2024

ACCESSIONING PRACTICES OF UNIVERSITY TEACHING COLLECTIONS

Arianna Gutierrez
University of Rhode Island, ariannagutierrez4@gmail.com

ACCESSIONING PRACTICES OF UNIVERSITY TEACHING COLLECTIONS

BY

ARIANNA GUTIERREZ

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

2024

MASTER OF SCIENCE

OF

ARIANNA GUTIERREZ

APPROVED:

Thesis Committee:

Major Professor Karl Aspelund

Linda Welters

David Howard

Maling Ebrahimpour

Brenton DeBoef

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2024

ABSTRACT

Many universities with historic textile and costume collections are not able to follow museum standard accessioning practices or policies because the unique nature of university teaching collections often necessitates the creation of custom practices. As a result, collections managers must create custom accessioning practices that address the specific challenges that their collections face.

This study meticulously surveyed university historic textile and costume collections in the United States to determine their accessioning practices and policies and how the challenges they faced influenced these practices. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to create a list of interview questions that accurately evaluated accession policies and practices, while also acknowledging the most common challenges that university teaching collections faced. Several staff members from university teaching collections in the United States, who were involved in the accessioning process at their universities, were then contacted to participate in Zoom interviews about their accessioning practices. With the information from these interviews, I developed recommendations and suggestions for creating useful accessioning practices and policies for university textile and costume collections.

The research was conducted in multiple steps. Once all the data was acquired, the interviews were transcribed into Word documents, the interview transcripts were coded to find common themes, and I identified the essential and beneficial information about my research. The recommendations and suggestions were then derived from those results.

Results demonstrated a wide variety of accessioning practices and policies utilized by university collections. Elements from accessioning policies recommended by

the American Alliance of Museums and the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries were observed in all accessioning policies, showing that though these museum standards may not fully apply to university collections, parts can still be applicable. Some accessioning policies were better developed, matching more of the AAM and AAMG recommendations, while others were more basic and heavily relied on the discretion of the staff. This diversity provides a comprehensive view of the field.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the process of writing my thesis, from my preliminary research to my literature review to my interviews to analyzing my data to writing it all out, there have been several people who have encouraged me, supported me, and gave me the motivation I needed to finish this thesis and get my degree. Without these people, the process would have been ten times more difficult.

Firstly, I want to thank my fellow graduate student, Payton Becker, who was writing her thesis at the same time. Payton provided abundant moral support throughout the process of my thesis. Our constant texts and conversations about how time was running out and that I needed to get things moving helped motivate me to continue progressing. My thesis advisor Dr. Karl Aspelund made writing my thesis possible. His guidance and advice were instrumental, and I could not have done it without him. Dr. Aspelund was always a positive influence, ready to help in any way. Dr. Linda Welters was there whenever I got stuck and needed a nudge in the right direction. Professor David Howard provided me with beneficial firsthand insight into what goes into running a small university teaching collection that proved to be extremely helpful. I thank him not only for that, but for also taking the time to be a part of my thesis committee. I also want to thank Maling Ebrahimpour for agreeing to be the chair for my thesis defense as well as all the people who participated in my interviews who gave me the first-hand information I needed to answer my research question. Without all these people, this project would not have been possible.

I also want to thank my family. My brother, Eli, and my parents, put up with a lot of hemming and hawing when I thought I would never be done. My family’s constant support served to lighten the mood when things got tough. My dad even helped me out by being my second coder and proofreading my proposal. Lastly, I want to thank my boyfriend, Sean, who was my biggest cheerleader when I felt like giving up.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS vi

LIST OF TABLES viii

LIST OF FIGURES ix

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Background 1

Chapter 2: Review of Literature.......... 4

Concepts of Interest 4

Controversy 12

Sustainability 14

Lack of Resources 16

Lack of Staff 17

Lack of Funds 18

Research Gaps 19

Justification of Research Problem 19

Chapter 3: Methodology 21

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion 27

Content Analysis of Results 30

Lack of Staff 32

Lack of Resources 37

Lack of Space 38

Lack of Funding 40

Lack of Institutional Support 42

Duplication 43

Pressure from Donors 45

Chapter 5: Conclusion 47

Further Research 49

Appendices 51

Appendix A. 51

Appendix B. 52

Appendix C. 55

Bibliography 58

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Information. 29

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Model of categories, themes, and central theme…………………………… 32

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

University historic textile and costume collections offer “students, faculty [and] scholars alike [the opportunity to] handle the objects in the collection …looking more closely at construction techniques and other elements.” (Participant 1).

University historic textile and costume collections are “great for [students] because a lot of times [they] go to a larger institution … [and they] don't get a lot of hands on [experience]… my students work with me… they do the same thing I do.” (Participant 2).

Across the United States, numerous universities house historic textiles and costumes, ranging from a few hundred pieces to as many as 50,000, that allow students to directly view and interact with the subjects they are studying (Marcketti et al., 2011). As the two excerpted quotations above show, the proper care of these historic textile pieces is of great importance to the experience of the students.

Large institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Museum of Modern Art can invest significant space, time, and money to acquire the proper knowledge and best equipment to store and care for archival clothing collections, such as HVAC systems to control temperature and climate, storage supplies and equipment such as archival boxes that protect against pests, dust, and light damage, as well as wash tanks, variable suction vacuums, and deionized water systems to clean and repair damaged pieces.

Smaller institutions such as university teaching collections or historical societies, often have far less funding and lack access to the equipment available to larger institutions. As a result, their costume collections can suffer from a lack of proper care (Brahm, 1977; Josephson, 1945; Moynihan, 2011; Rusch & Herro, 2000). The resulting lack of proper care in these historic textile collections is a problem as improper care to historic textiles can cause irreparable damage (Brahm, 1977; Josephson, 1945; Moynihan, 2011; Rusch & Herro, 2000). In academic settings, this damage results in the loss of the unique opportunity for students to view the objects they are studying in person (Marcketti et al., 2011). In both the textile conservation field as well as academia, the dedication of these smaller institutions to the proper care of historic textile collections is crucial.

Thus, smaller collections must consider these limitations when making decisions about accessioning. Limited resources can only be distributed among so many historic pieces. The condition of the historic objects must also be considered, as historic objects with substantial condition issues will need more resources that are possibly unavailable at these universities (Marcketti et al., 2011; Hackbart-Dean & Montgomery, 1998). Currently, there is a notable absence of research into the accessioning practices of university teaching collections. At the same time, donations have increased as people are beginning to recognize the historic value of textiles and fashion; also, the large baby boomer demographic is downsizing while at the same time cleaning out the estates of their parents. Through analysis of the accessioning practice of these smaller institutions—with their limitations—the goal is to find out if the limitations affect their accessioning practices and how these practices can be improved upon for the benefit of the collection.

This thesis addresses the research question: How do the accessioning practices—or, conversely, the lack of coherent practices—of university teaching collections affect the care of those collections?

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are accessioning policies for university teaching collections, and if so, what the policies are and if they are being followed. Here, accessioning will be generally defined as “the formal act of legally accepting an object or objects to the category of material that a museum holds in the public trust” (American Alliance of Museums, 2012). This study is significant as it will provide insights into the current state of accessioning practices and collection managers’ adherence to them in university teaching collections.

Accessioning policies will be defined as the acquisition process that addresses legal and ethical principles and professional responsibilities (International Council of Museums, 2020). University teaching collections will be generally defined as collections of historic textiles housed by universities for the purpose of supporting students in their research or related coursework.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Concepts of Interest

This study focuses on identifying challenges that exist across university teaching collections that affect accessioning practices. Through extensive review of the available literature that involved looking into studies of the challenges of university teaching collections, international museum standards of accessioning, and the considerations needed to be taken during museum accessioning, three challenges were identified:

1. Lack of Resources
2. Lack of Staff
3. Lack of Funding.

Museums and colleges both share a similar mission of spreading knowledge (Bonner, 1985). Museums can be a unique and useful teaching tool for schools to utilize. They can provide opportunities for students to see artifacts in person as well as the possibility of internships and training programs (Bonner, 1985). Internships and training programs are especially useful for students who want to enter the museum profession as practical experience is extremely useful and can be helpful in securing future employment. Many colleges have independent study courses that can be used for internships or independent research through a museum (Bonner, 1985).

