table 5 are the motivations for disposal and the selection criteria. According to the literature, general motivations for disposal method selection should be based on the following list.

TABLE 5

Disposal Motivations

Improved care for the item
Improved access to the item
Increased engagement with the item by the public
Improved context for the item
Continued retention of the item within public museum collections or the wider public domain
Removal of any hazard posed by an item.

Source: Adapted from "Code of Ethics for Museums."

Many methods to execute the disposal exist in the literature. Some museums may only endorse one method, whereas others might endorse all methods depending on the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 54-55.

circumstances related to an object's deaccession. See Table 6 for the various methods mentioned in the literature.

TABLE 6.

Disposal Methods

Transfer of legal title
Exchange with another collecting institution
Repatriation
Return to donor
Sale—private, public auction, or dealer
Return to living artist
Destruction

Source: Adapted from Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning."

Transfers can be both external and internal. An internal transfer refers to a deaccessioned object being transferred to a different collection within an institution. This distinction is important, since some institutions might deaccession an object from a permanent collection, but still retain the object in the museum for other purposes.¹⁰⁰ For example, an object may be transferred to an educational or research program where non-museum professionals handle objects. Often, these deaccessioned items are used for scientific study, school programs, hands-on demonstrations, exhibition props, or testing in conservation research.¹⁰¹ According to Morris, in these scenarios, objects will be subject to physical deterioration or destruction overtime.¹⁰² Therefore, objects deaccessioned from the permanent collection still can be used towards the museum's mission, but placed in a collection that is not subject to the same levels of collections care deemed appropriate by museum best practices.

¹⁰⁰ Davies, "Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma," 21.

¹⁰¹ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 104.

¹⁰² Ibid.

External transfers notate the transfer of title to another collecting institution, such as another museum, collection, archive, or library.¹⁰³ Museums often choose a method of disposal that helps the deaccessioned object remain in the public domain, due to their assumed fiduciary responsibility. Because of this, transfers are often preferred, even prioritized or mandated to a certain state or region if the objects are of significant value to a specific community. External transfers can be done by gift, sale, or exchange. Given sensitivities about whether making money from disposals is in accordance with good ethics, many collecting institutions make a practice of first offering to sell such items to other public museums.¹⁰⁴ However, according to the Museum Association of the UK (MA), requesting payment from other publicly funded museums may affect the likelihood of a new location being found and make it less likely that items will be retained within the public domain.¹⁰⁵ While transfers or exchanges to other public trust organizations might be the preferred method of disposal, objects of significant market value are typically sold. According to Davies, this may be because the institution purchased the item with its own funds or has invested a significant amount of money in conserving it.¹⁰⁶ According to Bendor Grosvenor, when a museum disposes of items through the private marketplace, the preferred method of sale is an auction because the process is transparent, and the public is better assured that the object will receive the best price.¹⁰⁷ However, sales at auction typically do not keep items in the public domain, as most public trust organizations do not have the means to compete in that venue. A sale of an object, also

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ "Code of Ethics for Museums."

¹⁰⁶ Davies, "Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma."

¹⁰⁷ Grosvenor, "Deaccessioning in Practice," 70.

known as commercial disposal in the literature, raises many other concerns that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The disposal methods of return to living donor or a return to living artist are often a response to restrictions given at the time of acquisition. The most common type of acquisition restriction is called a precatory restriction, in which a donor stipulates that the object cannot be deaccessioned or can only be deaccessioned in a certain way. In the cases where objects can no longer be cared for by the institution or are no longer relevant to the mission, precatory restrictions often notate that a return to donor or artist is warranted. No obligation to notify the donor is mandated in disposal literature; in fact, contact is not suggested if the gift was unrestricted and the museum clearly owns the material. However, some museums do contact donors or relatives as a courtesy, often as a precaution to local controversy.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, repatriation, as discussed in an earlier section, follows the guidelines of NAGPRA or other legal entities, where an object's ownership is returned to the rightful owner as deemed by law.¹⁰⁹ In comparison to other disposal methods, this is rare.¹¹⁰

In cases of passive deaccessioning, where items might be considered hazardous, destruction is often the disposal method of choice. Another possible justification for physical destruction might be to eliminate from circulation unauthorized or counterfeit materials.¹¹¹ Destruction also includes the use of collections in research where deaccessioned objects go through destructive analysis for field research. Ethically, the

¹⁰⁸ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 53; Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 103.

¹⁰⁹ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning."; Byrne, "Nps Museum Handbook, Part II: Museum Records."

¹¹⁰ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning."

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

importance of the test results should be weighed against the loss and its value as a permanent collection object.¹¹²

The criterion for selecting a deaccessioned object often dictates the choice of disposal method. Hazardous materials are often destroyed. Objects that no longer fit the mission might be better suited at another institution. Therefore, the method of choice would be a transfer or sale. According to the MA, making educated decisions about disposal is part of a museum's professional and ethical responsibility. Wilkinson in "Collections for the Future" insists that "disposal is not risk free, but neither is unthinking retention."¹¹³

The risk associated with disposal has the potential for controversy. Rebecca Buck in *Museum Registration Methods* uses a risk analysis chart (Figure 2) as a way to illustrate how risk or controversy is associated with specific disposal methods, along with object value, clarity of title, and object type. Internal transfers have the least risk, whereas destruction posed the highest risk.

¹¹² Ibid.; Byrne, "Nps Museum Handbook, Part II: Museum Records."

¹¹³ Wilkinson, "Collections for the Future: Report of a Museums Association Inquiry," 5.

	Value	Disposition method	Clarity of Title	Object type
MOST RISK	\$1 million +	Destroy	Undocumented/FIC	Unique
		Return to source	Accession number only	Small series
		Sell privately	Unsigned deed of gift (no value)	
		Sell at auction	Unclear documentation	Limited edition, artist
		Exchange	Object and/or source card file	
		Repatriate	Annual reports	Limited edition, manufacture
		Give to non-profit	Report to trustees	
LEAST RISK	\$0	Internal Transfer	Countersigned deed of gift/intent and acknowledgement/clear bill of sale	Mass produced (man-made) Abundant (natural)

FIGURE 2.

Deaccessioning Risk Chart

Source: Rebecca A. Buck, "Deaccessioning Risk Chart," in *Museum Registration Methods*, ed. Rebecca A. Buck and Jean A. Gilmore (Washington, DC: American Alliance of Museums, (2010), 108.

As a way to avoid controversy, the literature and some formal policies often point out what methods of disposal to avoid. For example, a museum's staff, board members, or their relatives should not acquire disposed items.¹¹⁴ Other recommendations from the literature include not selling deaccessioned objects in the museum shop or destroying objects without a witness present.¹¹⁵ These restrictions can make their way into the codified policies of some institutions. Usually, these methods or procedural restrictions are created in response to controversies, which will be discussed later.

¹¹⁴ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 102.

¹¹⁵ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 55.

Disposal Process

According to Morris, following “a set procedure and to be able to justify all the steps” is vital to avoid controversy.¹¹⁶ Since this process is subject to close public scrutiny, actions or formalized procedures should be logical and reviewed in detail, as missteps can and have caused public backlash. Again, limited literature is available for a discussion of process for disposal. Basic guidelines suggest that after an object is selected for deaccession, a disposal method is chosen for the object based on the criteria noted above, and then a governing body approves the disposal so the action proceeds.

To avoid the appearance of conflict of interest, guidelines recommend, for those institutions with available means, hiring a third party consultant in the selection of a disposal method.¹¹⁷ To inform the process, some policies also direct the staff to obtain an outside appraisal or solicit opinions from qualified professional consultants with appropriate expertise.¹¹⁸ According to Simmons, outside value consultation is especially useful in cases of assessing which objects can increase acquisition funds through sale. By directing the museum to incorporate the viewpoints of a variety of stakeholders in the decision-making process, the policy reduces the chances that a disposal or deaccession decision will be shortsighted or one-sided.¹¹⁹ According to the MA, potential sources of professional advice include: museums with similar collections, colleagues in the sector, subject specialist networks, and universities.¹²⁰ Physical examinations by a conservator

¹¹⁶ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 103-04.

¹¹⁷ Byrne, "Nps Museum Handbook, Part II: Museum Records."

¹¹⁸ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 53.

¹¹⁹ Davies, "Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma," 27.

¹²⁰ "Code of Ethics for Museums."

also can help establish the appropriate means of disposal, often between sale, transfer, and destruction. According to the National Park Service, sales of deaccessioned objects should be handled by a disinterested third party whenever possible at a public sale or public auction to avoid conflict of interest.¹²¹

Once the disposal method is chosen, justified, and cleared legally, disposal –like deaccessioning—normally requires a review and approval by either a committee, board, or some authority figure. Simmons notes that “typically the policy specifies the level of authorization needed to approve a deaccession. This level of authority should be equal to or higher than that needed to accession an object.”¹²² Grosvenor suggests the following order of disposal approval: “the curator through the director, recommends to the collections committee that the object be deaccessioned and disposed. The committee then makes a report to the board concerning the object, the reasons for the deaccession and the method of disposal. If the board approves, the action is carried out.”¹²³

As part of the documentation of the process, museums often develop a form that includes the reasons for the deaccession and method of disposal along with the signatures of those making the deaccession and disposal decision and the date of the decision. The importance of fully documenting deaccessions and disposals is a modern development, essential in the pursuit of public transparency and accountability. Historically, documentation is the weakest link in collections care.¹²⁴ This disposal documentation becomes part of a museum’s collection record, and reflects a deaccessioned and disposed

¹²¹ Byrne, "Nps Museum Handbook, Part II: Museum Records."

¹²² While process was distinguished for ease of definition in this thesis, deaccessioning and disposal approval often occurs simultaneously by authority figures. Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 53.

¹²³ Grosvenor, "Deaccessioning in Practice," 70.

¹²⁴ Davies, "Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma," 30.

object's permanent physical removal from a collection.¹²⁵ According to Morris, if it is pursued, the museum must keep good records and be ready to respond honestly to outside inquiries.¹²⁶

While deaccessioning can be controversial, the physical act of disposal is what the public and scholars respond to. Much is made of the mistakes, oversights, and abuse of the disposal system. The majority of issues highlighted by the media are art-based and focus on large income generating sales. According to Malaro, museums and collections are warned to manage this process with care and sensitivity to public perceptions to avoid public backlash.¹²⁷ A review of the disposal policies of seventy-nine organizations, carried out for the Deaccessioning Task Force of the Registrars Committee of AAM, found that most policies began by emphasizing the role of public trust.¹²⁸ To ensure accountability to the public, policies may even codify public dialog in the process of disposal.¹²⁹ This now paramount concept of transparency developed and evolved in the face of repeated disposal controversies.

¹²⁵ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 55.

¹²⁶ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 104.

¹²⁷ Marie C. Malaro, "Museum Collecting Policies," in *Museum Registration Methods*, ed. Rebecca A. Buck and Jean A. Gilmore (Washington, DC: American Alliance of Museums, 2010), 74.

¹²⁸ Roberta Frey Gilboe, "Report to the Deaccessioning Task Force of the Registrars Committee of Aam," in *A Deaccession Reader*, ed. Stephen E. Weil (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997).

¹²⁹ Davies, "Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma," 21.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature regarding deaccessioning and disposal as policies, practices, and processes. While this collections management tool is complex and varies from institution to institution, its overarching function is to ensure that a collection serves the mission of the museum. As strategic acts, deaccession and disposal remove objects that have no inherent utility. Best practice guidelines, asserted by museum organizations, overwhelmingly influence the language of the deaccession and disposal codified policy and procedure. The next chapter explores the notable controversies that have shaped the best museum practice, policies, and procedures set forth by accrediting associations and supported by the public, scholars, and even the law.

*"Museums are not typically corrupt agencies. They are just trying to do their best"*¹³⁰

Chapter Two: Controversy and Accreditation

Introduction

The word deaccession entered the public lexicon with the 1972 *New York Times* article by John Canaday entitled "Very Quiet and Very Dangerous," which criticized the Metropolitan Museum of Art's sale of important art works against the bequest of donor Adelaide Milton de Groot to raise acquisition funds.¹³¹ Although De Groot's donation of several paintings did not require the Met to retain the works in perpetuity, De Groot's will contained precatory instructions that the Met contribute to other museums, either in New York or Connecticut, any works the Met did not wish to keep.¹³² Exacerbating this controversy were early denials by Thomas Hoving, the Metropolitan's director, that such sales occurred, and his assertion that the Met was not accountable to the public.¹³³ Canaday's article not only brought to light this specific legal controversy, but also introduced to the public the practice of deaccessioning as an unethical procedure. Museums still feel the repercussions of this exposure.

Deaccessioning, and likewise disposal, has become a dirty word in the media world, promoting institutional distrust and decreasing public confidence.¹³⁴ The public,

¹³⁰ "Deaccessioning of Art and Attorneys General: Perspectives and Intersections"

¹³¹ Dictionary, "De-Accession, V."; Canaday, "Very Quiet."

¹³² Canaday, "Very Quiet."

¹³³ Smithsonian Institution, *Concern at the Core*; John Rewald, "Should Hoving Be De-Accessioned?," in *A Deaccession Reader*, ed. Stephen E. Weil (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997).

¹³⁴ Robin Pogrebin, "The Permanent Collection May Not Be So Permanent," *New York Times*, Jan. 26, 2011.

informed by the media, has a very narrow understanding of disposal that often is linked to destruction or sale.¹³⁵ The press obviously chooses stories and sides that grab the attention of the most readers, make the most money, and sell the most papers.¹³⁶ According to Van de Werdt, “the public reacts with greater emotion to the disposal of a painting than to that of objects from the collections of museums of history or science. The sensitivity is connected principally to the money made from the sales.”¹³⁷ What the public often does not understand is that deaccessioning happens a lot; sometimes it is handled discreetly, sometimes with fanfare.¹³⁸ Deaccessions worthy of press attention, therefore, tend to be the perfect storm—they involve high profile donors, high profile art, and lots of money. For instance, in a 2011 *New York Times* article, Robin Pogrebin recounts recent deaccessions:

At Sotheby’s in New York, the Cleveland Museum of Art is putting 32 old-master paintings up for auction, and the J. Paul Getty Museum is offering 15. In the meantime the Pennsylvania Museum of Fine Arts and the Carnegie Museum of Art are selling five paintings each, and the Art Institute of Chicago is selling two Picassos, a Matisse and a Braque at Christie’s in London. Last week the New Jersey Historical Society sold 17 items at Christie’s in New York, including a 120-piece dinner service used to entertain President Martin Van Buren that went for \$17,000.¹³⁹

Deaccessioning is happening constantly in a variety of museums, yet the fine art museums are the ones who most often make the headlines. The conditions surrounding a disposal are what attract media attention. Whether it is an infringement of donor stipulations or, of more recent dispute, the use of income generated by the sale of an object for operations funding, these controversies can evoke fierce reaction from the

¹³⁵ Davies, "Disposals: Debate, Dissent, and Dilemma," 35.

¹³⁶ "Deaccessioning of Art and Attorneys General."

¹³⁷ Van de Werdt, "Deaccessioning in Perspective."

¹³⁸ "Deaccessioning of Art and Attorneys General."

¹³⁹ Pogrebin, "The Permanent Collection May Not Be So Permanent."

public. The Met's deaccessioning incident of the early 1970s, which involved a violation of donor intent and public backlash, was the impetus for the development of formal policy structures within the museum field.¹⁴⁰ Eventually, the Met under pressure from New York's Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz, adopted procedures for disposal of works.¹⁴¹ Several professional organizations, such as the AAM, AAMD, AASLH, and ICOM also responded and published guidelines in codes of ethics.¹⁴² Regulatory policies, put in place primarily by the accrediting associations, AAM and AAMD, were implemented across organizations throughout the United States, and eventually became required for accreditation, thus institutionalizing the voluntary policies.¹⁴³ However, as Captain Barbosa from the film *Pirates of the Caribbean* explains, "The code is more what you'd call 'guidelines' than actual rules."¹⁴⁴ Yet, failure to abide by the ethics guidelines draws the threat of significant repercussions both publicly and field-wide in the form of sanctions.

Controversies serve as important points of discussion and debate as the museum world adapts best practice guidelines to modern economic environments. To best understand the current deaccession culture, this chapter reviews deaccession

¹⁴⁰ Chris Burgess and Rachel Shane, "Deaccessioning: A Policy Persepective," *The Journal of Arts Managment, Law, and Society* 41 (2011): 175.

¹⁴¹ Stephen K. Urice, "Deaccessioning: A Few Observations," in *Legal Issues in Museum Administration* (The American Law Institute, 2010).

¹⁴² "Code of Ethics for Museums ", American Alliance of Museums accessed Oct. 26, 2015, <http://aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics>; "Code of Ethics," Association of Art Museum Directors, accessed Oct. 26, 2015, <https://aamd.org/about/code-of-ethics>; "Aaslh Statement of Professional Standards and Ethics ", American Association for State and Local History accessed Nov. 22, 2015, <http://resource.aaslh.org/view/aaslh-statement-of-professional-standards-and-ethics/>.

¹⁴³ Burgess and Shane, "Deaccessioning: A Policy Persepective," 175.

¹⁴⁴ Gore Verbinski, "Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl," (2003).

controversies that have affected the public perception of the practice and the current museum best practice guidelines set by professional organizations.

Law vs. Ethics

Christopher Knight of the *LA Times* notes when a cash-strapped institution sells major art to raise operating funds “the world turns upside down.”¹⁴⁵ While making decisions about deaccessioning and disposal is part of a museum’s professional and ethical responsibility, disposal is not risk free. Deaccessioning controversies come down to issues of ethics, not necessarily legality. Marie Malaro states in her article “Deaccessioning: The American Perspective,”

We have very little law in the United States that inhibits deaccessioning, and we have a tremendous variety of museums . . . Accordingly, we have all sorts of museums experimenting with deaccessioning under a wide variety of circumstances. And we have everyone commenting on the ethics of each particular situation with little law defining what is actually enforceable.¹⁴⁶

The majority of United States museums operate as nonprofit organizations, outside the public sector. In the United States, nonprofit organizations legally have powers to dispose of their assets unless their charters specifically limit this. Thus, any museum organized as a nonprofit has an inherent right to deaccession material within its mission.¹⁴⁷ However, to maintain public confidence, collecting institutions are expected to adhere to a higher standard than the minimum defined by the law. Self-promulgated

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Knight, "Museum Deaccessioning Done Right," *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 2009.

¹⁴⁶ Malaro, "Deaccessioning: The American Perspective," 274.

¹⁴⁷ Marie C. Malaro, *Museum Governance: Mission, Ethics, Policy* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

ethical codes therefore have evolved alongside the legal framework in order to inform policies and uphold public trust.

Ethical codes set forth conduct that a profession considers essential in upholding the integrity of the field. They often have no enforcement mechanisms; they are voluntarily assumed and depend on self-education and peer pressure for their promulgation.¹⁴⁸ Individual museums then develop specific collections policies to implement these codes.¹⁴⁹ In those instances where the profession undertakes to police its own code, such as the museum field, enforcement cannot be effective without a consistent and voluntary commitment from a sizable portion of the profession to conscientiously adhere to the code. Museums self-regulate by requiring the adoption of codes of ethics through their member-based professional organizations, and by each museum developing and abiding by its own collections management policies.¹⁵⁰ Burgess and Shane assert that in the case of museum accreditation, “in effect, a policy subsystem had been born which, even at its outset, embodied the characteristics of a policy monopoly in which the primacy of a relatively small set of actors effectively guided deaccessioning policymaking for the decades to follow.”¹⁵¹ To use their term, this monopoly acts a policing unit to preserve the credibility of all collecting institutions and, when necessary, enact serious consequences for those institutions that violate the code of ethics.

¹⁴⁸ Malaro, "Museum Collecting Policies," 75.

¹⁴⁹ Smithsonian Institution, *Concern at the Core*; "Developing an Institutional Code of Ethics," American Alliance of Museums accessed Jan. 26, 2016, <http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/continuum/developing-a-code-of-ethics-final.pdf?sfvrsn=4>.

¹⁵⁰ Tam, "In Museums We Trust," 873.

¹⁵¹ Burgess and Shane, "Deaccessioning: A Policy Persepective," 175.

Controversy

In the public eye, deaccessioning has been synonymous with controversy since the 1970s, when several institutions such as the Met and the Museum of the American Indian were scrutinized for certain collections disposal practices.¹⁵² Museum organizations became painfully aware of the need for strong deaccession policies and practices after further repeated controversies throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The Brooklyn Museum in New York; the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan; the Barnes Collection in Merion, Pennsylvania; and the New York Historical Society are just few of the institutions whose actual or proposed deaccession activity created public and/or professional controversy. Twenty-first century examples include the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, The New York Public Library, and most recently the Delaware Art Museum. The criticism of these deaccessions emanated from various circumstances including the following: 1) outspoken offended donors were disappointed that their gifts were no longer worthy of museum status; 2) the deaccessioned objects were considered treasured cultural assets of the community; 3) legal and ethical codes were violated when museum staff or trustees personally benefited from collection sales; or 4) proceeds of deaccession sales were used to support operations or reduce financial obligations of the institution.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Jason R Goldstein, "Deaccession: Not Such a Dirty Word," *Cardozo Arts & Ent. LJ* 15 (1997).; The Museum of the American Indian was selling deaccessioned objects in the museum gift shop.

¹⁵³ Morris and Moser, "Deaccessioning," 100.

Just this past decade has seen many museums around the world deaccession collections controversially, often in the face of difficult economic circumstances. According to Miller, despite wide implementation of deaccession best practice guidelines, museums are hard pressed to avoid the “extraordinary lure of the marketplace.”¹⁵⁴ Jorja Cirigliana notes “there is currently a deaccessioning crisis that has instigated public outcry and even legislative reform.”¹⁵⁵ The crisis stems from the recent financial crisis, which has deeply affected museums. Collecting institutions are being forced to choose between severe monetary cutbacks (for some even permanent closure) and deaccessioning and disposing portions of collections at the risk of condemnation, sanctions, and lawsuits from the public and accrediting organizations.¹⁵⁶ While in the past this might have been done secretly and even with a sense of shame, more and more museums are being open about their need to reduce their collection size.¹⁵⁷

The MA’s “Cuts Survey of 2014” revealed that one in ten responding museums considered financially motivated disposal.¹⁵⁸ In the UK, they have a strong disposition against disposal based on their history as public institutions regulated by the government. However, similar to the United States, the survey showed that museums are increasingly concerned that they will be forced to sell objects from their collections as their governing

¹⁵⁴ Miller, "'Guilt-Free' Deaccessioning," 96.

¹⁵⁵ Cirigliana, "Let Them Sell Art: Why a Broader Deaccession Policy Today Could Save Museums Tomorrow," 365.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Conforti, "Deaccessioning in American Museums: Ii," in *A Deaccession Reader*, ed. Stephen E. Weil (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997), 77.

¹⁵⁸ "Cuts Survey 2014," Museum Association, accessed Oct. 28, 2015, <http://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/funding-cuts/cuts-survey>.

bodies seek to plug holes in disappearing budgets.¹⁵⁹ The recession of 2008 in the United States brought about numerous deaccession and disposal controversies where institutions sold or even considered to sell objects to cover operating costs. Both AAM and AAMD have frowned on using funds from sales to support operating costs; however, museums often are put in a position to sell in times of crisis. Seen in the recent controversies of the Maier Museum, the National Academy, Fisk University, and Brandis University, when museums even consider this avenue they are often subject to active criticism by the American press and professional organizations.

AAMD sanctioned the Maier Museum of Randolph College in 2014 for selling George Bellows' "Men of the Docks" for \$25.5 million to support the college's operating budget. AAM made a statement about the deaccession stating,

The sale of George Bellows's "Men of the Docks" by the Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College is a flagrant, egregious violation of our Code of Ethics for Museums, showing total disregard of an important tenet common to the charter of all museums: collections are held in the public trust.¹⁶⁰

AAMD, in a more crippling response, directed its members "to suspend any loans of works of art to and any collaboration on exhibitions and programs with the Maier Museum of Art."¹⁶¹ After being similarly sanctioned by AAMD for the sale of two important Hudson River School paintings in 2008 to pay its bills, National Academy

¹⁵⁹ Conforti, "Deaccessioning in American Museums: II."

¹⁶⁰ Dewet Blanton, "Statement on Deaccessioning of "Men of the Docks" by Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College," American Alliance of Museums, accessed Jan. 3, 2016, <http://www.aam-us.org/about-us/media-room/2014/statement-on-deaccessioning-of-men-of-the-docks>.

¹⁶¹ Christin Anagnos and Alison Wade, "Association of Art Museum Directors' Statement on Randolph College and Maier Museum of Art," news release, 2014, <https://aamd.org/for-the-media/press-release/association-of-art-museum-directors-statement-on-randolph-college-and>.

Director Carmine Branagan told the *New York Times* that she was “shocked by the tone” of the AAMD’s response, which implied “we had committed some egregious crime.”¹⁶² In an additional interview, Branagan honestly remarked that sanctions really hurt; “You’re completely incapable of designing exhibition programming going forward because you can’t loan and you can’t get loans, and sanctions also affect funding. Sanctions were very, very painful.”¹⁶³ The AAMD’s opinion is that, “the National Academy’s actions violated one of our most core beliefs: that the collection is sacred and not a fungible asset. We thought it was very important to make that statement, that they had acted improperly, and that AAMD as an organization did not condone that behavior.”¹⁶⁴

In December 2005, Fisk University proposed to take extreme measures to keep the university financially stable. The university announced plans to sell two of its Georgia O’Keeffe paintings to raise an estimated \$20 million. The university planned to use the proceeds to finance the construction of a new science building, establish three endowed professorships, increase the college's endowment, and enhance security and improve preservation at its art gallery.¹⁶⁵ Recognizing that these actions were at odds with traditional deaccessioning guidelines and potentially could violate the terms of the donor's gift, the school asked for a court order to affirm its ability to sell the paintings. After five years of litigation, a Tennessee court approved the proposed sale in late 2010,

¹⁶² Donn Zaretsky, "Aamd Rules Need to Be Deaccessioned," *Art in America*, March 31, 2009.

¹⁶³ Robin Pogrebin, "Sanctions Are Ending for Museums," *New York Times*, Oct. 18, .

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Christian H. Brill, "Art or Assets: University Museums and the Future of Deaccessioning," *Thomas M. Cooley Law Review* 28, no. 1 (2011): 69-75.

allowing Fisk University and Crystal Bridges Museum of Art to share ownership of the artwork.¹⁶⁶

Perhaps the most well known example of recent deaccessioning controversy comes from Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum. In contrast to other controversial schemes to sell only selected objects, Brandeis decided in 2009 to completely close its renowned Rose Art Museum and sell its entire collection to address the university's financial problems. The University's logic was if the museum would no longer exist, the plan was not in contradiction with ethical deaccessioning guidelines. However, the public and professional organization backlash caused a great media stir over the systematic deaccession. After almost two years, the case was settled in June 2011 when Brandeis University, under the leadership of a new president, agreed to keep the Rose Art Museum open and refrain from selling its collection.¹⁶⁷

In 2008, recent controversial deaccessions prompted New York Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, in collaboration with the New York State Board of Regents and the Museum Association of New York, to introduce a legislative bill that would prohibit museums from selling artworks to cover operating costs. Temporary regulations became permanent in 2011, when the legislation was formally adopted. The NY Board of Regents oversees most museums in the state that were formed after 1889. The approved regulations, listed in Table 7, allow New York museums to dispose of works from their

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 180; Andrew W. Eklund, "Every Rose Has Its Thorn: A New Approach to Deaccession," *Hastings Business Law Journal* 6, no. 2 (2010): 467.

collection only if one or more of the following criteria are met.¹⁶⁸

TABLE 7.

NY Board of Regents Deaccession Regulations Criteria

The item is inconsistent with the mission of the institution as set forth in its mission statement.
The item has failed to retain its identity.
The item is redundant.
The item's preservation and conservation needs are beyond the capacity of the institution to provide.
The item is deaccessioned to accomplish refinement of collections.
It has been established that the item is inauthentic.
The institution is repatriating the item or returning the item to its rightful owner.
The institution is returning the item to the donor, or the donor's heirs or assigns, to fulfill donor restrictions relating to the item which the institution is no longer able to meet.
The item presents a hazard to people or other collection items.
The item has been lost or stolen and has not been recovered.

Source: Lee Rosenbaum, "News Flash: Nys Regents Pass Stringent Deaccession Regulations" in CultureGrrl, May 17, 2011, Blog, http://www.artsjournal.com/culturegrrl/2011/05/nys_regents_pass_stringent_dea.html.

If a museum violates these rules, it risks losing its charter.¹⁶⁹ New York is the currently the only state with deaccessioning legislation.

These select controversies demonstrate that disposal of objects from museums has raised substantial media attention and professional concern. In all of these,

¹⁶⁸ Lee Rosenbaum, "News Flash: Nys Regents Pass Stringent Deaccession Regulations" in CultureGrrl, May 17, 2011, Blog, http://www.artsjournal.com/culturegrrl/2011/05/nys_regents_pass_stringent_dea.html.

¹⁶⁹ Cirigliana, "Let Them Sell Art: Why a Broader Deaccession Policy Today Could Save Museums Tomorrow."; Rosenbaum, "News Flash: Nys Regents Pass Stringent Deaccession Regulations."

deaccessioning has been undertaken or planned for the explicit purpose of raising funds for operating costs. However, the length of litigation and the repeated controversy clearly show this is not an isolated issue. According to Tam, museums now face an incongruous mixture of policies regarding their collections developed by their professional organizations, judicial decisions, and state legislation.¹⁷⁰ As this thesis is a review of deaccessioning in costume and textile teaching collections and not art museums, not every deaccession controversy will be recounted, as there have been quite a few since the 1970s. What is important to understand is the impact of deaccession and disposal controversies on current deaccession guidelines and public perception. The examples of the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, the Maier Art Museum at Randolph College, and the Fisk University Galleries illustrate that university museums, not just large art museums, are capable of creating mass media controversy.

According to Stephen K. Urice of Columbia Law School, especially problematic is “that the press has largely ignored differences between embedded museums—that is, museums forming a component of larger, more complex charitable institutions with missions distinct from the missions of most museums— and independent museums whose missions are more narrowly drawn than the missions of colleges and universities.”¹⁷¹ Urice further notes this is a compelling and cautionary tale for the parent institutions (such as universities) that treat their collections as financial assets rather than curatorial resources.¹⁷² While sales are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of deaccessioning and disposal, the public, literature, and accreditation agencies are

¹⁷⁰ Tam, "In Museums We Trust."

¹⁷¹ Urice, "Deaccessioning: A Few Observations."

¹⁷² Ibid.

currently engaged in debate over the proper use of income derived from the sale of a deaccessioned object, with no unanimous agreement amongst accreditation communities, specifically AAM and AAMD.

Guidelines

As mentioned previously, museums in America are self-regulated by the assertion of ethical codes through their member-based professional organizations and by each unique museum developing and abiding by its own collections management policies formatted to its mission's objectives. According to Malaro and DeAngelis, "professional codes of ethics set standards that are deemed important in order to uphold the integrity of the profession. The goal of such codes is to encourage conduct that warrants the confidence of the public."¹⁷³

In the United States, museum deaccessioning is largely guided by ethical standards formulated by two major entities: the American Alliance of Museums and the Association of Art Museum Directors. According to Cirigliana, museums are under an immense amount of professional pressure to join and maintain membership in these associations. As members, museums must abide by the associations' ethical codes. A violation of these codes has severe professional consequences, as discussed above.¹⁷⁴

Both associations have established ethics codes that define which objects may qualify to be deaccessioned and how the deaccession proceeds may be used. AAM and AAMD are cognate on 1) developing formal guidelines and governance for future

¹⁷³ Malaro and DeAngelis, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*, 197.

¹⁷⁴ Cirigliana, "Let Them Sell Art: Why a Broader Deaccession Policy Today Could Save Museums Tomorrow," 382.

disposal and deaccessioning policies, 2) placing final decision-making responsibility with the governing board, and 3) requiring that the board pay attention to curatorial opinion. However, in some areas, different emphases or language, especially in regard to how proceeds are used from sales of deaccession objects, differentiate the two guidelines.

These differences in the codes of ethics highlight the fact that even in a country where deaccessioning and disposal are generally accepted as a sustainable act, differing views on its implementation are associated with different disciplines and their unique field and objects. When discussing divergent ethical guidelines, noting whom the specific organization is representing and how that impacts their policies and procedures is relevant. The Association of Art Museum Directors represents art museums, including university art museums, whereas the American Alliance of Museums represents a wide variety of institutions from art, history, and anthropological museums, to archives, children's museums, zoos, and aquariums. Marie Malaro explains why this distinction is important to make in terms of deaccessioning.

Art museums are quite comfortable with sales in the market place but there is great pressure to require that sale proceeds be used only to replenish the collections. History museums seemed more concerned with finding an appropriate new home for an object and less controversy arises on the matter of what is done with any proceeds that may accrue. Anthropology museums and natural science museums tend to favor only exchanges with other collecting organizations.¹⁷⁵

Malaro further notes these differences can be explained in part by the fact that up until recently only art brought substantial prices in the market place. However, now a market exists for almost anything. With the very high sale prices we have seen over the last few years, history museums as well as natural science museums are being forced to grapple

¹⁷⁵ Malaro, "Deaccessioning: The American Perspective," 334.

with the lure of the marketplace.¹⁷⁶ However, neither association has amended its deaccessioning policies since the recent financial crisis directly related to the 2008 recession. Yet, the rise in recent controversies surrounding sales is directly related to the interpretation of policy language regarding deaccession and disposal.