Universities have a long history incorporating museums into their institutions. There are collections as old as Mesopotamia, such as that at Lasa dating from the 2nd millennium BCE or the museum rooms excavated at the School of Ur dating from 530

BCE. Many of the universities founded in the later Medieval period had collections of artifacts used for teaching, such as the Picture Gallery of Christ Church College in Oxford that was originally established in 1546 and was turned into a small art museum in the late 1960s (Boylan, 1999). By the mid-1800s, the increase in the number of university museums and teaching collections become central to higher education, driven by the increasing emphasis on empirical research, the scientific method, and the educational reforms that prioritized hands-on learning and the systematic study of natural history and archaeology (Kozak, 2016). The rise of museums in the mid-19th century was part of the trend toward greater public education and cultural enlightenment. Museums began to emerge as institutions dedicated to preserving and displaying artifacts, artworks, and scientific specimens. This movement reflected a growing interest in history, science, and art among the public, spurred by industrialization, colonial expansion, and increased global connectivity during that era. In more recent times, university museums have come to not only serve students and faculty of the institution but are also increasingly serving the public through public exhibitions (Boylan, 1999 The main goal of teaching collections is to supplement education and research. Museum collections provide an opportunity for students to study specific subjects through object-based learning (Chatterjee, 2010). Historic costume and textile collections in universities have been around for almost as long as there have been courses in textiles offered by home economics departments starting in the early twentieth century. These collections often started as private collections of the professors to enrich their courses before the creation of textbooks (Welters & Ordoñez, 2011). These collections can range from a mere couple hundred pieces to collections of over 50,000 (Marcketti et al, 2011). University teaching collections provide unique opportunities for students to engage firsthand with the material that they are studying. Specifically, historic costume and textile collections can teach construction methods for fashion design students or how to date clothing by specific details and silhouettes for fashion history students (Marcketti et al., 2011). Historic costumes are useful for textile studies as they show the variety of possible end uses of textiles. Historic costumes also show the relationship between textile history and social and cultural history (Strege, 2000).

Not only can these collections be used to supplement garment construction and fashion history courses, but they can also be used to tackle topics of social history, gender, race, diversity, postmodernism, and popular culture. Artifacts can also be used in academic settings to encourage discussion, group work, and lateral thinking (Chatterjee, 2010). Many university teaching collections began as supplemental material for courses to encourage object-based learning in higher education. This type of learning was popular in universities in the 19th and early 20th centuries. (Chatterjee, 2010). It has been found that students can better understand information they are taught when they are exposed to physical examples (Welters & Ordoñez, 2011). Despite the importance of these collections to the learning experience of students, there is little research into the current or best practices of these collections.

It is important that university teaching collections follow a specific mission or goal, with this mission being to facilitate teaching, research, and service/outreach missions. Historic costume and textile collections align with these goals by providing physical examples for textile history, fashion history, theater costumes, art, literature, language, women's history, and anthropology classes. Historic costumes and textiles can also be used to support classes on the material life of various cultures and material culture theory. Historic costumes and textiles can supplement fashion design classes, providing examples of garment construction, embellishment techniques, and pattern designs. Students studying textile conservation can use historic costume and textile teaching collections to learn archival research strategies, practice conservation techniques, and develop tools for collection management (Welters & Ordoñez, 2011). Teaching collections also contribute significantly to research, being used in the development of theses and dissertations as well as faculty research projects.

University teaching collections often face challenges involving a lack of funding, time, and knowledgeable staff. Faculty members have often been appointed as curators or collections managers, with them taking on the responsibility of caring for the collection without the proper knowledge or training to do so. Many of these faculty members do not have a set of policies or practices that they follow regarding accessioning, cataloging, or storing the collection put in their care (Welters & Ordoñez, 2011). In some instances, these faculty members would be aided by graduate teaching assistants; however, they too tend to lack the necessary training and knowledge.

Unfortunately, universities have been experiencing financial constraints, which has caused challenges for university teaching collections. Some universities have tried to circumvent this by increasing commercial avenues such as museum shops and reproduction fees, fund-raising, and admission prices, while others have chosen to close their museums and transfer ownership of their collections (Boylan, 1999). Smaller collections such as some of the ones my interviewees work at do not even have the option for fundraising through commercial avenues or admission fees because they are not a museum and must solely rely on funds raised from donors. Many of these university historic collections lack professional staff, relying on faculty members who may not have experience in collections management.

Marcketti et al. found that previous research from the 1970s shows that university historic textile and costume collections often struggle with a lack of storage space, insufficient climate control, and overall sparse resources. Many university teaching collections are solely reliant on their parent institution for funding for facilities and staff. To receive these resources, there may be processes in place in which these collections have to prove their value to their governing institution (Marcketti et al., 2011). For university historic textile and costume collections, this issue is aggravated by the history of textiles being deemed as inferior in museums and academia. There is rarely full-time staff for the collection, with the collections manager often being an existing faculty member of the university who takes on a second role (Marcketti et al., 2011).

When fourteen collections managers from various university historic textile and costume collections were interviewed by Marcketti et al., all of them stated that funding was an issue (Marcketti et al., 2011). Their work is of utmost importance, yet they face numerous challenges. One collections manager, for instance, shared that due to budget cuts, her sole assistant had her position terminated by the university, leaving this collections manager with no aid. Two other collections managers shared that they, too, experienced staff shortages that resulted in them having to take on additional work. Time constraints were also identified as a challenge across the board, with collections managers not having adequate time to focus on the collection along with their other responsibilities (Marcketti et al., 2011). A lack of support from the institution and other faculty was also consistently mentioned. This lack of support is often tied back to the lack of appreciation of historic textiles by academia, with university administration not understanding the importance of historical textiles as tools for education (Marcketti et al., 2011).

Colleges and universities have been accepting historic artifacts into their collections knowing the benefit they offer for teaching and research purposes. However, these acquisitions come with the responsibility to properly house, store, and care for these artifacts, with not every institution having the resources to do so. As was mentioned by Marcketti et al., Smathers & Eastin also found that in many instances, an existing faculty member is tasked with caring for the collection on top of their other responsibilities at the university (Smathers & Eastin, 1977).

The Betty D. Eastin Historical Costume Collection at the University of Kentucky is one example of a historic collection at a university. The collection was started in the late 1960s, and in 1973, Betty D. Eastin, an associate professor at the university, along with Smathers, a graduate teaching assistant, began working on the collection (Smathers & Eastin, 1977). The collection was solely funded by donation, with the total financial contribution being less than $1500 cumulatively for the four years before this article was written. To properly organize the collection, it is important to have proper registration, involving the name of the artifact, a description, how it was acquired, from whom it was acquired, the condition, and the location in the collection. This allows for the ease of identifying the various artifacts in the collection. Part of the accessioning process is having an explicit accession policy outlining the accession requirements. The accession policy should guide collections managers to only accept artifacts that positively contribute to the collection. Artifacts being considered for acquisition should align with the goals and needs of the collection (Smathers & Eastin, 1977).

Hackbart-Dean and Montgomery detail how before taking on a new acquisition, it is important to consider the care that the piece will require and whether the institution possesses the resources required to provide this care (Hackbart-Dean & Montgomery, 1998). Collections managers must ask themselves: Can they adequately care for these objects? Will accessioning these objects positively contribute to the existing collection without endangering it?