Currently, the AAMD's "Code of Ethics" states,

Funds received from the disposal of a deaccessioned work shall not be used for operations or capital expenses. Such funds, including any earnings and appreciation thereon, may be used only for the acquisition of works in a manner consistent with the museum's policy on the use of restricted acquisition funds.¹⁷⁷

The policy is seemingly black and white, and notably strict. This accounts for their harsh and swift sanctions against offending institutions, as seen above. Susan Taylor, director of the New Orleans Museum of Art and current president of AAMD, explains, "The proceeds from the sale or funds from the deaccession can only be used to buy other works of art." She adds, "The principle for us is that works of art shouldn't be considered liquid assets to be converted into cash."¹⁷⁸ Contrastively the American Alliance of Museum's "Code of Ethics for Museums" states, "proceeds from the sale of nonliving collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of the museum's discipline, but in no event shall they be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections."¹⁷⁹

"Direct care" is a phrase that promotes current disputation. According to Sally Yerkovich, AAM's passing of the current code of ethics in 1994 was a result of years of discussion and debate that at times threatened to divide the field irreparably. As we have

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ "Code of Ethics."

¹⁷⁸ Cunniffe, "The "D Word" and 21st-Century Museum Management."

¹⁷⁹ "Code of Ethics for Museums ",

seen, a major point of contention revolves around how museums should use funds generated from the sale of deaccessioned objects.¹⁸⁰ The phrase “direct care of collections” reflects a compromise accommodating the different disciplines and professional practices among museums.¹⁸¹ Direct care of a collection can be interpreted many ways. Such interpretations could include conservation treatment, supplies, technology for climate conditions in storage, software for collections documentation and management, reference materials for care of collections, consultants, salaries of collections staff, staff and training development.¹⁸² The list can go on and on.

In 2014, AAM created the Direct Care Task Force to help define the term “direct care” and the practices it entails. Yerkovich of the AAM further explains that, “In defining more explicitly what we mean by ‘direct care of collections,’ the AAM Direct Care Task Force aspires to give the field more guidance and bolster the public’s confidence that all museums are working for the benefit of present and future generations.”¹⁸³ In April of 2016 the Direct Care Task Force published a white paper developed from a survey of 1,258 museum professionals that examines the phrase “direct care.” According to the white paper, few areas of consensus among the museum profession were found from a statistical standpoint. Rather, the survey revealed that a number of potential uses of funds fell into ethical gray areas. As a result, the Task Force focused on identifying guiding principles and criteria for decision-making instead of

¹⁸⁰ Sally Yerkovich, "My Take: Detangling Deaccessioning," American Alliance Of Museums, accessed Jan. 16, 2016, <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/publications/museum-magazine/archive/my-take-detangling-deaccessioning>.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 56.

¹⁸³ Yerkovich, "My Take."

creating a definitive yes or no list or a singular definition of “direct care.” The Task Force developed a set of questions that can guide decision-making, as well as a matrix that visually aids practitioners in determining if their intended use of funds falls within an ethical gray area. Within these ethical gray areas, the use of disposal related funds can be determined as “direct care” if it aligns with a museum’s mission, discipline and specific circumstances. Therefore, the AAM Task Force recommends strengthening collections management policies regarding use of funds from deaccessioning.¹⁸⁴ “To ensure consistency and promote accountability, each museum should include in both its own code of ethics and its collections management policy identical statements on the use of funds from deaccessioning, limiting use to new acquisitions and/or the direct care of existing collections.”¹⁸⁵ In essence, decisions on how funds, acquired from a disposal, should be used to serve the museums mission and objectives must be detailed in deaccession and disposal policies.

Since the passage of the AAM code of ethics in 1994, museums have deaccessioned objects and used the proceeds to acquire additional items for their collections as well as for direct care of collections. The opposing views from differing disciplines on what restrictions or guidelines deaccessioning and disposal policies should provide are the result of different interpretations of the museum's mission and the public trust. Yerkovich comments that while a museum’s collection might yield high proceeds at market, its greatest value is as part of our artistic, cultural and/or natural heritage.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ "Direct Care of Collections: Ethics, Guidelines and Recommendations," American Alliance of Museums, accessed April 11, 2016, <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/direct-care>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸⁶ Yerkovich, "My Take."

Museums are dealing with ethical and legal conflict because, on the one hand, multiple deaccessioning guidelines are being thrust upon them, and on the other, and disagreement persists as to how museums should fulfill their duty to the public.¹⁸⁷ However, these guidelines do make great strides in making possible a practice that was previously viewed as being controversial and difficult, and for these reasons was avoided.¹⁸⁸ Yet even two decades later, one can still feel the passion of the various sides of the debate.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the structure and the environment of deaccessioning on a museum level. Historical and current deaccessioning and disposal controversies generate both public and field-wide debates on the ethics of this collections management tool. Influenced by these events, museum organizations publish guidelines that are required for accreditation, but self-promulgated by staff in most institutions as museum best practice. The first half of the review of literature, Chapter One and Two, investigated the act of deaccessioning and disposal as a collections management tool of the greater museum field. The second half of the review of literature, Chapters Three and Four, focus on clothing and textile teaching collections. As museums interpret broad guidelines, so must we now interpret the distinctions between the general museum field and the unique scenarios and environment of the costume and textile teaching collection.

¹⁸⁷ Tam, "In Museums We Trust," 872.

¹⁸⁸ Hadfield, "Deaccession and Disposal," 94.

*“Collecting, preserving, and storing textiles which are by nature “among the most fragile of all artifacts” is a constant challenge for archivists.”*¹⁸⁹

Chapter Three: Textiles in Museums

Introduction

“Clothing has been collected and exhibited for a long time by a variety of individuals and institutions including museums of art, design, history, and ethnography,” according to Valerie Steele.¹⁹⁰ Appearing in the first curiosity cabinets, as well as public collections, textiles have had a long history in the collections of museums. In early collections, Europeans, and then Americans, collected ethnographic dress from the seventeenth century onwards as representative of the cultural artifacts of the “Noble Savage” and the exotic “Other.”¹⁹¹ Not until the beginning of the twentieth century, when collecting philosophies shifted, did some museums begin collecting objects of everyday life, including dress. While costume, the most universal of everyday objects, had a logical place in these collections, little academic enthusiasm persisted for what was generally regarded as “old clothes.”¹⁹² Charles Gibbs-Smith in 1976 spoke to this collective mindset explaining, “Museum officials . . . regarded some artistic and allied subjects with a certain suspicion, especially the study of historic costume, which most of the staff

¹⁸⁹ Beth Ann Koelsch, Kathelene McCarty Smith, and Jennifer Motszko, "Collecting Textiles: Is It Worth It," *Journal For The Society of North Carolina Archivists* 10, no. 2 (2013): 2.

¹⁹⁰ Valerie Steele, "Museum Quality: The Rise of the Fashion Exhibition," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 12, no. 1 (2008).

¹⁹¹ Lou Taylor, "Doing the Laundry? A Reassessment of Object-Based Dress History," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 2, no. 4 (1998): 339.

¹⁹² Anne Buck, "Standards in Museum Care of Costume and Textile Collections," Museums & Galleries Commission, accessed Jan. 22, 2016, <http://www.collectiontrust.org.uk/media/documents/c1/a83/f6/000076.pdf>.

thought of only as a sort of rather unholy byproduct of the textile industry.”¹⁹³ For example, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), known for their notable collections of textiles and costume, explained, “the V&A has collected both textiles and dress since its earliest days. For many years garments were only acquired if they were made of significant textiles, as fashion had a low status within the decorative arts.”¹⁹⁴ Taylor in *The Study of Dress History*, states, “clothes, especially those related to Western European feminine fashions, were considered to be a frivolous and ephemeral characteristic of society.”¹⁹⁵

Beginning in the 1930s, the scope of textile studies widened to meet a growing awareness of its part in social and cultural history.¹⁹⁶ However, this delayed acceptance by the academic and art world still impacts research today. Taylor further notes, “the four hundred years of development of dress history in Europe and the United States have taken place outside the boundaries of academic responsibility and the residues of this prejudice remain a debated issue.”¹⁹⁷ According to Steele, textiles and clothing have traditionally been viewed as less important or of a lower status in both museums and in academia. Collections that hold textiles inevitably face challenges regarding the objects’ use, from larger art museums to educational collections.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Charles Gibbs-Smith, "James Laver, C.B.E.," *Costume* 10, no. 1 (1976): 123.

¹⁹⁴ "Furniture, Textiles & Fashion Department," Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed Feb. 13, 2016, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/f/furniture,-textiles-and-fashion/>.

¹⁹⁵ Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, ed. Christopher Breward, Studies in Design (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁹⁶ Buck, "Standards."

¹⁹⁷ Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*.

¹⁹⁸ Steele, "Museum Quality," 8.

As these universal and utilitarian objects have only recently been viewed as a scholarly area of study, in comparison to fine art, literature regarding costumes' utility in museum collections has been limited. Textiles, in broad museum literature, often are referenced in a minor paragraph or chapter. Few studies have investigated the policies and procedures specific to textile collections, especially in regard to educational collections. In this chapter, textile and costume objects and their specific issues that can be related to deaccessioning and disposal are discussed. Chapter Four will then investigate the history and structure of teaching collections, and what we know of deaccessioning practices from the limited literature.

Costume and Textiles

“What separates textiles and costume is the transformation the textile undergoes from its two-dimensional form to a three dimensional one through its draping, cutting and shaping for the human body.”¹⁹⁹ According to Taylor, “because of the multi-faceted levels at which clothing functions within any society and any culture, clothing provides a powerful analytical tool across many disciplines”²⁰⁰ Institutions and private individuals provide many motivations as to why they collect textiles. Reasons for collecting costume and textiles may include any or all of the following listed in Table 8.

¹⁹⁹ Buck, "Standards."

²⁰⁰ Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, 1.

TABLE 8
Motivations for Collecting Costume and Textile

To record changes in material, techniques, and fashion
To show examples of techniques of manufacture, e.g. weaving, stitching, dressmaking
To illustrate the textiles or dress of a particular area, whether rural, urban, or national
To record the clothing or textile industry of a particular skill, e.g. quilting, lace-making, millinery, corsetry, and shoemaking
To illustrate dress of particular occupations
To fill significant areas of omission in already established collections of a particular type. eg. children's dress, men's dress, embroidery, carpets
To illustrate military uniform or other specialist dress
To illustrate changing symbolic meanings of costumes, individual textiles, and motifs
To illustrate dress associated with particular occasions, e.g. rites of passage
To illustrate contemporary or fashionable dress, furnishing or design, e.g. street fashion, local designers' work, modern textiles
To illustrate the history of consumerism
To record items associated with a particular individual or culture
As part of a contemporary crafts or modern art collection
For specific exhibition or research projects
To record and celebrate the heritage of diverse communities and different social classes and groups
To document local domestic activities, e.g. knitting, quilting, embroidery, mat-making.

Source: Adapted from Buck, “Standards.”

While textiles have proven useful areas of object-based and theoretical research, archivists in “Collecting Textiles: Is It Worth It” ask, “does the historic and intrinsic value of textiles outweigh concerns about storage space, preservation issues, and archival significance?”²⁰¹ Candace Jackson of the *Wall Street Journal* reported, “Usually, textiles are among the first things a museum looks to get rid of because they are costly to

²⁰¹ Koelsch, Smith, and Motszko, "Collecting Textiles: Is It Worth It," 1.

maintain. Even if they don't fetch much at auction, the museum cuts down on costs.”²⁰² It has been mentioned repeatedly throughout this thesis that textile objects are amongst the most sensitive in museum collections. This chapter gives insight to the challenges of collecting, storing, and conserving textiles as they inform the justifications for deaccessioning.

Condition as a justification for deaccessioning and disposal is often used for textiles and costume. Textiles are fragile objects due to their organic nature. Objects made with natural fibers such as cotton, flax, wool and silk, as well as from modified natural fibers such as rayon, or manufactured synthetics such as nylon and polyester, have different chemical and physical properties that affect the aging process. Many factors, or agents, also contribute to a textile's degradation. These agents of deterioration can occur naturally, or they can result from external forces. Textiles are susceptible to damage from dirt, mold, insects, light, atmospheric pollutants, abrasion, and sudden changes in environmental conditions including relative humidity and temperature.²⁰³ As such, simply storing and exhibiting textiles in a museum, collection, or gallery setting can be a catalyst for deterioration. Countless examples of non-reversible textile deterioration exist in conservation literature.²⁰⁴ Caring for these materials is an ever-growing and costly challenge, as standards of conservation and care have grown and changed over the last several decades.

²⁰² Candace Jackson, "An Artist Transforms a Museum's Leftovers," *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 4,.

²⁰³ Sheila Landi, *The Textile Conservator's Manual*, Rev. 2nd ed., Butterworth-Heinemann Series in Conservation and Museology (Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998).

²⁰⁴ For examples read: Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer, eds., *Textile Conservation: Advances in Practice*, Series in Conservation and Museology (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2010).

According to Christine Giuntini in *Conservation Concerns*, many institutions encounter problems in creating good storage facilities because requirements for space and funding cannot be met.²⁰⁵ Ideal storage for textiles is expensive, as a collection of costume and dress requires several types of storage to accommodate the textiles' needs. For example, large textiles should be stored flat in large boxes or flat storage cabinets to avoid creasing. Voluminous objects may need to be stored in hanging storage. Hats, shoes, and other accessories may require specialty mounts. Fur objects also should have separated storage as they attract pests. Further, cold storage may be necessary to maintain some degrading objects. On a whole, storage should be climate controlled to avoid fluctuations in temperature and humidity that stress textile objects.²⁰⁶ These few examples of best practices in storage suggest the financial strain on an institution to provide proper care for costume and textiles.

Best practices suggest limiting interaction with the object as even handling increases the potential for damage to costumes and textiles. Excessive invasive research and use can destroy a textile object. According to the Canadian Conservation Institute, "historic textiles often appear deceptively strong and resistant, but they are vulnerable not only due to their age, fragility, or composition, but also because they are familiar objects."²⁰⁷ Everyday, we all have personal experience with textiles; some find difficulty in recognizing the distinction between handling museum-quality objects and interacting

²⁰⁵ Christine Giuntini, "Storage of Historic Fabrics and Costumes," in *Conservation Concerns*, ed. Konstanze Bachman (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

²⁰⁶ Lennard and Ewer, *Textile Conservation: Advances in Practice*; Giuntini, "Storage of Historic Fabrics and Costumes."

²⁰⁷ Canadian Conservation Institute, "Textiles and the Environment," Government of Canada, accessed Jan. 20, 2016, <http://canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1439925170741>.

with one's own clothing. These factors lay the groundwork for changes in condition of a textile that may warrant deaccession. However, a textile's rate of deterioration slows significantly with proper storage and preventive care.²⁰⁸ The role of preventive conservation is to avoid, block, or minimize the agents of deterioration. This practice will decrease the need for costly and time-consuming conservation treatments, however it does not eliminate them.

Additionally, specific textiles are aggressively self-destructive, and some require removal from a collection as they present both hazards to humans and other objects in a collection. Deaccession criteria due to health hazards that are beyond conservation would fall under the category of passive deaccessioning. Kelly Redding-Best and Margaret Ordoñez in their paper "Care of Highly Problematic Twentieth-Century Textiles" document the stability and aging properties of specific twentieth-century textile materials and finishes that are sometimes problematic in historic textile and dress collections and may necessitate deaccessioning. Such objects include those composed of cellulose nitrate, rubber-coated textiles, objects with polyvinyl chloride finish, and synthetic adhesives especially in bonded wool shoulder pads or interlinings.²⁰⁹ Isolation or removal of such objects protects humans and other objects from hazardous chemical off gassing. Other hazards may include fabrics finished or treated with harmful chemicals. For example, felted hats or weighted silks may contain arsenic or lead added during the manufacturing process that can pose a serious health risk to humans.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Byrne, "Nps Museum Handbook, Part II: Museum Records."

²⁰⁹ Kelly L. Reddy-Best and Margaret T. Ordoñez, "Care of Highly Problematic Twentieth-Century Textiles: Identification, Cleaning, Storage, and Exhibition," in *9th North American Textile Conservation Conference* (San Francisco, CA 2013).

²¹⁰ Byrne, "Nps Museum Handbook, Part II: Museum Records."

While the field of textile conservation is constantly advancing, only in the 1950s did the field of textile conservation truly develop.²¹¹ The standards of care, with the increasing knowledge of textile chemistry and ethical practices, have evolved to better serve these fragile objects. Yet, textiles are still notably sensitive to agents of deterioration. Following best practices in handling, storage, and exhibition can help abate deterioration in collections, as the degradation of organic matter is inevitable.

Conclusion

This chapter covered the history and challenges of collecting textile objects as they will inform deaccessioning and disposal practices and procedures. While textiles and costumes are important mediums in object-based research, they require proper storage and often conservation treatment to maintain them in a stable condition over time. Intricacies of textile objects are important to consider as condition often is cited as a criterion for deaccessioning in museums and teaching collections alike. In Chapter Four, the challenges of textiles are investigated within the structure of costume and textile teaching collections.

²¹¹ Ágnes Timár-Balázs and Dinah Eastop, *Chemical Principles of Textile Conservation* (London: Routledge, 1998), ix.