The condition of the piece should be taken into consideration as pieces in poorer condition will require more extensive conservation, and therefore more resources. The piece's historical significance, scarcity, and informational content should also factor into the acquisition process. These considerations aid in evaluating the value and significance of the piece to the collection as well as the potential costs that will be incurred with accessioning the piece such as conservation and storage. Additionally, there may be costs associated with acquisitioning such as packing, transportation, insurance, field survey, cleaning, and stabilization, as well as costs associated with processing the acquisition such as staff and supplies. The supplies may include proper storage containers such as acid-free boxes and acid-free tissue paper, acid-free tags for labeling textiles with accession numbers, needles, thread, adhesives, and crepeline for stabilization, Orvis or other detergents, deionized water, and a conservation tub for wet cleaning, and a freezer for pest control. The needs of the existing collection as well as the abilities of the staff also should be taken into consideration when making acquisition decisions (Hackbart-Dean & Montgomery, 1998).

Conclusions can be made about the possible condition of an object being considered for acquisition based on the environment which it has been kept in. If an object has been kept in an environment with less-than-ideal conditions for an extended period, it will likely have condition issues that will need to be addressed if it were to be accessioned (Hackbart-Dean & Montgomery, 1998). In this vein, the area where an object has been housed should be thoroughly checked for evidence of an infestation, as this would not only suggest that the object would need conservation but accessioning this piece could put the existing collection at risk.

Collections should also consider whether the object they are accessioning fits into their mission statement. If a piece does not align with the goals of the collection, then it does not benefit the collection to acquire it. The mission statement of a collection gives the collection its purpose, thus it is important to use the mission statement as a guide for accessioning. Policies and practices are implemented by a collection to ensure that the mission statement is being followed (Hackbart-Dean & Montgomery, 1998). Acquisition policies define what is being collected, the limits of the collection, and what objects would be of interest for the collection. The policy can be used as a guideline when making accessioning decisions.

Before making an acquisition, a comprehensive field study should be conducted to assess the condition of the items and the environment they have been stored in. This study is particularly important for identifying any mold or pest activity. The material of the objects should also be considered, as fragile, large, or threedimensional objects may require special transportation and storage. The value of the object should also be considered. For objects with significant historical value, condition issues can be overlooked (Hackbart-Dean & Montgomery, 1998).

Controversy

Merriman (2008) notes that the mission of museums is to collect and conserve artifacts so that the public has access to primary sources of history. However, as time has gone on, museum collections have grown enormously, with many museums accumulating objects at a rapid rate. This increase in acquisition has led to a situation where many museums are unable to keep track of exactly what objects are in their collections. The overabundance of artifacts has caused museums to struggle with the long-term storage and care of these objects, which can become quite expensive. This situation should be a cause for concern and a motivation to find effective solutions, such as deaccessioning (Merriman, 2008).

There is controversy around deaccessioning, as museums are considered "stewards" of their collections, a trustee that houses artifacts on behalf of the public, though legally the donation paperwork during the accession process transfers ownership of the artifacts to the museum. In the 1980s, a report was commissioned that showed that museums spend sixty percent of their resources on managing their collections, which is still reflective of today's museums (Merriman, 2008). This information helped museums to be stricter with accessioning, but there was still a stigma around deaccessioning.

The attitude towards deaccessioning has shifted in the 21st century due to changing perspectives on the role of museums and financial pressures. The National Museum Directors' Conference in the UK issued a report in favor of deaccessioning in 2003, and the Museums Association changed their code of ethics in 2007 to reflect a more permissive stance on the practice. This shift acknowledges the practical needs of museums to manage resources effectively and adapt their collections to better serve public interest, educational goals, and financial sustainability. That being said, museums still appear to be hesitant to utilize deaccessioning as a means of culling their collections. Despite evolving attitudes towards deaccessioning, museums remain hesitant to fully utilize it due to ethical concerns, the fear of public and donor backlash, regulatory constraints, and the need to ensure that proceeds align with the museum's mission. The unpredictable financial return from deaccessioned items also contributes to this caution, as museums must balance the potential benefits with the risks and reputational impacts involved (Merriman, 2008).

Museums tend to vary in their accessioning practices, with some immediately accessioning any newly acquired artifacts into their collections and others taking time to formally accession their acquisition, resulting in accession backlogs (Merriman, 2008). These accession backlogs can skew the number of artifacts in a museum's collection, making it more difficult to accurately assess the number of objects a museum possesses. A study of seven major museums in the UK found that between 1990 and 2004, these museums were acquisitioning artifacts at an astronomically higher rate than deaccessioning them. Three out of the seven museums had a ratio of acquisition to disposal between 750 and over 1000 to one. The rates in this study only accounted for items that were formally accessioned into the museum’s collection and did not include items that the museum had acquisitioned but not yet accessioned, meaning that the acquisition rate could be even higher than what was reported (Merriman, 2008).

Finally, Merriman notes that with museums continuing to grow their collections at an astounding rate, these institutions face challenges of documentation and conservation backlogs and a lack of resources and funding to store and maintain their artifacts. These challenges make the continued indefinite expansion of museum collections unsustainable. The UK Museum Needs Assessment report in 2002 revealed that 91-99% of museums had documentation backlogs, 55% felt that they had inadequate storage space, and 94-99% felt they did not have any space for expanding their collection (Merriman, 2008).

Sustainability

There has been a rising concern about sustainability and incorporating sustainable practices into institutions. One definition of sustainability is practices that meet present day needs without compromising the needs of future generations. When museums acquire more artifacts than they can properly care for, they fail to practice sustainability because they are unable to ensure the long-term preservation and maintenance of these items. This over-accumulation leads to inadequate storage conditions, insufficient conservation efforts, and strained financial and human resources. As a result, future generations inherit the burden of managing these large collections without the necessary means to do so effectively, compromising the integrity and accessibility of the artifacts over time. This approach undermines the museum's role in safeguarding cultural heritage for the future, as the quality of care and preservation diminishes with resource constraints. Museums are also acting unsustainably when they acquire more artifacts than they can care for because some of these artifacts are going to suffer damage from lack of proper care due to limited resources (Merriman, 2008). Those in the museum profession need to focus on the purpose of collecting artifacts so that they can evaluate whether all the pieces in their collections continue to fit this purpose. Artifacts in museum collections may suit the collection's purpose when they are first accessioned, but that does not mean that they will continue to suit the needs of the museum indefinitely. Future generations will have different needs than present generations just as present generations have different needs than past generations. When potential artifacts are evaluated for accessioning into a museum collection, their value and significance to present and future generations should be among the criteria used to determine whether they will make a good fit for the collection. Museums should evaluate their entire collections based on the value and significance of the artifacts so that in the future they can easily make decisions surrounding deaccessioning. As there are many ways to ascribe value to objects, this will depend on the museum's mission statement (Merriman, 2008).

Therefore, it is important to implement an accession policy with guidelines that reflect the mission of the collection. These accession decisions should be made by a team rather than one individual for legal protection. Accessioning policies should include explicit criteria used to determine accessioning eligibility of an artifact. Artifacts should fulfill the mission of the collection, supplementing the existing collection or filling a gap. Provenance that associates an artifact with the university, local area, or state could be possible criteria. Size and condition should also be taken into consideration; institutions should not take on artifacts that they do not have the resources to properly care for. Provenance should also be considered to ensure that any potential donations are the property of the donor and have been acquired lawfully. Collections managers should ask donors to provide as much information as they have on the object they are donating, such as historical photos of the piece, where they bought the piece, when they bought the piece, who they bought the piece from: any information that could provide provenance. Pieces in poor condition could be considered for study or conservation collections for students to handle and practice conservation techniques on. Artifacts should be donated to collections without strings attached, as acquisitions donated conditionally could cause challenges in the future such as the loaned objects being recalled without compensation for the care they received while under the collection's care or donors becoming upset if the object is not used the way that they want (Welters & Ordoñez, 2011). The collections mission statement and accessions policies can be provided to potential donors so that they can better understand what donations would be the best fit for the collection.

Lack of Resources

The International Council of Museums standards on accessioning states that when making decisions regarding the accession of a piece, museums should carefully consider the resources required for the care, research, and display of the piece (International Council of Museums). Hackbart-Dean and Montgomery expressed similar sentiment on museum accessioning practices (Hackbart-Dean & Montgomery

1998). Marcketti et al. mention a lack of support for university collections from upper management, leading to a lack of funding and resources (Marcketti et al., 2011). Rusch & Herro recalls an incident at the Virginia Historical Society where a burst pipe flooded the facility, resulting in water damage to their collection of books. Due to limited internal resources, the institution had to rely on untrained volunteers and unconventional outside aid in their efforts to save their collection, such as freezing their books at a Carmine Foods facility (Rusch & Herro, 2000). Although this calamity did not directly deal with textiles, it shows the peril of a lack of resources available at small museums as well as that posed by insufficient staff numbers. Moynihan discusses how the lack of trained textile conservation staff in small museums contributes to the lack of textile conservation resources because the staff does not have the training or knowledge to operate equipment (Moynihan, 2011). Brahm details the lack of equipment, funding, and trained staff in archival facilities outside of museum settings (Brahm, 1977). This source depicts how these deficiencies result in poor preservation of archival materials.

Lack of Staff

Josephson conveys the lack of staff, especially trained professionals, in small museums, showing that this issue has been around for at least 80 years (Josephson, 1945). This issue was also conveyed by Moynihan, who delves into the lack of funding for historical societies that can lead to a lack of staff trained in textile conservation (Moynihan, 2011). Marcketti et al. also state that due to limited funding staff for university collections is also often limited, with faculty often taking on multiple roles within the museum (Marcketti et al., 2011). Smathers and Eastin found the same practice where university faculty members were given the title “curator” and the responsibilities of the teaching collection in addition to their teaching duties (Smathers & Eastin, 1977). One collection manager who was interviewed by Marcketti et al. stated that the only other staff member in the collection was an undergraduate student at the university, with this student subsequently being let go and her position eliminated (Marcketti et al., 2011). The incident at the Virginia Historical Society I mentioned previously also reflects a lack of staff trained in conservation as the society needed to rely on outside help through volunteers from the general public who did not possess any collection’s training. (Rusch & Herro, 2000).

Brahm details the lack of trained staff in archival facilities outside of museum settings. This lack of trained staff results in inappropriate textile conservation techniques due to insufficient knowledge of appropriate practices (Brahm, 1977). Though the literature referencing this may be at first glance considered outdated, this phenomenon was also represented in my interviews, showing that it is still very much a relevant issue today.

Lack of Funds

Across the literature, there was confirmation of a lack of funding for small museum institutions. Marcketti et al. state that many university museums rely on their governing institutions for funding and to receive said funding, these collections must prove their value to the university (Marcketti et al., 2011). Curators and collections managers of university teaching collections who were interviewed about their positions all stated that a lack of funding was a challenge that they faced. This lack of funding is often borne by a lack of support from the universities’ upper administration, with collections management being undervalued (Marcketti et al., 2011). Hackbart-Dean and Montgomery state that museums need to consider the cost of accessioning a piece (Hackbart-Dean & Montgomery, 1998). Historical societies were also found to lack funding, contributing to a lack of staff and resources. This issue of a lack of funds was seen in sources as old as 1945 to more current sources from 2011 (Josephson, 1945; Brahm, 1977; Moynihan, 2011).

Research Gaps

Through my literature review, I have noted a severe lack of research into accessioning practices of university teaching collections. While guidelines have been published, few studies look exclusively at accessioning and deaccessioning which is a rising problem in recent years as baby boomers clean out their parents' estates as well as their own closets. This research gap could be due to a lack of institutional and professional support for university teaching collections in the academic research field. There are limited resources detailing accessioning practices in museums in general, let alone university teaching collections specifically. There is also a significant lack of current resources, with most scholarship on the topic being more than ten years old. Due to this lack of current resources, several significantly older sources have been included in this literature review to get a fuller picture of museum accessioning practices as well as the challenges that university teaching collections face.

Justification of Research Problem

The existence of these challenges across university teaching collections, as well as other small museum institutions, shows that these issues are not specific to certain institutions. The ages of the resources consulted, ranging from 1945 to 2011, also show that these are ongoing issues and that there is a significant lack of attention to addressing these issues with the absence of current research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The aim of this study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of accession policies and practices in university teaching collections in their professional context. Conducting a case study model allowed for the capture of a range of perspectives on accessioning practices in university teaching collections, giving the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the issue, and reducing the potential for any bias (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Furthermore, it also allowed for a better understanding of the relationship between the issue, the context of the issue, and the people related to the issue (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In the context of my research, conducting a case study allowed for a better understanding of the relationship between accessioning practices in university teaching collections, the challenges that university teaching collections face that affect the accessioning practices used, and the collections managers that implement these accessioning practices.

Therefore, I conducted an instrumental exploratory study of university teaching collections for this study. The data collected was based on the experience of collections managers from universities that have teaching collections. The study is an *instrumental case study* because cases will be used to provide insight into the accession practices implemented in university teaching collections (Stake, 1995). The study is an *exploratory case study* because university teaching collections were explored to see how accession policies or lack thereof are informed by the resources and limitations of the teaching collections (Yin, 2003).

Population

The population of this study was composed of collections managers from university teaching collections in the United States. University teaching collections in the United States were selected because that is a wide enough scope that a full picture of the situation can be observed while still being narrow enough to be feasible within the available time frame.

Sample

The study's sample consists of eight collections managers, each from a different university teaching collection in the United States. Thirteen potential participants were contacted. The potential participants were recruited through purposive sampling, which allows for the study of participants well informed in the phenomenon under examination who can provide deep and thorough insights (Staller, 2021).

To be eligible to participate in this study the potential participants had to be collections managers working in a teaching collection of a university in the United States. Moreover, to accurately assess the accession policies in university teaching collections, the collections managers working in the university teaching collections needed to be directly consulted. If a collections manager was not available, or the role was not defined at the institution in question, the potential participant would need to be involved in the accessioning of pieces for the collection. A sample size of eight participants was deemed to be satisfactory for this study to ensure feasibility within the research time frame while allowing for enough data to be collected to get a comprehensive understanding of university teaching collection accession practices. The participants for this study were recruited by emailing thirteen collections managers directly and inviting them to participate in Zoom interviews.

Data Collection Process

For this study, semi-structured/standardized interviews were conducted over Zoom from March 6th through March 22nd with eight employees from eight different university teaching collections in the United States to learn more about the accessioning practices that they implement and the limitations that they might face regarding managing their respective collections as well as how these limitations affect their accessioning practices. Two pilot studies were conducted at my own university beforehand where I interviewed two individuals who were each in charge of a collection of historic costume and textiles at the university. The results of these interviews are not included in this thesis. Conducting interviews was chosen because it allowed for a better understanding of the current accessioning practices used by collections managers and what challenges they might be facing that affect those practices by speaking to the employees directly. Through interviews I was able to ask the participants open-ended questions, ask them to elaborate on topics that came up that were pertinent to the study, clarify the questions if the participants were confused, and look for unspoken indicators such as body language and tone of voice to get context for their answers (Hopf, 2004; Kendall, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were conducted because this method of interview allowed for the freedom of exploring new information that arose while still having an outline to guide the interview (Hopf, 2004; Kendall, 2008). This flexibility was important for the study because the goal is to learn as much as possible about the accessioning practices used in university teaching collections and there was information that arose during the interviews that was pertinent to this topic that was not already included in the prepared questions (Hopf, 2004; Kendall, 2008). Zoom interviews were conducted rather than in person interviews for convenience due to the varying geographical locations of the participants.