*“Given the resources for proper management and promotional activities, a textile and costume collection has the potential to contribute to a reputation for program excellence, become a target for financial donations, and offer numerous opportunities for community outreach.”*²¹²

Chapter Four: The Clothing and Textile Teaching Collection

Introduction

According to Laurence Vail Coleman in his 1942 book, *College and University Museums*, “the first duty of a university or college museum is to its parent establishment, which means that the faculty and student body have a claim prior to that of townspeople and outsiders in general.”²¹³ The academic museum’s role is to supplement the program or department of the university or college of which it is a part. According to Alfred K Guthe, this can be done by a variety of means including “exhibits, study collections, and research.”²¹⁴ Learning institutions maintain collections for study and exhibition as an important part of the education process, for the academic collection serves not just students but also faculty, administrative personnel, and the public.²¹⁵

Drawing our focus to the clothing and textile teaching collection experience with deaccessioning, establishing a frame of reference for this particular type of institution is important. This final chapter of the review of literature investigates the framework of

²¹² Linda Welters and Margaret Ordoñez, "Historic Textile and Costume Collections in the Academic Setting," *ITAA Monograph #11* (2011).

²¹³ Laurence Vail Coleman, *College and University Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1942), 5.

²¹⁴ Alfred K. Guthe, "The Role of a University Museum," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 4, no. 2 (1966): 103.

²¹⁵ J. P. Bonner, "Museums in the Classroom and Classrooms in the Museum," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 16 (1985): 288.

university collections, as it will draw upon specific studies of clothing and textile teaching collections' mission, organization, and documented deaccessioning.

Academic Collections

According to Subhandra Das and Jayne Dunn, as teaching and research practices have evolved so has the need for and use of particular objects or groups of objects.²¹⁶ A variety of academic disciplines and different museological traditions support university museums and collections. They can be found as independent entities within the academic setting or as a part of a department. Objects are collected into teaching collections because they can facilitate learning.²¹⁷ Melanie Kelly in *Managing University Museums* expounds, "They can authenticate theoretical teaching by providing original artifacts for practical study that enrich the learning experience."²¹⁸

Many university and college museums and collections strive for alignment with museum best practices as discussed in earlier chapters. AAMD's deaccessioning policy states, "University and college museums play a significant role in acquiring, preserving and presenting collections. While the primary focus of the university or college is education, it must also adhere to professional standards and ethics when operating a

²¹⁶ Subhandra Das, Jayne Dunn, and Emma Passmore, "Disposal? How to Run a Democratic Exhibition," in *The Museums and Disposal Debate*, ed. Peter Davies (Edinburgh: MuseumsETC, 2011), 175.

²¹⁷ Steven W. G. De Clercq and Marta C. Lourenco, *A Globe Is Just Another Tool: Understanding the Role of Objects in University Collections*, ed. Manus Brinkman, vol. 11, Study Series (International Committee for University Museums and Collections, 2003).

²¹⁸ Melanie Kelly, *Managing University Museums* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2001), 10.

museum.”²¹⁹ Several larger university museums are accredited by AAM or AAMD. Other professional associations for educational collections such as the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries, the College Art Association and the Southeastern College Art Conference publish guidelines and ethics specifically for university museums, collections, and galleries. The College Art Association actually refers inquires about best practice on deaccessioning to AAM or AAMD.²²⁰

While most academic museums, collections, and galleries strive for best practices within their means, the same standards as larger independent museums are not always possible due to varying resources, staff, and funding. Although some schools have clearly delineated policies and procedures regarding museums and galleries, some do not.²²¹ According to Kelly, many collections are small and department based with the most basic of storage facilities, as most have been assembled on an ad hoc basis. Further, many have never been properly documented or managed.²²²

Despite the importance of university museums in fulfilling university missions, research about current museum practices and best practices in smaller departmental institutions is scarce. University museums translate best practices to fit their missions just like other institutions, but they go a step further; they also adapt these policies to a unique

²¹⁹ "Policy on Deaccessioning," Association of Art Museum Directors, accessed Sept. 15, 2015, <https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Policy%20on%20Deaccessioning%20website.pdf>.

²²⁰ Katherine Crum, "Standards and Guidelines," College Art Association, accessed Feb. 12, 2016, <http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/museums>.

²²¹ Southeastern College Art Conference, "Guidelines for College and University Galleries and Museums," Southeastern College Art Conference, accessed Feb. 12, 2016, <http://www.secart.org/galleries-and-museums>.

²²² Kelly, *Managing University Museums*.

educational or teaching mission. Little is known about the policies and procedures in these institutions other than that they strive for best practice.

Clothing and Textile Teaching Collections

Throughout the United States, many universities and colleges have collections of historic textiles and dress ranging from very small holdings consisting of a few hundred garments to large collections of 50,000 plus.²²³ Of the colleges and universities that do collect textiles, most are associated with clothing and textile departments. However, textile objects also are located in university archives, theater collections, libraries, and ethnographic collections. Often faculty developed these teaching collections for a variety of reasons including to provide hands-on opportunities to multiple disciplines in the textile, fashion, historic, and museum educational fields. Students of these collections can touch and explore the textiles and garments, and utilize the collections as material culture libraries of fashion, textile, and costume history.²²⁴ In teaching collections, utilization is a key word. Most objects are handled more than those in permanent collection museum environments. This approach is considered essential to the educational process. With use, however, objects are inherently exposed to agents of deterioration. According to Claire Sauro, some schools have addressed this inextricable issue by developing separate, expendable study collections that are available for classroom use. Others have created

²²³ Sally Queen and Vicki L. Berger, *Clothing and Textile Collections in the United States*, Costume Society of America Series (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2006).

²²⁴ José F Blanco, "Fashion at the Museum: Successful Experiences with Student Curators," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25, no. 2 (2010).

reproductions of their finest examples, which can be handled by teachers and students alike. “While this approach is admirable for construction methods, it is not sufficient when researchers are interested in details such as historic textiles.”²²⁵ Yet, under best practices, the potential for education and research outweighs the cost of potential damage or loss of these objects. According to Gayle Strege, “a full garment is a much more effective representation of a textile's qualities than a 2 x 3" swatch, and an actual garment is better than a picture.”²²⁶ Table 9 is a list of example uses of textiles and costume in the academic setting.²²⁷

TABLE 9

Uses of Objects in Clothing and Textile Teaching Collections

To provide examples in historic textiles, historic costume, ethnic textiles and dress, theater costume, art, literature, language, women’s history, and anthropology classes
To teach about material life of various cultures
To teach material culture theory
To provide inspiration for creative work in apparel and textile design
To develop archival research skills
To practice textile conservation
To learn collection management skills (acquisition, cataloging, storage, exhibition)

Source: Adapted from Welters and Ordoñez, “Historic Textile and Costume Collections in the Academic Setting.”

²²⁵ Clare Sauro, "Digitized Historic Costume Collections: Inspiring the Future While Preserving the Past," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 60, no. 9 (2009): 1939.

²²⁶ Gayle Strege, "Expanding Textile Studies through the Use of a University Costume Collection" (paper presented at the Seventh Biennial Symposium 2000, Santa Fe, NM, 2000).

²²⁷ Welters and Ordoñez, "Historic Textile and Costume Collections in the Academic Setting."

Linda Welters and Margaret Ordoñez, in “Historic Textile and Costume Collections in the Academic Setting,” note that the typical college costume and textile collection started as the personal teaching collection of a single faculty member to support a textile or related field’s department. Teaching collections of professors appeared almost as soon as home economics departments offered courses in textiles. Similar to the larger museum field, collections in most U.S. land grant institutions had their origins in the twentieth century, ranging from the 1930s through the 1970s.²²⁸

Welters and Ordoñez further note that few university textile collections had a curatorial staff prior to the 1970s, despite collections’ earlier establishments. American Bicentennial activities influenced apparel and textile program faculty and administrators who began devoting resources to support these historical collections. Classrooms were converted into storage areas, and faculty assumed responsibility for overseeing collections. However, most of the early collections managers and curators had no formal training in museum management, and they therefore struggled to adopt professional standards. The 1970s also marked a turning point in availability of literature for textile collection best practices; literature such as the *Journal of Home Economics* published information on textile collections management.²²⁹ However, to date ,few formal studies about university collections of textiles and costume have been undertaken or published.

Research conducted in 1977 indicated that university costume collections face a number of challenges including lack of space for exhibits and storage, poor climate

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

control, and inadequate resources.²³⁰ In 1997, Linda Boynton Arthur urged academics working in costume collections to be more transparent regarding the resources needed to support historic costume teaching collections, as such information was not addressed in the literature. The benefit of such surveys and studies is pertinent information that can be used in grant paperwork or in supporting a network of similar institutions.²³¹ In 2011, Sara Marcketti et al, conducted a study to provide information on current and best practices of historic textile and dress collections by documenting practices, challenges, and opportunities for excellence experienced by university collections within the United States. The results of this study suggested that many curators and collection managers encounter similar struggles within their departments. Lack of financial resources, time, and support from upper administration posed significant challenges to the participants.²³² In 2012, the Association of Research Libraries conducted an online survey with its members regarding art and artifact management within their collections. Results revealed a lack of best practices and management strategies within the institutions regarding art and artifact materials, a category that included textiles.”²³³

Among the many conclusions in the Marcketti et al study, the researchers derived that while these collections pose an important contribution in the education setting, practitioners still endure similar struggles in the adoption of museum standards of best practice. In support of best practice models, the authors suggested, “collections managers

²³⁰ Diane G. Smathers and Betty D. Eastin, "Responsibilities of Curating a Small Costume Collection," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 20, no. 2 (1977).

²³¹ Linda Boynton Arthur, "Resources for Costume Collections in American Universities," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 89, no. 3 (1997).

²³² Sara B. Marcketti et al., "University Historic Clothing Museums and Collections: Practices and Strategies," *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal* 29, no. 3 (2011).

²³³ Koelsch, Smith, and Motszko, "Collecting Textiles: Is It Worth It," 3.

and curators consider creating governance documents/collection manuals.”²³⁴ Of the fourteen collections’ staff interviewed in the Marcketti et al study, six collections staff noted having such documentation. Additionally, their results included a brief discussion of deaccessioning, identified as a tool to help fund a collection.²³⁵

Deaccessioning in Clothing and Textile Academic Collections

Limited discussion exists of deaccessioning in historic textile teaching collections. According to Welters and Ordoñez, guidelines of best practice for costume collections include a responsibility for a committee to identify and review objects for deaccessioning, “which should be a serious consideration for collections that have limited space for growth.”²³⁶ Welters and Ordoñez also note criteria for such deaccessioning includes objects that do not support the mission of the collection. Other criteria mentioned include duplicates, objects in poor condition, altered clothing objects that do not reflect any period well, and objects that pose a threat to the collection (cellulose nitrate, cellulose acetate, rubber, foam, polyvinyl chloride components) that cannot be stored correctly and/or safely.²³⁷

For the process of deaccessioning, Welters and Ordoñez place the authority with the accessions committee for considering an object for deaccessioning. They also cite the importance of donor notification and endorse the disposal methods of transfers and

²³⁴ Marcketti et al., "University Historic Clothing Museums and Collections: Practices and Strategies," 260.

²³⁵ Ibid., 254.

²³⁶ Welters and Ordoñez, "Historic Textile and Costume Collections in the Academic Setting," 16.

²³⁷ Ibid.

exchanges with other collections. “Such collections include a departmental study collection, a university theater department, another university, or a museum/historical society.”²³⁸ Their justification for such priority of action is that this type of arrangement may be more acceptable to donors, university administrators, and attorneys than the sale of objects. They further stipulate deaccession sales must have approval of administrators and the university attorney and should follow AAM’s standards of proceeds use.²³⁹

As no formal studies of deaccessioning in historic textile and costume teaching collections have been conducted, what we know about the current practice comes from references in self-published news articles and collections publications. Four online publications discuss deaccessioning and disposal within this clothing and textile teaching collection context. They are as follows:

1) Deaccessioning is suggested in an online summary of a collections review conducted in preparation for a merger between the Smith College Historic Clothing Collection and the Historic Northampton Historic Clothing Collection, into the proposed Smith College Center for the Study of Dress.²⁴⁰

2) At Iowa State University, a 2014 article noted deaccession and disposal as “part of a process we have been going through to make room for more in our storage because our storage is really full already and we want to be actively collecting

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid., 18.

²⁴⁰ Colleen Callahan, "Colleen Callahan Presentation," in *Narratives of Dress: What Can a Garment Say?* (Smith College, 2013).

contemporary fashion.” With over 9,000 objects, the main motivation for deaccessioning “involves eliminating duplicates in the collection.”²⁴¹

3) The Hood Museum of Art of Dartmouth College published an online listing of a 2013 deaccession, where textile objects were deaccessioned and transferred to the theater department’s costume shop. The Internet documentation included a photo each object, its accession number, and the reason for its removal. Reasons included: better examples in the collection; condition (celluloid and corrosion were reasons for destruction); low likelihood of exhibition; missing pieces of the original whole; space limitations for object, and no value to mission.²⁴²

4) Finally, an Ohio State University collection newsletter discusses an exhibition of objects that were acquired with funds raised from the deaccessioning of items not relevant to its mission and/or in poor condition. They note that the acquisitions filled current voids in the holdings of clothing and fashion history.²⁴³

With these limited examples and studies, we can affirm that deaccessioning occurs in teaching collections that hold historic textiles and dress. Surveys and studies of best practice guidelines, including Sara Marketti et al’s “University Historic Clothing Museums and Collections: Practices and Strategies,” and Welters and Ordoñez’s

²⁴¹ Jessi Wilson, "Textiles, Clothing Museum Serves as Teaching Tool for Students," Iowa State University, accessed Dec, 16 2016, http://www.iowastatedaily.com/style/article_ffb0b0b2-d199-11e3-96f1-001a4bcf887a.html.

²⁴² Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Committee, "Deaccession of Clothing and Accessories from the Costume Collection," Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, accessed Oct. 16, 2015, <https://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/sites/hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/files/2013springdeaccessioncostumes.pdf>.

²⁴³ Historic Costume & Textiles Collection, "Friends News," The Ohio State University accessed Oct. 20, 2016, http://costume.osu.edu/files/2013/08/Summer-Friends-News_2013_final1.pdf.

“Historic Textile and Costume Collections in the Academic Setting,” recommend that historic textile and costume teaching collections strive for guidelines in documentation and deaccessioning set by the larger professional organizations such as AAM.

Conclusion

Chapters Three and Four of this review of literature examined the role and nature of textiles in both museum collections and teaching collections, as a preface for the context of this study. The primary educational mission of teaching collections imparts a greater emphasis on the utility of collection objects. However, the demanding care of sensitive textile objects in teaching collections is often fraught with issues such as limited resources and untrained faculty/staff, as seen in several studies. Within this paradoxical environment, between utility, preservation, and best practice is the context for this qualitative study on the realities and challenges of selection and removal of textile and costume objects. In Part Three the methodology and conditions of this clothing and textile teaching collection study is outlined.

Part III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This thesis is a qualitative study of deaccessioning policies and the challenges and successes they present in historic clothing and textile teaching collections. In this study, the role of the collections management tools, deaccession and disposal, are investigated within the context of clothing and textile teaching collections. Thirteen American academic clothing and textile collections' staff/faculty were interviewed via e-mail on their collections management policies and procedures related to deaccession and disposal. As supported by the review of literature, deaccessioning and disposal occurs in these collections, but little literature discusses the actual policies and procedures employed. The results of this interview-based research aim to provide both information on collection policies and procedures and the successes and challenges of the process in these object and mission-specific collections.

Results from this research will contribute information on the processes of deaccession and disposal, which can be used by similar institutions interested in creating, reviewing, or amending policies to better sustain these collections that benefit education. The results of this research also may be applicable to other small institutions with clothing and textile collections interested in developing deaccession policies and procedures. This thesis was submitted to and approved by the University of Rhode Island Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ IRB Reference #: 831325-2

Collections Sampling

Thirty-seven colleges and universities with clothing and textile teaching collections were identified and contacted using Internet resources (See Appendix A). As this study focuses on teaching collections and not museums, those clothing and textile collections with mission statements that self-identify as teaching institutions and not as public museums were contacted. Additionally, the holdings of the teaching collection needed to be at least 80 percent clothing and textiles. Collections were assessed and determined eligible by reviewing the collection's website for the above criteria. The staff and faculty of those institutions who act as collections managers regardless of their title were contacted via email for interviews. As the research is an analysis of institutional policy and procedures, those mentioned above will be most versed in and have engaged with deaccessioning policies and procedures.

Prior to collection of data, an initial email explaining the study was sent to eligible participants. Email addresses were gathered through the information provided on the collection's website. Where a faculty or staff member was denoted, the email addressed them specifically. If multiple faculty or staff members were listed, the staff member listed with the title "collections manager" was contacted. If no faculty or staff members were listed as overseers of the collection, then the advertisement email was sent to the specified email for the collection at large. The initial email, or recruitment letter, included information detailing the objectives of the study and the amount of participation time anticipated for participation (Appendix B).

Of the thirty-seven collections, nineteen responded to the advertisement email for an initial 51 percent response rate. Four collections responded negatively, and fifteen collections responded positively. The faculty/staff who responded, but chose not to participate in the study cited several reasons for not participating. Examples include: “Our collection is in a state of flux currently and will be for some time,” and “We do not use the word deaccession since we are not a museum collection.”²⁴⁵ It is the opinion of the researcher that the word deaccession in the title of the advertisement email possibly deterred some eligible participants from responding, either from the controversial nature of the term or because they did not deaccession objects from their collection.