For this study an extensive literature review was conducted before the interviews took place to formulate the interview questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Kendall, 2008). The interview questions along with a letter of introduction and an agreement to participate were approved by the IRB at my university. Two of my committee members reached out to potential participants to make an initial introduction. Once a potential participant expressed interest in participating, I sent out the introduction letter explaining the goal of the research study as well as an agreement to participate that outlined the expectations and requirements for participation. This was to allow the participants to learn about the goals of the study before participating in any interviews so that they could make an informed decision regarding participation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The participants were asked to thoroughly read the introduction letter and give verbal informed consent to ensure that they were completely aware of what they were agreeing to. The participants were not compensated to avoid the possibility of coercion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). One interview was conducted per participant over Zoom, with questions that establish demographic information about the participant, facts surrounding the research question, and to get the participant's opinions and thoughts on the facts. Each interview lasted approximately sixty minutes long. This time frame was chosen because people start to lose interest after sixty minutes. Choosing a shorter time frame for interviews allowed the participants to fully focus their attention on the questions asked (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). There was a set of open-ended questions asked to the participants regarding the accessioning practices and policies that they use in their university teaching collections as well as the limitations that they face that may affect these practices. These interviews were conducted by me. The interviews were recorded in Zoom as well as notes taken on body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc. A laptop computer was used for housing and analyzing data. After the participants had been interviewed, the results of the content analysis were sent to the participants as a member check to assess validity (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Measures

To assess the current accessioning practices in university teaching collections, the participants were asked to explain the accessioning practices and policies they follow and any challenges they face in managing their collections that affect these practices. The participants were asked explicitly about challenges related to storage space, access to equipment/resources, time management, available staff, and support from governing institutions, as these are the areas that have been identified through relevant literature to pose the most challenges in university teaching collections and subsequently affect accessioning practices.

The semi-structured interviews began tentatively with nine questions; one question to establish relevant background information about the participants, five questions establishing accessioning practices and policies that the participants follow, and three questions that delve into possible challenges and limitations that the participants may face that may affect their accessioning practices (Appendix C). These interview questions were adapted from the interview questions used by Kira Moynihan (2011) to interview conservation staff about their experience working at historical societies as well as from the interview questions used by Marcketti et al. (2011) in identifying practices and strategies used by curators and collections managers in university historic clothing collections. Additional questions were added during the interviews to follow up on the participants' responses. The data from the interviews was transcribed and then coded through thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Analysis

Eight participants were interviewed for this thesis. Specific locations and identifying details were removed during coding and the participants will be referred to by "Participant #," going from "Participant 1" to "Participant 8." Seven of the participants were female and one was male. Based on the genders of all the potential participants I identified as well as the genders of the collections managers interviewed in the literature, such as the interviews conducted by Marcketti et al., I would say that this sample is representative of the people in the field (Marcketti et al., 2011). All eight participants were Caucasian, one identifies as Jewish. Three of the participants had doctoral degrees and five of the participants had master's degrees. Many of the participants held multiple titles. Five of the participants held the title of curator, three of the participants held the title of director, two of the participants had the title of collections manager, two participants held the title of museum registrar, and one held the title of associate director. Five of the participants are also professors, with their primary responsibility being teaching and their secondary responsibility being collections management. One of the participants is a lecturer in addition to their primary role as associate director. One of the participants had been working at their institution for between 1-5 years, two had been working at their institution between 5-10 years, two had been working at their institution between 10-15 years, one had been working at their institution between 20-25 years, and one had been working at their institution for over 40 years.

Three of the universities were in the Northeast, two in the Midwest, two in the South, and one in the West. Three of the universities had collections between 25,000-30,000 pieces, two collections had between 10,000-15,000 pieces, one collection had between 5,000-10,000 pieces, and two collections had between 2,500-5,000 pieces. Six collections had well-defined mission statements, while two collections did not have mission statements at all. Four collections had formal accession policies while four had informal accession policies or did not have any accession policies. Four of the collections were part of a museum while four of them were not. Four of the collections utilized an accession committee while four did not. All eight of the collections were used as a teaching tool in classrooms, seven of the collections were used for exhibitions, five of the collections were used for research, and four of the collections were used for community engagement/public programming. All eight collections used some type of electronic database, with two using Past Perfect, two using FileMaker, one using Embark Gallery Systems, one using Prefacio/Rediscovery, and one using Excel Sheets. All eight collections had donor files. Three of the participants cited the American Alliance of Museums as a resource for their accession policies, one cited the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries, one cited what they called "national/international museum standards," one cited general literature on modern museum practice, one cited Sara Marcketti, one cited Arden Kirkland, and one cited Marie Molero.

Name	Geographic Location	# Of pieces in collection	Part of a museum?	Mainly professor or mainly collections manager?	Mission Statement?	Formal Accession Policy?	Accession Committee?	Database?
P1	NE	10K	No	Collections manager	Yes	Yes	Yes	Past Perfect
P2	MW	30K	Yes	Professor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Past Perfect
P3	MW	30K	Yes	Professor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P4	NE	4K	No	Professor	No	No	No	FileMaker
P5	SE	12-15K	Yes	Professor	Yes	No	No	Prefacio/Rediscovery
P6	W	25-30K	Yes	Collections manager	Yes	Yes	No	Embark Gallery Systems
P7	SE	3.5K	No	Professor	Yes	In the works	No	FileMaker (Switching to CODA)
P8	NE	6-8K	No	Collections manager	No	No	Yes	Excel Sheets

Table 1. Demographic Information.

Quality of Measurements

Validity was established through a member check, where the codebook and coded transcripts were sent to the interview participants to ensure that the participants agreed with the codes generated from the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rose & Johnson, 2020). The participants agreed that the themes from the codebook were an accurate reflection of their experiences. Validity was also established through a statement of researcher's bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Having done a preliminary literature review prior to the interviews, there is a possibility that the information from the literature review influenced the way that the interview transcripts were coded which would cause the resulting themes to be an inaccurate reflection of the participants' experiences. Reliability was established through intercoder reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rose & Johnson, 2020). My father acted as a second coder, creating his own codebook, and coding the interview transcripts independently. My father was chosen as a second coder to limit bias in in the coding as he is not affiliated with the university and does not have any previous knowledge of my research. To prepare for the coding, my father read my proposal as well as my interview questions so that he understood what my research question was and could recognize themes related to my research question. The results of the two codebooks were compared using Cohen's Kappa (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Cohen's Kappa was found to be 0.70, showing that the results are reliable.

Thematic Analysis

Interviews were conducted over three weeks in March. Following transcription, the interview transcripts were carefully read through, and memos were taken to identify any recurring ideas. The transcripts were read several more times, each time annotations were taken to further identify patterns and trends that arose. Once it was decided that all the patterns and trends had been found and the data had been thoroughly analyzed, codes were developed based on these arising patterns to categorize data points with similarities (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Spiggle, 1994; DeCuir-Gunby et. al, 2011). A codebook was then developed using these codes where the data points were separated into sections with the codes as labels for each section (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Spiggle, 1994). These codes were then condensed into larger categories which were then further refined into larger themes that encompassed the essence of the original data points. Initially there were ten themes that arose from thematic analysis: Lack of Trained Staff, Lack of Staff, Lack of Resources, Lack of Space, Lack of Time, Lack of Funding, Lack of Institutional Support, Lack of Organization, Duplication, and Pressure from Donors. These themes were then further refined from ten to seven themes, combining Lack of Staff, Lack of Trained Staff, Lack of Time, and Lack of Organization into the theme Lack of Trained and/or Experienced Staff with the categories of Lack of Collections Management Trained Staff and Lack of Experienced Supplementary Staff. These seven themes culminate into a central theme of Resource Limitations.

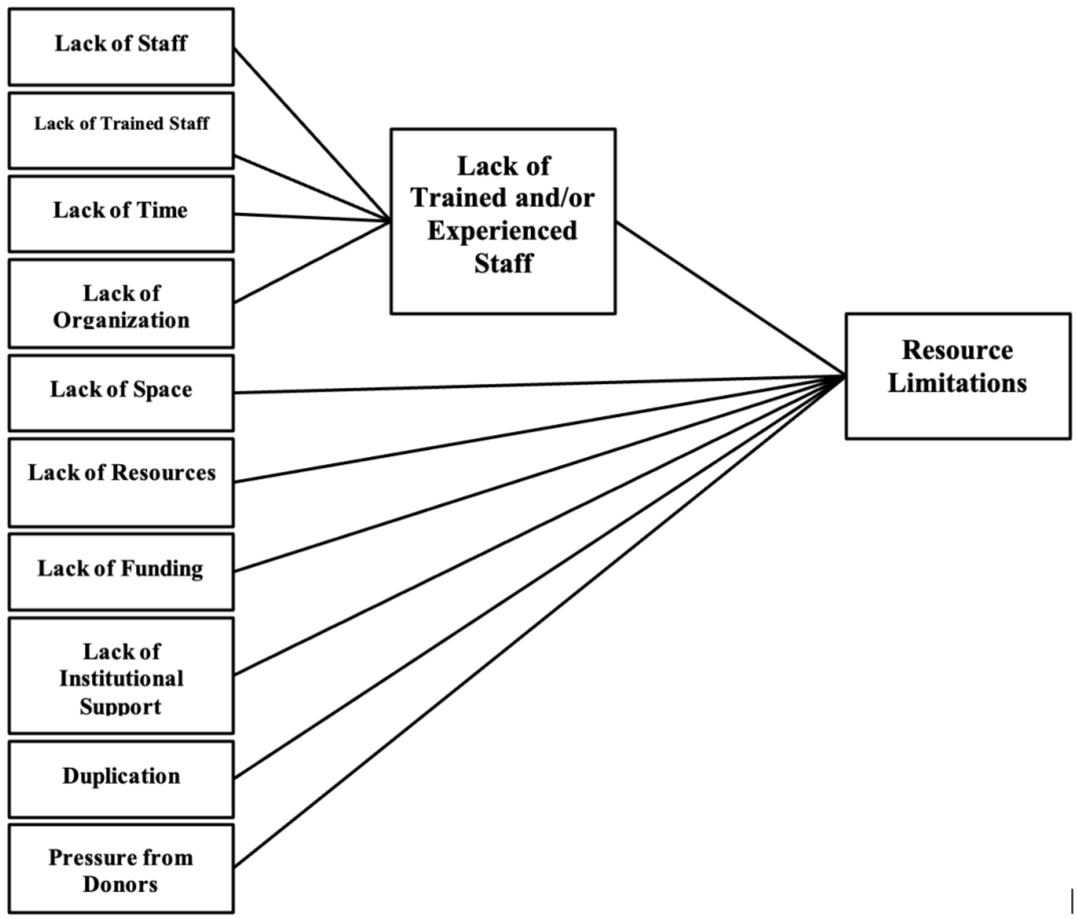

Figure 1. Model of categories, themes, and central theme.

Lack of Trained and/or Experienced Staff

This theme represents two categories: a) the lack of collections management-trained staff and b) the lack of experienced supplementary staff.

Lack of Collections Management Trained Staff

This category refers to challenges that collections managers face in university teaching collections arising from an insufficient number of staff members who are trained in collections management. This includes staff that needs to be trained in collections management such as student workers or volunteers. This can lead to mishandling of the objects and possibly damage to the objects. This challenge was present throughout the literature (Brahm, 1977; Josephson, 1945; Moynihan, 2011; Rusch & Herro, 2000).

Relying on inexperienced student workers was cited as creating more work for the staff or resulting in inaccurate recordkeeping. "…the students have no reason to know the subtleties of whether it's linen or linen and wool…a significant detail about the construction that would help date it," Participant 4 stated about having students help with recordkeeping. Participant 7 also stated that it was difficult to work with students, as the students assigned to work in the collection did not always have previous experience. "…it is much harder when I have the students [where] I'm their first stop" (Participant 7). Participant 5 stated that working with students negatively affected his work, as he was not able to focus on his own tasks when he had to constantly keep an eye on his student aids. "It is increasingly challenging to ensure that the students do the simplest… of tasks correctly and consistently…It drives me to distraction…I have to check every single thing, and I have to make compromises because I don't have time to check every single thing…filling out records…I just find constant mistakes…when I go back and look at our records and see how many mistakes there are I wonder [if] the dozens of students that have touched this over time is part of the reason why our records are so inconsistent" (Participant 5).

It is not solely inexperienced students who affect recordkeeping, but also uninformed volunteers, such as those that Participant 6 worked with. "…the detail that was captured [in the older records] was subject to the donor or the volunteer who was working on it. So, some are incredibly robust and [s]ome say 'dress'" (Participant 6).

A lack of trained staff affects accessioning practices because staff that are not trained in collections management will not be able to differentiate what they can or should accession for the collection from what they should not. Several of the participants interviewed expressed that either their predecessors or the members of their accessioning committee tended to accession everything that was presented to them because they needed to have the knowledge needed to be discerning (Participant 3 and 4). Additionally, staff not trained in collections management may not be aware of the proper way to store or catalog items, resulting in situations such as this one that Participant 5 faced. "…[My predecessor] would take an item, put it in a Ziploc bag, [label it] 'Smith 2001' and it's been sitting there for 20 years, so I cleaned out one room of over 800 baggies" (Participant 5).

Lack of Experienced Supplementary Staff

This category refers to challenges that collections managers face in university teaching collections due to having a smaller number of employees. A lack of staff in university teaching collections causes challenges for collections managers because it limits the amount of work that can be done. With an insufficient number of employees, many projects are not attended to because there are not enough people to complete them. "…we just don't have the staff to do it" (Participant 2). This can put stress on employees to rush through projects to complete all the work that needs attending to. "…I need someone else to help me…it can physically be a lot to handle the collection" (Participant 2). This challenge was seen in the literature where university teaching collections were facing issues with getting projects done because of a need for more staff (Marcketti et al., 2011). Lack of staff due to a lack of funding was also seen in the literature (Brahm, 1977; Josephson, 1945; Moynihan, 2011; Rusch & Herro, 2000).

Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8 stated that they were the only staff member for their collections. "We just need more [staff], I am the only dedicated collections employee, even though we have six full time positions. Everyone else has their other responsibilities and duties. And if we had a second employee, even a graduate student who was just assigned…to collections care, that would make a world of difference" (Participant 6). "I have asked for, many times…a number two…a person that we could divide and conquer around here. And because the graduate students always fill that role…the challenge has been that they come in and then they go out…I'd love one sustained person" (Participant 7). Oftentimes, the person tasked with running the collection is also a full-time faculty member with other responsibilities that take priority. "I'm assigned to manage the collection 20% of my time…but it requires me doing more than my job actually calls for in order to catch up on the massive amount that has been piled up…I'm technically on a nine month contract, I'm only supposed to work nine months out of the year, but I work twelve out of the year because there's no other time for me to get any of that physical accessioning and reorganization done" (Participant 5).

Participant 2 stated that it was just her, the curator, and the director who oversaw accessioning decisions. "…we recognize…we should have a bigger group" (Participant 2). Many of the participants interviewed commented that a lack of staff resulted in the absence of an accession/deaccession committee and resulted in them having to make these decisions on their own or with a smaller than preferred group. "We did, we've discussed at length this sort of how to deaccession things because there's no committee" (Participant 8). "…there should be…[an] accession committee and a deaccession committee…we have such a massive undertaking to get our operational standards in place, it's much more efficient for those decisions to be made by me" (Participant 5). Because of the small staff sizes, many collections managers heavily rely on student workers. "I really rely on my grad student…[w]e don't have even a social media person…our grad student helps work with that too…[w]e don't have a graphic designer on staff, we have a separate grad student that works in that area…we don't have a separate installation person…[we] were without a permanent director for two and a half years" (Participant 3).

This information can be used to inform accession policies in university teaching collections because a lack of staff translates to a lack of people available to care for the collection. University teaching collections cannot accession new objects into their collections if they do not have enough people to take care of these new items. This should be reflected in the accession policies.

Lack of Resources

Lack of Resources refers to challenges that collections managers in university teaching collections face due to limited access to supplies and resources necessary for the care and upkeep of historic textile collections. Collections managers can only properly treat collection objects with access to the proper equipment and supplies. This can result in collection objects being damaged from improper care. This challenge was present throughout the literature consulted (Brahm, 1977; Josephson, 1945; Moynihan, 2011; Rusch & Herro, 2000).