Fifteen collections responded positively and were sent consent forms for participation as required by IRB (See Appendix C). The consent form again reviewed the study’s objectives and outlined the participant’s risks and benefits. It explained to the eligible participant that e-mail addresses were the only personal information that would be required of participants that would link them to this study; these would be kept confidential. Emails were only necessary for contact and data collection and are not included in the data analysis. Respondents were notified that the participating institutions would be listed in the thesis, but any data identifiers used in this study would be kept confidential. As the data collection was to take place via e-mail, so the consent was also obtained through e-mail. Signatures were not obtained, as signatures would be a link to

²⁴⁵N1; N2; To not identify the specific collections by name, the participating academic collections were assigned a number from C1-C13 based upon the order of the interviews. While these two collections did not participate in the study, data was used from recruitment e-mails; therefore, these two collections will be identified as N1 and N2.

individuals; this is a study of institutional practices. Not obtaining signatures also assisted in keeping individual participation confidential.

Embedded in the consent form was a hyperlink to the initial questionnaire of the data collection process. Consent of the participating parties was obtained when the participant clicked on the hyperlink, beginning the interview process. Two collections did not respond after receiving the consent form. Follow-up emails were sent every two weeks to prompt response. After two months, the non-responsive interviews were abandoned, since the quota of ten minimum interviews had been met.

Interviews

After consent was obtained, interviews were a multi-step process. An initial questionnaire was conducted through Google forms (See Appendix D). One participant was unable to access Google forms. In this case, the initial questionnaire was conducted via email, and the rest of the data collection continued as planned.

The initial questionnaire asked the following questions:

- 1) Deaccessioning is defined as the permanent removal of an object from a collection. Does deaccessioning occur in the historic clothing and textile teaching collection? Yes or No
- 2) Does the collection have a deaccession policy? If yes, please attach a copy or type below.
- 3) Does the collection have set procedures and criteria for the selection and disposal of objects? For this study, disposal is the physical removal, or mode of transfer, of the deaccessioned object from a collection. If yes, please attach or type below.
- 4) What is your preferred email address for a follow-up interview?

The participant was still eligible to participate, if they chose not to answer specific questions or provide the policy and procedural documents requested. From the

information provided in the initial questionnaire, each institution was contacted for a follow-up email interview that employed open-ended questions based on the individual institution's answers to the preliminary questions. Follow-up questions varied, but were strictly focused on the policies, procedures, motivations/justifications, criteria for objects, disposals, successes, and challenges specifically related to deaccessioning to gain further understanding of the institutional practice. See Appendix E for the question bank used in creation of each individual interview.

Interviews varied in length and schedule, in accordance with participant's role. Email participation is inherently based on the participant's schedule and desire to participate. The total time commitment was therefore dependent on the participant. All response time on the part of the researcher was completed within twenty-four hours. First advertisements were sent out December 17, 2015, and the final interview was completed March 7, 2016. Reminder prompts were necessary in most cases. Those contacted who failed to reply to the initial questionnaire or follow-up email were sent a reminder email after two weeks passed with no response. As interviews began just before a winter semester break, over break, and during the beginning of a spring semester, many noted a slow response time due to business related to break or the beginning of the semester. This also may account for some of the collections staff/faculty who did not respond to the study recruitment letter.

E-Mail Method

As emails are not face-to-face contact, this method of contact was chosen to heighten the feeling of anonymity in a discussion of institutional policy and realities.²⁴⁶ This method follows the suggested procedure as noted in “E-Mail Interviewing in Qualitative Research: A Methodological Discussion” by Lokman I. Meho.²⁴⁷ As probes or follow-up questions in interviews generally are used to elaborate and clarify participants’ responses, unlike face-to-face and telephone interviews, initial e-mail interviews do not allow direct probing; “It can be done only in follow-up e-mails, which can take place any time during the data collection and analysis periods.”²⁴⁸ As time and travel constraints did not allow for in-person interviews, email interviews provided an accessible platform to obtain rich data. For all of the interviews, the method and protocol followed ensured a systematic approach to data collection and minimized interviewer bias, yet allowed participants the opportunity to openly explore the topic in their own time.

Interview content and policies were coded and analyzed according to the principles of grounded theory. As deaccession and disposal are processes for the removal of an object from a collection, “grounded theory coding fosters studying action and processes.”²⁴⁹ Axial coding was used to support the analysis. Axial coding, as defined by Stauss and Corbin, is used to answer questions such as when, where, why, who, how, and

²⁴⁶ Lokman I. Meho, "E-Mail Interviewing in Qualitative Research: A Methodological Discussion," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 10 (2006).

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 1290.

²⁴⁹ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006), 46.

with what consequences.²⁵⁰ Therefore, interviews were coded to identify three axial coding categories as defined by Kathy Charmez: “1) *conditions*, the circumstances or situations that form the structure of the studied phenomena; 2) *actions/interactions*, participants' routine or strategic responses to issues, events, or problems; and 3) *consequences*, outcomes of actions/interactions.”²⁵¹ These coding categories can be applied to this deaccessioning study as 1) *conditions*, if the collections staff deaccession, deaccession and disposal policies, and justifications; 2) *actions/interactions*, procedures, selection of objects (criteria), and disposal; and 3) *consequences*, successes and challenges of the deaccessioning process. This methodology was used in identifying important parts of policy and procedures with emphasis on the realities they present in clothing and textile teaching collections. After analysis, the information was assessed and synthesized. In Part 4 the results are presented in a discussion format.

²⁵⁰ A. Strauss and J. M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), 125.

²⁵¹ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 61.

“I will be really interested in hearing about other similar teaching collections”(C1).²⁵²

Part IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this study, thirteen American historic textile and costume teaching collections’ staff were interviewed on the successes and challenges of deaccession and disposal policies and procedures. Of the thirteen collections involved, ten collections, or 77 percent, engaged in the act of deaccessioning and disposal. In the pursuit of museum best practices, deaccessioning in these collections serves a variety of purposes. Respondents noted deaccessioning is a way to “make the amount of items we have more manageable ” (C1), “to better align the collection with the mission and collecting goals” (C13), or more pointedly,

deaccessioning of collections is a legal, ethical, and responsible way for museums/collecting institutions to better define and focus their collections and collecting efforts based upon their stated collections policy, mission, and their fiduciary responsibilities to the communities they serve. It allows for better collections management by giving those objects that fit our mission the best care we can possibly provide to benefit generations to come (C3).

In the following sections, the role of deaccessioning and disposal in the clothing and textile teaching collection context is addressed as reflected by the results of this study. In the first section, an overview of the sample group’s size and institutional variation is

²⁵² For this discussion, as to not identify the specific collections by name, the participating academic collections were assigned a number from C1-C13 based upon the order of the interviews. These pseudonyms will be used throughout the results discussion. Additionally, while the previous sections of this thesis have been formatted in alignment with Chicago Manual of Style footnote citations, for ease of discussion and clarity of voice, interview citations will be in-text.

discussed, as it relates to the framework of this study. Then, similar to the structure of the review of literature, the act of deaccession and disposal in these participating collections will be unpacked in three categories—policy, practice, and process. While in the review of literature, deaccession and disposal were discussed separately for clarity, now, for ease of discussion, deaccession and disposal are analyzed through these categories simultaneously. Following an analysis of the act of deaccessioning and disposal, the discussion moves into the presentation of successes and challenges.

The Collections

While the participants and institutions of this study are confidential, to establish context for the conditions under which deaccessioning and disposal occur, the variations of size and type of collection should be distinguished. The thirteen collections ranged in size from 1,000 objects to 20,000 objects. According to Linda Arthur, three distinct collection sizes exist in academic costume collections: small collections holding less than 3,000 costumes and textiles; medium-sized collections holding between 3,000 and 9,000 items; and large collections holding between 9,000 and 19,000+ items.²⁵³ This study involved six large collections, three medium collections, and four small collections. Additionally, the responding collections are primarily concentrated in the Midwest region (eight collections); other collections are located in New England (one collection), the Mid-Atlantic (two collections), and the South (two collections). While western teaching collections were contacted, no response was obtained. Finally, in terms of structure and resources, six land-grant institutions, five public institutions, and two private institutions

²⁵³ Arthur, "Resources for Costume Collections in American Universities."

participated. For reference, Table 10 correlates the size range and type of collections interviewed.

TABLE 10
Size and Institution Type of Participating Collections

Collection	Size	Institution Type
C1	Medium	Public
C2	Small	Public
C3	Medium	Land Grant
C4	Large	Land Grant
C5	Small	Private
C6	Large	Land Grant
C7	Large	Land Grant
C8	Medium	Private
C9	Large	Public
C10	Large	Public
C11	Small	Land Grant
C12	Small	Public
C13	Large	Land Grant

Deaccession and Disposal Policy

In the initial questionnaire, staff were asked if they had formal or codified policies or procedures regulating the act of deaccession and/or disposal. Ten collections respondents reported that they use deaccessioning and disposal as collections management tools. Among those ten respondents that deaccession, six have formal deaccessioning and disposal policies. Of those six, five have formal procedures. Table 11 summarizes the responses to the initial questionnaire.

TABLE 11

Collections' Staff Responses to Initial Questionnaire

Collection	Does Deaccessioning Occur	Formal Policy	Formal Procedures
C1	No	No	No
C2	No	No	No
C3	Yes	Yes	Yes
C4	Yes	Yes	Yes
C5	Yes	Yes	Yes
C6	Yes	Yes	Yes
C7	Yes	Yes	Yes
C8	Yes	Yes	No
C9	Yes	No	No
C10	Yes	No	No
C11	No	No	No
C12	Yes	No	No
C13	Yes	No	No

One respondent out of the six was in the process of revamping their policies because they noted they were “outdated” (C6). Some of these policies were assumed by the respondents to have been in place since the beginning of the collection; contrastively, one was updated as recently as 2014. Four respondents noted that while they do not have a formal policy and procedure, they have unofficial processes that guide deaccession and disposal. One justified that the reason their policies and processes were not properly documented was because “deaccessioning happens very rarely” (C10). Of the three collections staffs that do not deaccession, all were interested in creating formal policies and procedures. One noted, “It’s not that I don’t WANT to [deaccession], it’s that there is no protocol in place for it and I haven’t found an appropriate set of guidelines to help

guide decisions. I want to be sure that if/when I DO deaccession, I follow appropriate, established, supported procedures within my field” (C2).²⁵⁴

Respondent C2 mentioned in the initial questionnaire a need for their collection to have deaccessioning policies and procedures. When asked to expound, they comprehensively replied,

Established deaccessioning policies and procedures would help ensure that I am making decisions consistent with what has been established as appropriate actions to take. Without procedures, decisions may be made on personal bias or beliefs, which may not necessarily be in line with what is best for the collection. Established policies and procedures also provide a “paper trail” for future directors of the collection to understand why I made decisions in the manner in which I did. Policies would also make the deaccessioning process more efficient, since less time would have to be spent deciding what stays, what goes, how to handle all of that—guidelines to follow take a lot of guesswork out of decision making. I have not personally deaccessioned anything or been part of the process in past work experience, so I have nothing by which to guide my decisions—I want to be sure to make the right decision at the right time (C2).

Similarly to the greater museum field, policies of these teaching collections exist to ethically regulate the practice and process of deaccessioning and disposal. As they are specific to their institution’s mission and objective, the disclosed policies varied in length and structure from short paragraphs to pages worth of guidelines, including appendices. All collections that noted formal policies and procedures provided them to the researcher in the initial questionnaire. Most formal policies made reference to the specific mission of the collection, criteria for selection of objects and disposal methods, as well as the guidelines for the process. Each collection’s policies have their own particular structure

²⁵⁴ Throughout this discussion any wording within the symbols, [], are the researcher’s words. This is for clarity or to remove any identifying information that might link back to the participant, who remains confidential.

and codified language. Markedly, none of policies could be linked back to a common template, a sample policy found in literature, or set of specific guidelines.

Comparably, these respondents listed many resources of information on deaccessioning to inform their own policies and procedures. When asked about basing formal deaccession policies and procedures on a template, set of guidelines, or other institution's collections management policies, one interviewee answered, "Yes—Why reinvent the wheel?" (C9). All of the collections interested in creating, or in the process of amending, policies and procedures discussed the possibility of future research into other institutions' deaccessioning policies for reference. However, some were unsure of what institutions to look to. One collection's staff said when creating policy and procedures, they looked to local institutions such as historical societies and art museums (C4). Others would look to similar institutions such as other university clothing and textile collections, university libraries, university museums, and then perhaps further to major museums, such as the Met (C2, C5, C12). One participant further explained, "I would always go to others in the same field, since we have similar needs and concerns" (C2). In contrast, one respondent listed general museum resources, all published by AAM, for the development of their policy and procedure.

Our policy and procedures were based on information from multiple professional sources, including AAM's Code of Ethics and Standards of Best Practices, the books "Museum Registration Methods," 5th ed, by Buck and Gilmore, "Things Great and Small" by John Simmons, and deaccession policies and procedures that I had used in previous museums (C3).

Similarly, a participant spoke of their personal experience in museum management and offered that they would look to their experiences as a resource for formulating policy and procedures for the collection (C12). This variance in references and resources informing

policy language and structure may speak to the range of backgrounds of faculty and staff working with clothing and textile teaching collections. This spectrum and its influence on deaccessioning and disposal is further discussed in a later section.

With regard to the approval of policy, respondents from three institutions noted a higher university/college authority necessary for approval of their formal policy before it could be implemented, which included trustees and attorneys for the home institution, a committee, faculty or departmental administration review, and the school's dean. In accordance with higher institutional approval of policy, these collections not only serve their specific population, but also are bound to the larger academic framework. Therefore, institutional policies have an impact on the codified language, justifications, and process of deaccessioning and disposal in these embedded collections. For example, respondent C3 simply stated that the policy complies "with all [specific college/university] policies, procedures, and code of ethics." Respondent C7 specified that previous to the enactment of their own policies, they employed the libraries' deaccession policy and procedures, which were more rigorous with regard to disposal approval.

Besides policy approval, some universities/colleges enforce overarching policies that effect deaccession policy and procedures. For example, one institution requires the contact of a living donor in the deaccession process (C7), and another restricts transfers of a deaccessioned object to other in-state institutions (C12). When asked, "do university policies impose any restrictions on the collection's deaccession policy and procedures?" a few responded that they did not know. They offered, "Unknown. This is an issue I must

investigate with the college's legal council" (C8), or "Unsure, would have to research as part of developing policy/procedures" (C13).

As discussed in the review of literature, policies serve as standardizing guidelines for the practice and process of deaccessioning. While these collections have similar missions, individual policies varied due to a variety of references used to create them and larger governing institution policies. Those who did not have policies were interested in creating them, because they would support best practices in the collection. Some were hesitant to start the process due to the laborious tasks of research, creation, approval, and implementation of policy for an act that rarely happens.

Now that the conditions surrounding clothing and textile teaching collections deaccessioning and disposal have been established through a discussion of the collections sample and existing policies, the acts of deaccessioning and disposal will be analyzed. These actions/interactions, as defined by Kathy Charmaz, will be discussed in two sequential sections: 1) Practice, or motivations and criteria that inform the process of deaccession and disposal, regardless of formal policy adoption; and 2) Process, including the actions or the formalized procedures that take place to execute deaccessioning and disposal in these clothing and textile teaching collections.²⁵⁵

Deaccession and Disposal Practice

As a practice, deaccessioning and disposal happens.²⁵⁶ In this section, why deaccession and disposal happens is investigated through the responses of teaching collections' staff to questions related to motivations, selection criteria, and disposal

²⁵⁵ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*.

²⁵⁶ Miller, "Subtracting Collections: Practice Makes Perfect (Usually)," 396.

methods. Motivations or justifications for why deaccessioning is executed in these collections varied as did their missions and objectives. Yet, as it did in the evaluation of museum deaccessioning, the theme of utility resonates through all specific motivations.

While freeing up space was noted as a motivation for two collections (C13 and C14), overwhelmingly, the motivations for deaccessioning in these teaching collections were tied to the refinement of the collection. Some example responses include: “strengthen another area of the collection to further goals of the collection” (C3); “refine collection to remain consistent with policies, upgrading the quality of the collection artifacts” (C7); and “refine portions of collection in response to current use” (C13). Respondent C9 specifically noted a change in mission as a motivation for deaccessioning. “Our collection mission changed a number of years ago—for example, we no longer collect flat or household textiles or ethnographic pieces, those were originally part of the collection but have been transferred out” (C9).

Interviewees were more concerned with curatorial deaccessioning than passive deaccessioning, most likely because the questions focused on active deaccessioning. However, several categories of passive deaccessioning discussed are listed in no particular order in Table 12.²⁵⁷

TABLE 12

Passive Deaccession Criteria—Clothing and Textile Teaching Collections

Loss of an object
Hazard to other objects, staff, and visitors
Destruction by disaster/extrinsic forces
Self-eradication

²⁵⁷ For comparison of passive deaccession criteria discussed in the review of literature refer back to Table 2 on page 25.