Participants 1, 2, and 6 mentioned that due to a lack of conservation equipment, much of the textile conservation work must be outsourced to outside facilitates that do have the proper equipment needed to carry out said work, as was also seen in the literature (Brahm, 1977; Josephson, 1945; Moynihan, 2011; Rusch & Herro, 2000). "…unfortunately, at this time, we're not necessarily set up…to do very much conservation work" (Participant 1). Participant 1 also stated that the software used to catalog the collection is out of date and therefore causes frustration due to its limitations. Participant 8 does not even have a proper database to catalog her collection, with the collection currently being cataloged on Microsoft Excel Sheets. Many collections in universities are housed in less-than-ideal buildings, often old buildings that lack modern technology. "…we don't have adequate support for the HVAC system, which is never meant to keep up…[i]t's a 1928 building, it was originally the library on campus, and it became the museum in 1985 and was renovated, and the HVAC system was never updated, and they knew it couldn't keep up with museum standards then. So, we struggle with that all the time…the HVAC system…limits us" (Participant 2). Participant 8 stated that she does not feel comfortable bringing on student workers as, "…I work in a place that has no phone, no potable water and such" (Participant 8).

This information informs the development of accessioning policies in university teaching collections because accessioning policies need to acknowledge the resources that university teaching collections must uphold best practice. Some historic textiles require more resources than others. Furs require cold storage, damaged textiles require conservation interventions, flat or delicate textiles require acid free boxes and acid free tissue paper. "…but because we don't have cold storage…I'll just say no to things I know that we can't take care of" (Participant 3). Because there is limited access to resources in university teaching collections, accessioning policies will need to be reflective of this. University teaching collections should only acquire historic textiles that they have the resources to properly care for.

Lack of Space

Lack of Space refers to challenges that collections managers in university teaching collections face due to limited storage space as well as limited workspace. Limited climate-controlled storage space can lead to collection objects being damaged by environmental conditions. "So really our collection should only be within that temperature and humidity-controlled environment…[a]nd we had more than we could store because we collected everything…[we] started going through the things that weren't in cold storage, that had been sitting outside of cold storage for decades…[they were] covered in mold and disintegrating and falling apart, dry rotted" (Participant 5). Limited storage space can also lead to damaged objects if too many items are crammed into one space, resulting in multiple items having to be jostled around for an item in the back of the pile to be accessed. "I think our dec[orative] arts, which includes product design, they just don't have enough room…a wall of ceramics and you have to take out four things to get to something, well, then you're risking those four things every time you want the teapot in the back" (Participant 3). Participant 3 also stated that due to a lack of space, garments are being hung rather than stored flat in boxes, resulting in distortion of the fabric.

Limited workspace can lead to delays in conservation/preservation treatment or the inability to treat collection objects. Participant 1 states that there is limited storage space at the university that she works at, resulting in historic textile pieces not being properly stored because there is no space for them to be stored. The institution that Participant 2 works at provides extra storage space. However, it is off-site, making it difficult to access. "…I feel like I have more storage space…however it's an off-site storage. Still on campus, but it's a mile away. So yes, I do have more storage and it's better but am I able to use it? No, because I need cabinets over there and the likelihood of me getting over there is a lot less likely… So, there is technically more room, but it's not where I need it. So, I still feel crammed here" (Participant 2). This issue was present in the literature (Brahm, 1977; Josephson, 1945; Moynihan, 2011; Rusch & Herro, 2000).

This information informs the development of accessioning policies in university teaching collections because university teaching collections should not acquire objects that they do not have the space for. A lack of space results in collections managers having to say no to accessioning new items because they do not have the space for them. "Lack of space is the very top of the list…I've already curbed my purchases of pieces and things aren't pouring in the way they used to. Thank God, because there just is no room…I just have to keep saying no…" (Participant 4). For Participant 7, a lack of space means that she cannot fill the gaps in her collection. A lack of space does not only limit the number of items that a collection can accession, but also the size of the items that can be accessioned, as larger items required more storage space. "So, some things are quite large and if we do not [physically] have the capacity, then that would be a consideration" (Participant 1). Accessioning policies should be reflective of what the university has the space to accommodate.

Lack of Funding

Lack of Funding refers to challenges collections managers in university teaching collections face due to limited funds. Multiple participants interviewed stated that a lack of funding was an issue for their collections (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7). Many of them stated that the lack of funding resulted in a lack of resources, with Participant 5 even stating that there was a fear of not being able to pay basic bills such as the database subscription fee or the alarm fee. "The university only provides money when I ask for something specific…I have no operating budget and…they don't give us a single regular dollar… I worry about, am I going to raise enough money to pay the alarm monitoring bill? Am I going to raise enough money to pay the database subscription bill? Am I going to raise enough money to pay our bills?" (Participant 5).

This information informs the development of accessioning policies in university teaching collections because collections that have limited funding can only care for a limited number of items. "We do have an endowment that we are able to… dip into when we have to, but we work really hard to balance the budget so that we don't dip into the endowment…other than that…the only acquisition budget we have is through deaccessioning portions, [which is] how we purchase other items for the collection" (Participant 2). All the participants that noted a lack of funds as a challenge that they face mentioned that the lack of funding affected their accessioning decisions. "But I have gaps in the collection that I really need to fill, and I have no budget for that" (Participant 7). The resources needed to care for archival objects cost money, off-site storage facilities cost money, pest control costs money, HVAC systems cost money, etc. "…the sale of these bits and bobs brings in a couple of thousand dollars…a year…I need it for all of the incidentals and the notions and for getting more dress forms to fit a certain size range". (Participant 4). Participant 7 stated that she does not accession items in poor condition because she doesn't have "…a single dollar…to put in to repairing anything or stabilizing anything if it starts to go south" (Participant 7). When funds are limited, collections need to be more selective with the items that they accession to ensure that they have the adequate funds to care for new objects in addition to the objects already in the collection.

Lack of Institutional Support

Lack of Institutional Support refers to challenges collections managers in university teaching collections face due to limited support and commitment from the university. Many collections managers felt that even when the university provided basic funding and resources, the university did not see the value of the collection. This lack of support was seen in the literature (Marcketti et al, 2011).

Participant 4 stated that the college did not formally recognize the collection. "…it's never been…formally acknowledged by the college…we could do a center for the study of dress [but that option] was ignored by [the] administration…" (Participant 4). Though Participant 7 herself is not in this position, she stated that many of her colleagues from other institutions were in danger of losing their collections due to a lack of institutional support. "…some of my colleagues are finding they have such lacking support…that their collection has been sort of lost in the cracks so much at their institutions that they are in danger of being folded" (Participant 7). Participant 5 received limited institutional support when he reached out for grants, "[b]ut in terms of helping to promote [the collection or] to staff it," the university will provide support as long as it doesn't "have to be bothered with the day to day of the process…[the university doesn't] want us to bother them" (Participant 5).

This information informs the development of accessioning policies in university teaching collections because collections that have a lack of support from their governing institutions were shown to also have a lack of resources and funding. Having limited resources and funding limit the number of objects that a collection can house, therefore limiting the number of new objects that can be accessioned into the collection. Participant 5 felt that if the university could see the value in the collection and allow him to focus on it rather than having to focus on teaching, he could raise the funds needed to properly maintain the collection. "…if the university could shift its thinking, at least for a period of time, and [allow me to] focus on the collection only instead of also [lecturing,] maybe that would in the long term be just as valuable" (Participant 5). Accessioning policies in university teaching collections should address this challenge the same way that they address a lack of resources or funding.

Duplication

Duplication refers to challenges that collections managers face in university teaching collections due to high numbers of similar objects in the collection. Some duplication can be useful in university teaching collections because it shows slight variations between items of the same style and ensures that the collection accurately represents that type of item, however too much duplication results in redundancy. "…for styles that show a decade…you don't need more than…three, four, five of those" (Participant 8).