Health hazards, discussed in interviews, specifically included off gassing objects that are harmful to humans and other objects. In a discussion of poor condition, respondent C9 listed textile conditions that would warrant deaccessioning, which include shattered silks, plastics that have completely broken down, and powdered silk tassels. These conditions lead to self-eradication. Respondent C7 mentioned that deaccessioning happened after a flood in the storage space damaged several objects. In regard to external forces instigating deaccessioning, only one collection's policy cited NAGPRA or other repatriation as a selection criterion (C3).

The practice of structural deaccessioning, as termed in the review of literature, was inadvertently referred to in two separate interviews. The potential for structural deaccessioning seems to be quite strong in many of these collections because donors have a tendency to just drop off and leave things, or want the collection to take their objects no matter what. This can be a particular problem if collections do not enact a strict acquisitions policy. "Sometimes people dump things on small collections and while you take them, the question becomes how to get rid of them" (C1). Respondent C5 explained the structural deaccession in their specific collection,

When people offer a bunch of garments and accessories, before I've seen them, I tell them that I'm happy to look over everything and decide what I can accession into the collection. Most things sent to auction are never even accessioned. They are pieces that were part of a total gift. These pieces are usually in very poor condition. I tell [the donor] that they can take the rest of the garments or leave them for me to put either into the theatre stock or send them for auction to generate funding for further student exhibits and storage.

Discussed in the Marcketti et al study, space and funding are often limited in costume and

textile teaching collections.²⁵⁸ Therefore, respondent C5 engages with structural deaccessioning as a means to negotiate these issues, as “these policies will help provide a more succinct collection for users.”

Active, retrospective, and curatorially driven deaccessioning represents the bulk of the formal policy and interview content on selection criteria. The criteria used by the collections surveyed are very similar to ones noted in museum literature, with some divergence based on the teaching collections’ educational objectives and textile singularities.²⁵⁹ Table 13 lists, in no particular order, the various criteria distinguished by the ten collections’ staffs that deaccession.

TABLE 13

Retrospective Deaccession Criteria—Clothing and Textile Teaching Collections.

Altered objects; the object lacks its original integrity
Beyond the means of the collection to maintain/store
Duplication
Incomplete or inauthentic examples
Objects acquired illegally or unethically
Objects in poor condition
Objects selected as not within the collection’s scope or mission
Objects that do not support instruction or research
Objects that will generate funds/or serve as trade that can be used to acquire other objects more critical to the collecting plan.
Objects that would better serve the public within the holdings of another institution
Objects with no foreseeable future use

²⁵⁸ Marcketti et al., "University Historic Clothing Museums and Collections: Practices and Strategies."

²⁵⁹ For comparison to active/retrospective deaccession criteria as discussed in the review of literature, refer back to Table 3 on page 26.

The criterion “objects not within the collection’s scope or mission” is an umbrella category that encompasses a variety of more specific criteria codified in policies and discussed in interviews. The collecting mission of the specific collection informed the more defined criteria. For example, respondent C5’s policy noted the selection criteria of non-western fashion items, children’s clothing, men’s clothing, and jewelry, as they were not a part of the collection’s focus on western women’s costume. Respondent C3’s policy noted that collection objects must serve to preserve the history of the local area or state.

Similar to the category of “objects not representative of the collection’s scope or mission,” is the category of “objects that do not support instruction and/or research.” Making the distinction between these two categories is important for these academic collections as they often serve a dual purpose. Teaching collections frequently act like museum collections in that they are a repository for historical objects held in trust that aid in research and can be used in exhibitions; these collections also uniquely serve as tools for teaching and illustrating fashion history, construction, and design, among other subjects. Under this category, selection criteria include objects that do not “illustrate an aspect of fashion history or fashion design” (C3); “instructively reveal something about the design, cut, construction and use of the fabric of its fashion period.” (C5); “exemplify period” (C5 and C7); “illustrate international or cultural dress” (C3); or “exemplify the work of a specific designer” (C7).

Examples of “inauthentic” criteria for deaccessioning textile collections go beyond the generic description of false provenance; they include costume reproductions and objects misattributed to a designer or time period. Altered objects were also cited as a criterion for deaccessioning, as alterations diminish the object’s utility in these teaching

collections. Objects without significant provenance that do not display key characteristics of the time period, style, or region are undesirable for exhibition or illustrating costume history, and therefore, their utility in these educational collections is limited.

Another criterion repeatedly discussed in most of the interviews with clothing and textile teaching collections staff was duplication. According to respondent C7, “as in any growing collection, duplications have developed over the years, and the collection has come to include items that are no longer exhibited or otherwise effectively used for the education of students and enjoyment of the public.” Many policies of these teaching collections ask “Is this object a duplicate of another already in the collection that may be in better condition or have a stronger provenance?” (C3). As discussed in the review of literature, with a lengthy history and often late adoption of collection management policies, some of these collections have many duplicate objects. While doubles or even multiples of one type of object may serve some research purposes, they can be a strain on resources and space. Interestingly, discussions of duplication repeatedly revolved around white cotton dresses and pantaloons. Respondent C4 mentioned, in regard to an object being selected for deaccession, “in my experience, the textiles that I have worked with were simply poor quality or extremely common things that we had too many of, like white cotton nightgowns or pantaloons. I would think just about every collection has some representation of white cotton nightgowns or pantaloons.” Respondent C5 noted, “we let go of a number of white cotton embroidered dresses a number of years ago because we had—and still have—so many.” Respondent C11 similarly mentioned, “[we have] some items that could be deaccessioned if that was a policy for us. We have lots of

[nineteenth] century white petticoats.” Another example of a duplication deaccession is as follows,

A blue and white dress with a floral pattern and matching jacket is identified for deaccession. This artifact is identified for deaccession due to the fact that other examples are already in the collection. This particular artifact came from a donor who often had the same dress or ensemble made in multiple fabrics for her wardrobe each year. This particular ensemble is in worse condition than a similar ensemble that the donor also gave to the collection (C7).

Removing duplications from a collection can be one way to free up storage space or refocus a collection’s resources. However, one collection specifically noted a challenge associated with deaccessioning duplicates.

One of the challenges we face as a teaching collection is that it can be difficult to define what constitutes a ‘duplicate’ for purposes of deaccessioning. Many conversations about deaccessioning have been derailed by someone who believes that even a small difference in construction or fabric makes each object unique and valuable as a teaching object. It has been hard to balance our need for space in the storage rooms with the fear of deaccessioning something that could be useful to our students and researchers (C3).

This balance between utility and space is a challenge that all teaching collections have and will be discussed further in a later section. Despite hesitancy in deaccessioning duplicates, most often the distinguishing factor of selecting which object to deaccession comes down to condition.

The vast majority deaccessioning collections staff cited condition as a criterion for object selection. As a way to further understand the spectrum of condition that warrants textile and costume deaccession, participants were asked to define the range of condition or to give specific examples. In regard to active deaccessioning, the most succinct definition of condition is that the object has “deteriorated beyond usefulness” (C3). In addition to this interpretation, the same collection explained, “if the object

cannot be mounted on a mannequin, cannot be handled without the significant loss of additional material, or has large areas of material missing so that the original characteristic of the object is unclear, we would consider that object to be ‘deteriorated beyond usefulness’” (C3). Respondent C7 determines poor condition by conservation practices; “the item has significant damage which cannot be repaired by the staff or is too costly to be commissioned for repair. The item cannot be displayed or utilized for research due to its condition.” Similarly, another reply distinguishes, “such poor physical condition that conservation or restoration would either be unfeasible or render the object essentially false” (C4). Respondent C5 notes an object that is “too difficult to conserve” and provides the following example:

There's a wonderful red wool day dress with a jacket from about 1914 that we have had for years. It is missing its lower sleeves, the insert at the upper bodice and collar. The high waisted silk sash was deteriorated. I started to replace the sash and looked for something reasonable for the sleeves. But I then conferred with another consultant who felt that it was too adulterated to be worth saving and trying to guess how to pull it together. This is an example of a piece that was too difficult to conserve.

More explicitly, C12 notes, “if the object is literally falling apart shredding silk, significant broken [yarns], and areas of loss larger than 2” in diameter, it will be considered for deaccession.” Respondent C3 illustrated a deaccession case where “the silk in a 1930’s dress was so shattered and fragile that there was no way to handle it without causing more tears and loss of material. There was no way this dress could be exhibited or handled safely so it no longer was suitable for the collection.” When an object is found to be no longer suitable for the collection and selected for removal, a disposal method must be determined.

Correspondingly to selection criteria, the disposal methods were in alignment with museums guidelines, but were tailored to a clothing and textile teaching collection context.²⁶⁰ Table 14 lists all of the disposal methods noted in policy, procedures, and interviews provided by the study participants. Some collections respondents had an order of preference for the disposal methods, which will be noted in the discussion. However, for the purposes of listing all disposal methods mentioned in this study, the methods in the table are in no particular order.

TABLE 14
Disposal Methods of Clothing and Textile Teaching Collections

Destruction
Exchange
Exhibition Prop
Repatriation
Return to donor
Sale
Transfer

Similar to museum literature, transfers of objects to another collection or institution are the ideal option for the majority of interviewees, as they allow objects to be better utilized and remain in the public sphere. The ten collections that deaccession mentioned several different locations for a transfer. Notably, six collections transfer deaccessioned objects to a university/college theatre department. Collections noted deaccessioned objects go into the theater department stock for use in productions and/or for study of construction, design, and costume history. This optimal transfer allows the object to remain as university/college property and continues fostering the educational

²⁶⁰ For comparison of disposal methods discussed in the review of literature, refer back to Table 6 on page 34.

missions of the institution. Respondent C12 noted that an object was given to the theater department so that they could make a pattern of it for future use. This clear relationship between clothing and textile teaching collections and theater departments is an interesting topic for future study and should inspire other deaccessioning collections to consider such educational transfers in the creation or amendment of policies or procedures.

Other external transfer and exchange options mentioned were non-profit institutions, a reputable for-profit institution, local collecting institutions, charities, and other clothing and textile teaching collections. Respondent C9 recently completed a transfer to a local historical society because the deaccessioned object was better suited the mission of the society. Respondent C9 explains,

We found a crazy quilt in our collection that didn't fit our mission, and was deteriorating. The quilt incorporated a commemorative ribbon from a town located approximately one hour away. I contacted that local historical society and sent an image of the quilt. They were interested—so the transfer was made. We acquired a little more storage space, removed an object from our collection that no longer fit our mission, and they gained an artifact with some local connection.

Other transfers included other academic collections, such as a university museum or a collection in a fine arts department.

Internal transfers, in this study, are defined as intradepartmental transfers. Movement within the same academic department is another means of extending the utility of a textile object. This is similar to an object from a museum collection being deaccessioned to an educational collection, whereby the object is still within the same institution, but subject to different policies and procedures. Such transfers in academia include transfers to a textile science lab, sewing lab, or other study collection. The distinction of the teaching study collection and teaching permanent collection is

important to make in the institutions that use these study collections, as it supports the assumption that these collections strive for and adhere to museum best practice in their permanent collection. Respondent C9 explains the difference:

We call our collections the permanent collection and the study collection. Both are teaching collections, and both are used in classrooms. However the permanent collection pieces are those identified for exhibition, research, and preservation, handled with gloves, stored in acid-free archival environment. Access is limited. The study collection pieces can be taken apart, circulated in studios, ect., in a hands-on environment. No gloves required, pieces are not anticipated to last in perpetuity, as are the [permanent collection] objects.

According to respondent C3 the object is,

Deaccessioned from our collection and transferred to the instructor in [textile science and sewing] labs. This allows them to use the objects in a way they need, including destruction. Instructors are encouraged to use objects from the collection's permanent or education collections, but these must be handled in a manner that protects their preservation and cannot be used for destructive testing or destructive analysis.

Respondent C4 adds that the objects in their study collections are of minimal value; they “must be considered expendable since, due to the nature of programming within a teaching collection, their ultimate destruction may result.” For respondent C5, these collections are distinct because no deaccession policies are in place for the study collection. In fact, study collection objects are not accessioned or inventoried, unlike the permanent teaching collection. Additionally, two collections’ staff identified the use of deaccessioned objects as props for exhibition. The transfer into study collections or as exhibition props in a collection increases the utility of an object and directly benefits students, faculty, and staff who can engage with the objects as educational tools without restrictive museum best practices. While destruction is imminent, the benefits of education outweigh the immanent loss of the object. When textiles find no utility through

transfers or other disposal methods, destruction is the method these teaching collections' staffs employ as an option for objects in poor condition (or passive deaccessioning).

Unlike transfers, the method of return to donor often is considered as a non-ideal option in museum literature. Donor engagement in the processes of deaccessioning and disposal could cause donor or local community backlash, or possibly instigate donor restrictions on future donations. Yet, the return-to-donor method in clothing and textile teaching collections is quite prominent and often recommended as a first option for disposal. Several collections have policies requiring the living donor to be contacted if an object is deaccessioned, regardless of donor restrictions. According to respondent C5, living donors are consulted for decision-making about disposal. Donor relations are of great importance to collections administrators that prioritize this method, especially with alumni donors. An important relationship that should be investigated in future study is between costume and textile teaching collections and alumni and the impact of that relationship on the object holdings, policies, and procedures of the collection. This relationship between policy and donors will be discussed again more fully, as it also poses a challenge to many collections' staffs.

Five collections staff and their policies acknowledge the disposal method of sale. Four collections' policies designate specific procedures as to how funds are to be used from such sales. Sale methods ranged from sale by auction—both public and private—sale through private dealer, sale to a non-profit institution, sale to a reputable for-profit institution, to public sale through non-profit retail businesses.²⁶¹ Further, the specifications for the allocation of income derived from a sale varied for each collection.

²⁶¹ This is a range. Some collections specifically restrict deaccessioned objects to be sold publicly or to be sold to for-profit businesses or private dealers.

An addendum in respondent's C7's policy includes results of a library study on acquisition funds stating,

In 2004, [omitted] Assistant Director for Special Collections and Archives surveyed the policies and practices of institutions comparable to [omitted], its benchmark institutions. Six of the nine institutions surveyed had no policy for deaccessioning special collections. However, the [three institutions] did. These three institutions limited revenue from deaccessioning to the purchasing of collections and related expenses such as shipping and insurance.

However, respondent C7's policy, similar to AAM standards, states, "any income derived from deaccessioning of an object or collection shall be used for the improvement of the [collection] with a high priority for acquisitions." C4's policy was the strictest with regards to deaccession funds; similar to AAMD, it reads, "All funds generated by sales of deaccessioned collections, net of selling costs, shall be placed in the acquisitions fund." Respondent C5, conversely, puts income returned from sales into an unrestricted account that has been used for student exhibitions, storage, and student projects. Respondent C3, notes, "Any funds realized from the disposal of an object may only be used to acquire additional collection objects or provide care for the permanent collection." The previously mentioned deaccession motivation of "collections refinement" informs the spectrum of these sales policies. While varying in restrictions, the allocation of funds for the improvement of collections either by acquisitions, generic care, or improving educational tools was denoted as the appropriate use of generated income from sales. The non-restrictive language of respondents C3, C5, and C7's policies make their use of income flexible on how best to support the collection, similar to AAM's "direct care" clause. However, unlike the museum literature, no mention is made regarding operational costs in relation to income generated from deaccessioning in the formal policies. Though

much of the current literature stresses the controversy of funds supporting operational costs, the lack of discussion of this topic in both policies and interviews could be reflective of participants' feelings of improbability that such a level of controversy could occur.

Selection criteria and disposal methods codified in policy lay the groundwork for the process of deaccession and disposal. The consolidated list of selection criteria used by the interviewees aligned with the museum literature, but the collecting and educational mission of the specific collections informed the more defined criteria. In general, disposal methods placed a preference on transfers within the broader academic institution, to other teaching collections, or intradepartmentally into study collections. As the clothing and textile and costume teaching collections varied in motivation, selection criteria, and disposal method, so they varied in process and formalized procedures.

Deaccession and Disposal Process

As the “why” of the deaccession process has been investigated, now the “how” of deaccessioning and disposal process is examined. This section documents and discusses the different steps involved in the act of deaccession and disposal. The rate of deaccessioning varied from “happening year round” (C5) or “ongoing” (C7), to “rarely” (C9 and C12), “only once” (C4), or “does not currently happen” (C8). This spectrum of deaccessioning frequency is due both to differing staff, time, and resources, as well as a variable complexity of deaccessioning processes.

Five respondents from the ten deaccessioning collections referred to an assessment of the collection as part of the process. In museum field literature, this is

recommended as a first step in the deaccession process, often with an outside consultant, to assure the role of a particular object within a particular collection is understood.²⁶² For respondent C3, objects are flagged for deaccession throughout a current inventory process. “At the end of the inventory, we will review the objects that the inventory team has flagged and also review categories of objects to identify duplicates for potential deaccession” (C3). Stated in respondent C4’s policy is the “obligation to review and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of its existing collections.” For respondent C7, step one is literally, “Identify area of collection for assessment.” The same collection notes, with regards to a deaccession initiative, “there was a two-year push to get started, and since we did not get through the entire collection due to lack of resources within that time frame and other commitments have continued on an ‘as we get to it’ basis after other higher priorities” (C7). In any collection, an inventory is a time consuming and laborious process. For any collection that requires assessment for the processes of deaccession and disposal, the challenges of staffing and time are inherent variables for how often deaccession and disposal can occur in a collection.

Faculty and staff of an academic department are those responsible for collections management processes in a teaching collection, such as deaccessioning and disposal. If specific faculty/staff have designated roles that mimic museum job descriptions, selection and assessment of objects for deaccession are then often left solely to the collections managers or curators of the clothing and textile teaching collections. Students and volunteers also can be involved in the deaccession process, assisting with collections assessment, but approval authority and disposal execution always rests (at least

²⁶² Hadfield, "Deaccession and Disposal," 89; Museum Association, "Disposal Toolkit: Guidelines for Museums."

preliminarily) with faculty and staff. Additionally, C5 mentioned that in the past, their collection had planned for an outside expert to come in to participate in object research and selection. However, that did not come to fruition.

The selection of objects and the execution of disposal can include many steps. Like museum literature, the process in these clothing and textile teaching collections generally required object selection, disposal method selection, and final approval. Table 15 lists all the actions mentioned in the interviews related to the deaccession and disposal process or in formalized procedures. Actions are listed in order of reported practice.

TABLE 15

Deaccession and Disposal Process in Clothing and Textile Teaching Collections

Review or create scope of collections
Review the museum's deaccession criteria
Separate objects preliminarily identified from collection
Provide written justification outlining the decision criteria that apply
Ascertain that the museum had the authority to dispose of the object by reviewing the donor documentation and confirming the museum's ownership
Contact donor
Obtain authorization for the deaccession decision from the appropriate authority
Document the deaccession
Photograph the objects for the record
Remove accession numbers or other marks that identify the object as collection property
Update permanent record marking the object deaccessioned explaining the reason for the deaccessioning decision
Determine disposal method
Obtain authorization for the disposal decision from the appropriate authority
Execute disposal

As objects are selected for deaccession, they often are removed from or isolated within the permanent collection space. When asked how objects are identified as deaccessioned before disposal, many noted this removal or isolation. Respondent C7 simply noted their transfer to “another space in storage,” and further specified, “the garment is relocated to a temporary rack in a separate storage space.” A few mentioned simply separating objects into boxes labeled for deaccession.

In the process of deaccessioning and disposal, documentation is expected according to several of the responding collections. The documentation ranged from a notation on the permanent record to the creation of additional paperwork. For respondent C7, the object’s “digital record is removed from our electronic database, it is marked deaccessioned on the donor card, donor file, curator workbook and accession workbook.” Two collections mentioned a worksheet for deaccessioning that included a checklist for selection and disposal method, along with documenting pertinent information on condition, provenance, and donor information. One interviewee had an Excel sheet that documented deaccessioning and also served as a checklist for the staff. “We are doing a lot of deaccessioning at a time, an Excel spread sheet was faster and easier than individual forms” (C7). Others require less additional documentation, but still address the change to a permanent record, both electronic and paper, depending on the cataloging system. According to respondent C3, the object records for deaccessioned objects “will be marked with the date of the deaccession and the object’s disposition. These records will be retained permanently. A note will be added to the donor’s file indicating what objects have been deaccessioned.” In the collection of respondent C12, “the

card catalog is marked ‘deaccessioned’ with the date of action, name and signature of the responsible party.”

Approval of deaccession ranged from a curator to involving a chain of higher authority approval that extended to the chancellor of the college. See Table 16 for a review of various chains of command.

TABLE 16

Deaccession and Disposal Approval Required

C3	Curator and Collections Manager
C4	Accessions Committee, Department Chair, Dean of the School, Chancellor of the University
C5	Curator
C7	Curator and Department Chair and/or Dean of the School
C8	Accessions Committee, Advisory Board, and Higher Authority
C9	Curator, Collections Assistant, Collections Committee, and Director
C10	Curator and Collections Manager
C12	Faculty Responsible for the Collection and Chair of the Department

Four collections staff only need the internal approval of the faculty and staff who work in the collection (i.e curator, assistant curator, collections assistant and/or collections manager). Three collections staff additionally needed approval from a director or chair. The remaining three respondents required higher powers from the institutions to complete a deaccession. The requirement of several higher approvals is similar to larger museums often needing director and board approval. While multiple stages of approval put in place an ethical system of checks and balances, the collections requiring such approval noted the challenge of time it takes to complete deaccession in relation to the

various steps needed. C7 adds, “The biggest challenge to the process [is] the amount of time that it takes to complete.” The challenge of time is common among many teaching collections and will be discussed further. After approval, the disposal method is then executed.

In the sections of policy, practice, and process, the collections management tools of deaccession and disposal have been outlined as they are used by the historic textile and costume teaching collections in this study. Under the motivations of utility and refinement of collection, the provided selection criteria, disposal methods, and processes varied across the clothing and textile teaching collections. For some, their policy and formalized procedures are subject to the larger home institution’s overarching policies. Others have few restrictions upon the removal of objects. Most cite museum best practices as the goal for deaccessioning in the permanent teaching collections. While collection size does not impact the adoption of deaccession policies and procedures, time, resources, and staff do have a variable impact on the execution of deaccession and disposal. With this context, the discussion moves into an analysis of the successes and challenges of deaccessioning and disposal provided by clothing and textile teaching collections staff in this study.

Outcomes

The acts of deaccessioning and disposal would not be conducted unless they produced a positive result. The ten that engage with deaccession and disposal noted several successes from deaccessioning. According to respondent C9, through deaccessioning, “acquired a little more storage space, removed an object from our

collection that no longer fit our mission, and [the receiving institution] gained an artifact with some local connection.” Respondent C3 stated that because of deaccessioning, they “are no longer using our limited resources on objects that should not be part of the collection.” They also highlighted that the process of assessment and deaccession are accurately represented in the records, resulting in better collections management. Successful outcomes of deaccession and disposal help the collections to fully achieve mission goals and objectives of both preservation and education. However, with these successes come many challenges that hinder the process of deaccessioning. Those challenges will be discussed in the subsequent sections on time and resources, staff, and donors.

Time and Resources

In both interviews and recruitment emails, participants noted that deaccessioning is an issue for clothing and textile teaching collections. This era of diminishing resources, impacted in part by the 2008 recession as discussed in the review of literature, has had a serious impact on all collections, including clothing and textile teaching collections, the focus of this study. In all previous studies regarding clothing and textile teaching collections as reviewed in previous chapters, faculty and staff cite shortages of time, space, and financial support for the collections; this study is no different. One collection, respondent C1, did not deaccession because plainly “resources are a big issue.” A similar non-deaccessioning collection staff member noted, “my position as collections director is 100 percent volunteer, on top of teaching, research and service expectations of my department and university, this is at the bottom of my priority list” (C2).

Three out of thirteen collections staff interviewed did not deaccession, and all justified their position with the lack of resources, staffing, and time. Collections' staff who do deaccession mentioned the same issues as factors for their limited deaccessioning and disposal. Interviewee C7 blamed lack of resources as a factor for why they were unable to assess the collection and complete the deaccession initiative, as other higher priorities took precedence. The same respondent further asserted, "The biggest challenge to the process is the amount of time it takes to complete. It can take multiple days to assess...and several hours to fully process each artifact for deaccession" (C7). A graduate student of respondent C4 created an Excel file for estimating the amount of time required to complete deaccessioning in their particular collection. This document included time for researching objects, documenting objects, contacting donors, and other associated tasks. The estimate for a team of one student and one textile expert was a minimum of 280 hours to a maximum of 663 hours to deaccession 1,300 objects. The interviewee sarcastically stated in recognition of the challenges surrounding deaccessioning, "I feel fortunate that we can deaccession if we ever find ourselves with 280-663 free hours" (C4).

Staff

Many challenges regarding the deaccession process point back to the staff responsible for the collections. The number of staff and the staff's knowledge of collections management both factor into the success of a deaccession and disposal process. Respondent C11 "does not really have staff, generally [the collection] is assigned to the faculty member who teaches history of dress and fashion courses and

conducts research in the history of dress.” This lack of dedicated staff affects the time and resources available for deaccessioning. Similarly, most of the respondents mentioned only one to two staff/faculty members working within collection, possibly supplemented by a team of students and volunteers. While volunteers may be constant, students can change every semester, therefore requiring continued training and supervision.

Some participants noted issues with previous record keeping that hinders deaccessioning. According to respondent C3, prior to their policy development in 2014, the deaccession practice and process had no consistency. This led to confusing paperwork and a “mess” for the current collections manager. Similarly, respondent C7 commented that the biggest challenge to deaccessioning, beyond time, is the prior record keeping. “There were some records but they did not follow museum standards. This can make finding records associated with a particular artifact or even finding the artifact that corresponds with old records very difficult” (C7).

Often, it seems, tension exists between caretakers with museum experience and training and those without, further complicating the deaccession process. For example, respondent C3 described a challenging situation:

A member of the collections committee who cannot stand to see things discarded and wanted to give [the deaccessioned object] to a friend of hers... It was difficult to get her to understand that our university’s policy does not allow us to give state property to individuals no matter how little monetary value it had. I’m afraid this will be a continuing issue with her.

As noted in the review of literature, faculty and staff responsible for clothing and textile teaching collections fall on a spectrum of best museum practice knowledge. Respondent C7 asserts,

Most academic clothing collections are usually administered by faculty

whose major duty/area of expertise is teaching/research, not collections management. While they may have an interest, they are not well versed in museum curatorial practices and may have taken in every donation without discriminating as to what was actually useful and valuable to the collection.

Faculty and staff, regardless of background, in the process of deaccessioning are forced to wear many hats. In museum literature, several chains of command are included in the assessment and approval of objects for deaccession. Curators, collections managers, conservators, registrars, assistants, directors, committee members, and legal staff are often all involved in the decision making process of one object. The limited staffing in clothing and textile teaching collections requires the executors of deaccessioning to be well rounded or at least minimally educated in all these fields. This is a strong justification for the establishment of policies and procedures regarding all collections management, including deaccessioning, so that best practices can be upheld in times when faculty/staff are not familiar with museum practices.

Donors

A common theme among all participants, whether deaccessioning from their collection occurs or not, was the collective sensitivity to donor opinion. Donors play a major role in small collections because they 1) are often the source of most acquired collections objects, 2) are volunteers, or 3) give money. Respondent C1 found it difficult to deaccession objects “as some donors are well known in the community and I do not want to offend.” Donor contact was discussed in several interviews as a tedious but necessary process. This sensitivity is noticeable on a collections and institutional level, as many policies required donor contact if their donated object is selected for deaccession.

Conversely, interviewee C7 stated that they were not legally bound to contact donors, but they did so as a courtesy. Respondent C3 said they contact donors if they have a long-term relationship with them and believe that they may have strong feelings about the disposal of their donations. Two collections have letter templates attached to their policies indicating the language to be used when discussing this controversial topic (C5 and C7). The donor letter template for collection C7 reads, "Because we are grateful to all who have helped build our collections, we make every effort to advise donors or their families of plans for deaccessioning and sale of objects they have given. That is the reason I am writing you now." The C5 deaccession policy states:

The first step to be taken is to contact the donor and tactfully explain why their item must be deaccessioned. If the item is of true museum value but its care is beyond our conservation and/or storage expertise, this can be explained. Our concern here is that we cannot care for the item properly and we would be betraying the donor's trust if we were to keep it. If further review determined that the item is actually beyond the scope of the collection, this too can be explained. Most probably an honest and sincere explanation will be received well. Tact should be used to insure the truthful explanation is not offensive, not to create a false explanation. Undoubtedly, a false explanation will be detected and this will cause offense.

In a deaccessioning webinar by Columbia University Law School, a participant made the following point: the size of the museum is correlated with dependence on donors. Larger museums survive on prestige; they can easily refuse donor gifts or restrictions simply due to their larger resources. Small museums, on the other hand, are dependent upon their local community; their resources are often minimal. To keep donor and community support, they often accept gifts with donor restrictions or are more sensitive to deaccessioning objects valued by members of the community.²⁶³ This concept

²⁶³ "Deaccessioning of Art and Attorneys General."

is applicable to clothing and textile teaching collections that are sensitive to donor concerns. As resources often are proven to be limited, these collections depend on the local community, including alumni, for support. While challenging, those policies with procedures in place for donor contact are ensuring the stability of that support. This relationship between donors and the clothing and textile teaching collections could be an important area of future research, to ascertain the best collections management policies and practices, such as deaccessioning and disposal that boost donor support.

Conclusion

Issues of resources, particularly time and staffing, as seen in previous studies of teaching collections, subsequently emerge in this study. On a whole, the staffs of clothing and textile teaching collections strive for museum best practices, as they are repositories for objects of historical value. When objects no longer prove useful to the educational mission of these collections, deaccessioning and disposal may be employed. No one standard method or resource for the creation of formal policies and procedures in these collections exist. Further, the implementation of these various policies poses many challenges to the practitioners. Deaccessioning is a laborious, time-consuming, and complex process, on any scale. However, with limited means deaccessioning and disposal can be an exceptionally challenging task that even deters some collections managers from employing this collections management tool in their teaching collection. While challenging, the benefits provide more space, improved utility of objects, and refinement of collection. In an era of declining resources, ten out of thirteen clothing and textile and costume collections staff use deaccessioning as a best practice tool to help better serve

their missions of preservation and education. In the final section, findings are summarized and areas of future research are identified.

“Deaccessioning can be compared to a bowl of marshmallows. It looks benign until you dig in, then it can become messy”²⁶⁴

Part V: CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Conclusion

In this study, the role of the collections management tools—deaccession and disposal—are investigated within the context of clothing and textile teaching collections. As a qualitative study to understand the development and practice of deaccessioning and disposal on a teaching collection’s level, this study addressed the collections management objectives in academic clothing and textile collections and the successes and challenges of such environments. These unique collections have a dual mission: preserving textile and costume objects while utilizing objects for educational purposes. Respondent C9 commented, “I think we kind of reside in a gray area—not a formal museum—but a teaching collection, yet we try to use museum-level standards and practices.” Staff working with these collections must interpret and adopt museum best practices that support preservation efforts but tailor policies and procedures that complement educational goals and fragile objects. Further, clothing and textile collections are one of the most overlooked areas in collections management literature; and more specifically, teaching collections are neglected in deaccessioning literature. As an investigation into the language of policy, motivation, selection process, disposal, and outcomes of deaccessioning and disposal practices, this study responded to the need for information

²⁶⁴ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 51.

and was inspired by a trend in deaccession literature that disseminates research through case studies.

Thirteen American academic clothing and textile collections' staff were interviewed via e-mail about their collections management policies and processes related to deaccession and disposal. Consenting respondents were first sent an initial questionnaire inquiring if 1) deaccessioning occurred in their collection, 2) if the collection had a deaccession policy, and 3) if the collection had set procedures and criteria for the selection and disposal of objects. From the information provided in the initial questionnaire, each respondent was contacted for a follow-up email interview that used open-ended questions that followed up on the individual's answers to the preliminary questions. Follow-up questions varied, but were strictly focused on the policies, procedures, motivations/justifications, criteria for objects, disposals, successes, and challenges specifically related to deaccessioning to gain further understanding of the institutional practice.

Throughout this thesis, deaccessioning and disposal have been defined as policies, practices, and processes. To effectively complete tasks and delegate to other practitioners, it is important to have all three elements. As policies, the actions are usually formalized in various documents. As practices, they happen. As processes, actions are taken to complete the task of deaccession and disposal. A process regulated by formal procedures allows for the process to unfold in an intellectually and procedurally logical, legal, and disciplined way.²⁶⁵ Deaccessioning and the subsequent disposal of an object serve as a way to improve a collection by refining, upgrading, or focusing it to better serve its

²⁶⁵ Miller, "Subtracting Collections: Practice Makes Perfect (Usually)," 396.

mission. When conducted according to established ethical standards and sound policies and procedures, deaccessioning and disposal are regarded as museum best practices.²⁶⁶

This study found that clothing and textile teaching collections' staff are engaging with deaccessioning and disposal, creating formal policies and procedures, and informing their choices with literature on museum best practices. Ten out of thirteen academic clothing and textile collections' staff interviewed use deaccession and disposal as collections management tools to better serve their mission and collection objectives. Motivations or justifications for why deaccessioning in these collections varied as did their mission and objectives.

Among those ten collections staff that practiced deaccessioning, six have formal deaccessioning and disposal policies. These policies help clarify values and goals, and make clear what actions are and are not acceptable. They serve as a guide to staff and as a source of information for the public by articulating museum philosophy and standards regarding the development and management of its collections.²⁶⁷ While these collections have similar missions, individual policies varied due to a variety of references used to create them and larger governing institution policies. Those who did not have policies were interested in creating them to support best practices in the collection. Some were hesitant to start the process due to the laborious tasks of research, creation, approval, and implementation of policy for an act that rarely happens.

Of the thirteen respondents interviewed, ten collections practice the act of deaccessioning and disposal. Active, retrospective, and curatorially driven deaccessioning represented the bulk of the formal policy and interview content on

²⁶⁶ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 52.

²⁶⁷ DeAngelis, "Collections Management," 84.

selection criteria. The criteria used by the collections are very similar to ones noted in museum literature, with some divergence based on the teaching collections' educational objectives and textile singularities. Practitioners prioritized disposals that kept objects in the university setting, such as an intradepartmental transfer or reassignment to another teaching collection. Notably, six collections' staff transfer deaccessioned objects to a university/college theatre department.

Deaccessioning in only five of ten collections is directed by formal procedures. Deaccession procedures guide practitioners through actions from the selection of the potential object to the eventual approval or disapproval of the deaccession. Procedures should be in alignment with the museum or collection's size, type, objectives, and most importantly resources. Clothing and textile teaching collection formal procedures varied based on the larger institution to which it was attached. Donor contact, disposal method, and use of funds acquired from a sale of an object often were regulated by the larger university or college institutional policies.

Deaccessioning and disposal on a teaching collection level is principally used as a tool for collection refinement. The respondents who engage with the act cited benefits such as more storage space and an improvement in the quality, scope, and appropriateness of the collection in line with its mission. While these benefits justified the use of such actions, interviewees focused on the challenges these collections face in the practice of deaccession and disposal. Overwhelmingly, they cited limited resources and time as deterrents to the deaccession process. This complex and laborious process often strains a small multitasking staff. A level of sensitivity to donor approval that is contrary to the larger museum field adds more time and complexity to the process by

allowing donors to engage in the decision-making process. Further, many impediments exist in just the implementation of museum best practices. As embedded institutions, these collections' staff not only aim for but must interpret best practice set forth by organizations such as the American Alliance of Museums and the Association of Art Museum Directors. They must also follow the policies and procedures set forth by their university or college. Notably, implementation of policy and procedures in clothing and textile teaching collections varied with the spectrum of collections' staff and faculty training in museum management. Educators charged with managing these collections without museum experience need extra support when creating and implementing policy and procedure.

The lack of collections management literature focused on these collections serves as an appreciable hindrance in systematic deaccession and disposal. Out of ten collections' staff who deaccession, six had formal policies and five had formal procedures regarding deaccession and disposal. Little commonality was found between these formal policies and procedures in terms of research references, structure, and language. However, this lack of concordance and the insight that those without formal policy and procedure still participate in the practices of deaccessioning and disposal point back to the larger justification of this study: little literature exists for these unique institutions to draw upon in developing their policies and procedures.

In addition, the staffs of the three collections that do not deaccession were interested in creating deaccession and disposal policies and procedures. One respondent noted, "It's not that I don't WANT to [deaccession], it's that there is no protocol in place for it and I haven't found an appropriate set of guidelines to help guide decisions. I want

to be sure that if/when I DO deaccession, I follow appropriate, established, supported procedures within my field.”²⁶⁸ A clear need for guidance and support in developing policies and procedures exists, so that the practice does not happen informally or unethically. Interpreting museum field ethical guidelines devised for large art museums is time consuming and challenging, especially for those practitioners without museum experience. Collections management practitioners looking for insight as to how others in the clothing and textile teaching collection community adopt and practice deaccessioning and disposal will benefit from this study. Clothing and textile teaching collections staff can use the organizational structure of this thesis to review their own deaccession and disposal policies, practices, and processes. Table 17 lists questions developed from museum best practice literature used in the interview process by the researcher that can aid clothing and textile teaching collection staffs to introspectively review or develop their own policies and procedures. (See Appendix E for full question bank)

²⁶⁸ C5

TABLE 17

Guiding Questions

Policy	Was the mission of the collection taken into consideration in the creation of the deaccession and disposal policy?
	Do university/college policies impose any restrictions on the collection's deaccession and disposal policy?
Practice	What are the specific motives for deaccessioning objects?
	Are there specific criteria for the selection of objects for deaccessioning?
	What methods of disposal are used?
	Would the collection staff sell a deaccessioned object? If yes, what would the acquired funds be used for?
Process	How are deaccessions and disposals documented?
	Are donors notified if their object is selected for deaccession?
	Are there objects that will not be deaccessioned based on donor requests or university wishes?
	Who is involved with deaccessioning in each step of the process from object selection, deaccession to disposal?
	How are selected objects visually marked for deaccession?
	How is the method of disposal decided for the deaccessioned object?

The categorization of these questions by policy, practice, and process corresponds to the structure of the thesis. Therefore, the answers to these questions can be easily compared to the review of museum literature and the results and discussion section, which serve to show the range of the contemporary practice of deaccession and disposal in clothing and textile teaching collections.

However, further research and greater development of collections management guidelines are vital for support of these unique collections. Increased transparency of deaccession and disposal policies, practices, and processes within clothing and textile teaching collections will only strengthen a collections' ability to adopt museum best practices and ethically serve their objects and community.

Further Research

John Simmons in *Things Great and Small* suggests that the public is better served when the museum operations are transparent and open to scrutiny.²⁶⁹ The results of this research show that transparency of clothing and textile teaching collections management will ultimately serve and strengthen their own unique community. In 1997, Linda Arthur urged academics working in costume collections to be more transparent regarding the resources needed to support historic costume teaching collections, as such information was not addressed in the literature.²⁷⁰ However, to date, few formal studies specific to the management of university collections of textiles and costume have been undertaken or published.

The accessibility of policies and procedures of similar institutions could inspire other collections to adopt best museum practices. For example, one respondent noted time as a reason they have no policies and procedures. “We need to have started them in the past, but with no allotted time to work on this, [policy development] is at the bottom of my priority list.”²⁷¹ If collections, such as those in this study, make available policies and procedures and begin discussing openly the practice of collections management, other practitioners would need to do less time consuming work of researching and interpreting external policies and procedures. When asked, “What sources a practitioner would look to in order to create policies and procedures?” one respondent noted, “I’m not

²⁶⁹ Simmons, *Things Great and Small*, 53.

²⁷⁰ Arthur, “Resources for Costume Collections in American Universities.”

²⁷¹ C2

sure who I would look to for resources.”²⁷² Another noted, “I don’t know of a specific institution that I’d model our policy after, probably a similar teaching collection.”²⁷³ If the field supports best museum practices, this research argues that it is imperative for similar collections to make available and share deaccession and disposal policies. This type of transparency not only aids practitioners who are translating museum policy and best practice for their institutions, but also fosters best practices in other collections that may have been struggling to explicate it. Obviously, policies do not enact themselves. They require full adoption by staff and volunteers. However, established policies and procedures ensure standardization and consistency when followed, as a way to ensure the future of the collection and limit personal bias by unregulated management.

Further research is also needed into how clothing and textile teaching collections can strive to be more transparent with collections management policies and procedures. While formal policies and procedures were provided to the researcher, due to the confidential nature of this study, they cannot be put in the appendix for the reader or other interested parties to personally evaluate. This act of accessibility then must come from the collections practitioners themselves. This transparency could aid in donor and community understanding of motives, collecting, and mission. While every collection has different staffing and resources, the educational missions are incredibly similar. Books on museum registration methods or museum web pages often include sample collections management documentation such as accessioning policies and deaccessioning policies. Similarly, some clothing and textile collections host their scope of collections on their

²⁷² C4

²⁷³ C9

webpage. In a 2015 study, Arden Kirkland et al noted in regard to clothing and textile teaching collections online,

There could also be tools that assist with our archiving processes: how objects are cataloged, what vocabularies are used for description, how we work with both digital and analog systems for all stages of documenting and preserving our objects.²⁷⁴

Additionally, “These tools might offer another important benefit. If we can provide instruction, resources, and contacts for anyone working with historic clothing, we might underscore the value of these collections, however modest.”²⁷⁵ Transparency is the key to the dissemination of information.

This transparency would be instrumental in aiding deaccession and disposal, not merely through policy but in action. The creation of a forum or network available to teaching collections could help keep deaccessioned objects in the educational field and further support those collections striving for museum best practices and to avoid potential controversy while engaging with disposal. Future studies into the transparency of clothing and textile teaching collections are important to connect colleagues and disseminate knowledge of collections management policies and procedures, especially the acts of deaccession and disposal.

Finally, this study not only highlighted the lack of guidance for clothing and textile teaching collections but also for clothing and textile collections at large. Discipline-specific guidelines regarding deaccession and disposal in the museum field only exist for fine art. The creation of clothing and textile specific deaccession and disposal ethical guidelines by leaders in the field, such as the Costume Society of

²⁷⁴ Arden Kirkland et al., "Sharing Historic Costume Collections Online," *Dress* 41, no. 2 (2015): 121.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

America and the Textile Society of America, would be a tremendous addition to the compendium of collections management literature, guiding not just clothing and textile teaching collections but any collection or museum with holdings of clothing and textiles. As many small collections, such as local historical societies, historic homes, and anthropological collections may have significant holdings of textiles, this research and transparency will have broader use across the museum field. With this knowledge, similar institutions can create, review, and adapt their deaccession and disposal policies and procedures to better ethically and practically serve the managers of clothing and textile collections, by aligning with the ideals represented in best museum practices.

Appendix A

LIST OF ACADEMIC CLOTHING AND TEXTILE COLLECTIONS CONTACTED

Ball State
Columbia College
Cornell
Denison University
Drexel
Framingham State University
Illinois State University
Indiana University
Mount Holyoke College's Antique Clothing Collection.
Mount Mary
North Dakota State University
Ohio State University
Oregon State University
Philadelphia University
School of the Art Institute
Smith College
Texas Women's University
Towson University
University of Connecticut
University Nebraska-Lincoln
University of Akron
University of Delaware
University of Georgia
University of Hawaii
University of Idaho
University of Kentucky
University of Missouri
University of North Carolina
University of North Carolina
University of North Texas
University of Texas at Austin
University of Virginia
University of Washington
University of Wisconsin
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Marti College of Art and Design
Virginia Tech

Appendix B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear ,

My name is Kristin DeiTos, and I am a historic costume graduate student in the Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design at the University of Rhode Island (URI). The reason that I am contacting you is that under the supervision of Dr. Blaire Gagnon, (Principal Investigator, bgagnon@uri.edu; 401-874-5858), I am conducting a study on deaccessioning policies and practices in historic costume and textile teaching collections. This research will be done for the completion of URI master's thesis requirements. We are currently seeking volunteer academic faculty or staff from such teaching collections as participants in this study.

Participation in this study involves completing an initial online questionnaire and follow-up email interviews discussing your collection's policies, procedures, successes and failures in regards to the deaccession process. As little information is published on policies and practices of historic costume and textile teaching collections, results from this research will contribute information on this process, which can be used by collections interested in creating, reviewing, or amending policies to better sustain these collections that benefit education.

Participation in this study is variable and is done around your personal schedule; participation should take no more than 2 hours of your time. As this is a study of institutional policy and procedure, no personal information will be requested of the participants. A list of participating institutions will be noted in the results of the study but no names or identifying information will be included in any publications or presentations based on these data, and your responses to the interviews will remain confidential. This research has been approved by The University of Rhode Island Institutional Review Board.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to kmdeitos@my.uri.edu and a form of consent will be completed with a link to the initial questionnaire. If you are interested in further information on the study before agreeing to participate, please email the above address with any further questions or comments.

Sincerely,
Kristin DeiTos
MS candidate
University of Rhode Island

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

Emailed on University Letterhead

The University of Rhode Island
Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design
55 Lower College Road
Kingston, RI 02881

The Art of Removal: An analysis of deaccessioning in clothing and textile teaching collections

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in an email interview on deaccessioning policies and procedures in historic costume and textile teaching collections. This is a research project being conducted by Kristin DeiTos, a graduate student at the University of Rhode Island, under the supervision of Dr. Blaire Gagnon, the Principal Investigator. While participation times are variable, it should take approximately 3 interviews to complete with an expected maximum participation time of 2 hours.

PARTICIPATION

To participate you must be a faculty or staff member that engages with collections management deaccession policies and procedures in a college or university historic costume and textile teaching collection, and be over the age of 18. The collection must have a mission statement that self-identifies it as a teaching institution and not as a public museum. Additionally, the holdings of the teaching collection must be at least 80% clothing and textiles. Your participation in this questionnaire and subsequent follow-up email interviews is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the development of policies and procedures, as well as the successes and challenges associated with deaccessioning in historic costume and textile teaching collections.

RISKS

The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. You may feel a little uncomfortable answering questions as the representative of institutional decisions on the controversial topic of deaccessioning. All questions and procedures were designed to minimize this possible risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The initial questionnaire answers will be sent to a link at Google forms where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Google forms does not collect identifying information such as your name or IP address. Email addresses will be requested for follow-up questions. Therefore, your responses will remain confidential not anonymous to the researchers, but any data used in this study will be kept confidential. All subsequent email interviews will take place on a secure password protected network. A list of participating institutions will be noted in results of the study but no names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations based on these data, and your responses to the interviews will remain confidential.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact my research supervisor, Dr. Blaire Gagnon via phone at 401-874-5858 (office), 401-932-9772 (cell) or via email at bgagnon@uri.edu.

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, or you have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, you may contact the office of the Vice President for the Division of Research and Economic Development, Carlotti Administration Building, 2nd Floor, 75 Lower College Road, Suite 2, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island; telephone: (401) 874-4576.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Clicking the link below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older, and indicates your voluntary consent to participate in this study. Please feel free to print a copy of this consent page to keep for your records.

<[Link to Initial Questionnaire](#)>

Appendix D

GOOGLE FORMS INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Deaccessioning Questionnaire

A study of historic costume and textile teaching collections

Deaccessioning is defined as the permanent removal of an object from a collection. Does deaccessioning occur in the historic clothing and textile teaching collection?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Does the collection have a deaccession policy?

If yes, please attach a copy or type below.

Does the collection have set procedures and criteria for the selection and disposal of objects?

For this study, disposal is the physical removal, or mode of transferal, of the deaccessioned object from a collection. If yes, please attach or type below.

What is your preferred email address for a follow-up interview?

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Appendix E

E-MAIL INTERVIEW QUESTION BANK

Below is a question bank that will be used to develop follow-up interviews based on the information provided by the interviewee in the initial questionnaire.

1) Deaccessioning is defined as the permanent removal of an object from a collection. Does deaccessioning occur in the historic clothing and textile teaching collection?

- If no, why does the collections staff/faculty choose not to deaccession objects?
- How often does deaccessioning occur in the collection?
- What are the collection's specific motives for deaccessioning objects?
- Are objects selected for deaccession and disposal continuously or under a specific time frame/motive?
- Is deaccessioning included in a strategic plan of the collection?
- Approximately what year did the collection begin deaccessioning?

2) Does the collection have a deaccession policy? If so, please attach a copy or type below.

- If no, are you interested in creating deaccessioning policies? Why or why not?
- Do you have other collections management policies and procedures? If so, what do they include?
- Did you develop your deaccession policy off of a template, set of guidelines, or other institution's policies? If so, which one(s)?
- Was the mission taken into consideration in the creation of the deaccession policy? If so, how? If no, why not?
- Approximately what year was the collection's deaccession policy created and instituted?

3) Does the collection have set procedures and criteria for the selection and disposal of objects? For this study, disposal is the physical removal, or mode of transferal, of the deaccessioned object from a collection. If so, please attach or type below.

- Did you base your deaccession procedures off a template, set of guidelines, or other institution's collections management policies? If so, which one(s)?
- Do you have specific paperwork for deaccessioning? If so, please attach. Was this form created from a template? If so, what is the source?
- Do you keep paperwork from deaccessioned objects? If so, how? If no, why not?
- Are donors notified if their object is selected for deaccession?
- Are there objects that will not be deaccessioned based on donor requests or university wishes?

- Without naming specific individuals, but rather their titles, who is involved with deaccessioning in each step of the process from object selection, deaccession, to disposal?
 - Is there a committee involved with deaccession decisions, or do individuals complete the deaccession process?
 - Do the same people involved in deaccessions handle accessions/acquisitions?
 - Do you have specific criteria for the selection of objects for deaccessioning? If so, what are they? Are they subject to change?
 - How were the criteria for deaccessioning developed? Were they based off of a template, set of guidelines, or other institution's collections management policies? If so, which one(s)?
 - How are selected objects visually marked for deaccession? Are they removed from the physical collection prior to disposal? Where and how are they stored prior to disposal?
 - Do you have different deaccession criteria for costume vs. flat textiles? If so, what are they?
 - What methods of disposal does the collection approve?
 - How is the method of disposal decided for the deaccessioned object?
 - Do you deaccession to another department on campus, for example a theatre department? If so, which and how?
 - Are deaccessioned objects offered to students and/or faculty for personal research or collections?
 - Would the collection consider selling a deaccessioned object? If yes, why and what would the acquired funds be used for? If no, why not?
- Please walk me through a recent deaccession from selection of object to the disposal method? What were the successes and challenges? If you have any paperwork you would like to share, please attach.
 - In this research we are looking to document both successes and challenges of implementing deaccessioning policies and procedures in historic costume and textile teaching collection. Please add any anecdotes, advice, and/or references you feel necessary to further the discussion or aid those collections interested in amending or creating policy.

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