Several collection managers pointed out the absence of accession policies made it difficult to limit duplication. This has led to a significant issue with an overabundance of similar objects. They have acknowledged that a small number of historical pieces that define a style for a specific period would be adequate (Participant 5, 6, and 8). "…there was just mass collecting in…disparate areas…for a long time based on different people's interests, because no one was taking a wide view and no one was really looking at it in kind of the professional lens that the museum industry has become over the last 30, 40 years" (Participant 8). Participant 8 states that her collection has about three hundred cocktail aprons from the 1950s. Not only is that more than enough items to tell the story of cocktail aprons from the 1950s, but it is also taking up storage space that could be allocated to other items that may fill gaps that the collection currently has.

This information informs the development of accessioning policies in university teaching collections because as stated above, university teaching collections often have limited access to resources, space, and funding. With limited resources, these collections must be selective when acquiring new objects to ensure that they have the resources to care for them. With high levels of duplication in collections, resources, space, and funding that could go towards new objects are being used by objects that could be considered redundant. Many collections managers stated that the challenges with duplication they are facing are due to their predecessors having interests in particular eras/styles and them collecting large volumes of items in those eras/styles regardless of mission of the collection or what was already accessioned. Accessioning policies should be written so that collections managers must assess what is already a part of the collection before taking on new objects to limit redundancy. It would also be helpful for collections to have an explicit mission statement so that collections managers have guidelines as to what items would fit the collection rather than going off personal interest.

Pressure from Donors

Pressure from Donors refers to challenges that collections managers face in university teaching collections due to pressure from the institution to accession pieces given by high profile donors. Multiple participants stated that they felt pressure from their universities to accession objects that did not fit their collections to uphold positive donor relations (Participant 2, 6, and 7). "...we have in the past got saddled with things…we would have never taken…but philanthropy almost forced it on us" (Participant 2). This phenomenon was also seen in the literature (Marcketti et al., 2011). Additionally, collections managers felt pressure to keep these items when making decisions about deaccessioning to uphold positive donor relations. Participant 7 stated that she has "…to check every accession against who donated it, because there's a handful of donors that are noteworthy to [her] collection or to the university and it wouldn't be the best choice to remove their items…" Participant 6 said that there is a box of items in the collection that they want to deaccession, but they are waiting until the donor passes away to avoid conflict. The participants interviewed who did not experience this pressure were those who had mission statements that explicitly stated what types of objects they collected and had accession policies that reflected these stipulations.

This information informs the development of accessioning policies in university teaching collections because as stated previously, university teaching collections do not have the resources, space, or funding to take on objects that do not fit the mission of the collection. Accessioning more objects than there are resources, space, and funding to care for puts all the objects in the collection in jeopardy. Additionally, acquiring these objects prevents collections managers from being able to accession other pieces in the future that would benefit their collections because the space, resources, and funding they need to accession the new object is being used by the ill fit object. It should be clearly written in the accession policies what types of objects the collection houses so that if a donor tries to use their influence in the university to pressure a collections manager into accepting their ill-fitting donation, the collections manager can refer to said accession policy as the reason for refusal.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Theoretical Contributions

Many theoretical contributions emerge from this study. One theoretical contribution is that this research fills a gap in accessioning practices in university teaching collections at a time when such research is urgently needed, as there is currently no relevant scholarship that is less than ten years old.

This study also addresses a long-standing issue in accessioning practices in university teaching collections, as there is no evidence of standardized accessioning practices implemented in university teaching collections with each collection having its own unique set of limitations and challenges. Examples of these challenges that collections managers in university teaching collections face arise in the literature from the beginning of historic textile collections in universities in the early 20th century (Welters & Ordoñez, 2011).

Lastly, this research paves the way for further research to address the challenges identified for collections managers working in university teaching collections, including additional research into the development of a list of best practices for accessioning policies that could be referenced by university teaching collections based on the individual needs of those collections. Examples of such accessioning policies and practices based on the existing literature as well as the information gleamed from my interviews could be the inclusion of an accessioning/deaccessioning committee when applicable, having an estimated maximum number of items the collection can house based on available storage space and resources, or a set of explicit conditions that an item must meet in order to be eligible for accession such as condition, size, materials, location of origin, etc.

Practical Contributions

Several practical contributions came out of this study. One practical contribution is that this study identified several challenges that collections managers working in university teaching collections face that their governing institutions may not be aware of, such as a lack of funding, lack of resources, lack of staff, lack of space, lack of institutional support, duplication, and pressure from donors. The governing institutions can use this information to make changes to their practices that better support the needs of their collections managers. Another practical contribution is that the findings from this study can be used in further research to develop a list of best practices for accessioning policies and practices, such as the ones suggested above, that could be implemented in university teaching collections.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. Twenty potential participants were identified, thirteen were contacted, and twelve expressed interest in participating. Of the twelve potential participants that expressed interest in participating, only eleven scheduled interviews. Unfortunately, due to a scheduling conflict, one of the interviews had to be postponed and the interviewee never rescheduled. Additionally, two of the interviews succumbed to technical difficulties that resulted in the interview recordings being lost. This resulted in only eight viable interviews being included in this final analysis and discussion. Having such a small pool of interviews could have skewed the results because the results only reflect a limited number of experiences. It is difficult to fully determine whether the experiences of these particular collections managers are reflective of the experiences of collections managers at large but given the literature it is highly likely that these experiences are representative of many collections managers experiences. The interviews also do not adequately represent the different geographical regions in the United States, with many of the interviewees being from a university in the Northeast and only one being from a university in the West. Though different geographical locations likely have their own unique challenges such as heat and dryness in the Southwest or humidity and cold in the Northwest, based on the information gathered from the interviews it does not appear that the experiences of collections managers vary significantly due to geographical location within the United States.

Further Research

There are many areas of this study that could benefit from further research. More collections managers from university teaching collections need to be interviewed to determine whether they experience the same challenges. The sample size of this study could be expanded to collections managers working in university teaching collections outside of the United States to see whether accessioning practices differ in other countries. The information gathered on the current accessioning practices used in university teaching collections and the challenges that collections managers face working in university teaching collections should be used to develop accessioning practices that address the challenges that collections managers are facing while considering what is currently working for them and why museum standard accessioning practices are not an option for them. Additionally, this research could be expanded beyond accessioning practices to develop a list of best practices collections managers can reference in general for how to maintain and care for their collections given the constraints they work within.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Agreement to Participate for Exempt Studies 2024

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Dear (insert name),

My name is Arianna Gutierrez, and I am a second-year graduate student at the University of Rhode Island studying textile conservation under the Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design program. I am currently working on my thesis, where I am investigating accessioning practices and policies in university teaching collections in the United States. I am reaching out to see if you would be interested in participating in a Zoom interview about the accessioning practices implemented in your collection. The goal of this interview and my thesis is to further understand accessioning practices in university teaching collections and how these accessioning practices are informed by the constraints of the collection. The information from this interview will be used in my thesis alongside an extensive literature review to develop a comprehensive understanding of accessioning policies in university teaching collections and how they may be improved upon. You were chosen as a potential participant because you are involved in managing a university teaching collection. This research has been approved by the University of Rhode Island Institutional Review Board.

If you agree to be in this study, it will take you up to 60 minutes to complete the Zoom interview. A series of prepared questions will be asked about accessioning practices and policies implemented in your collection. There may be additional follow-up questions. There are no known risks, benefits, or compensation. The results of the study will be made available upon request. You will be sent an agreement to participate in advance explaining the expectations of participation in greater detail.

This agreement will then be read at the start of the interview session and you will be asked to verbally confirm agreement before the interview begins.

Your part in this study is confidential. The responses may be used in my thesis to provide evidence of what accessioning policies and practices are being implemented at university teaching collections in the United States. None of the interview information, when published or shown to anyone beyond myself and my major professor, will identify you by name, nor will the name of your institution be used. The interview will be recorded to a digital video file if you verbally indicate your willingness as noted above, at the start of the interview session in response to the agreement that will be read to you. This verbal agreement will be documented in the written notes. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded, in which case only handwritten notes will be taken. Before transcription, I will edit any identifying information out of the video file and any accompanying notes. The video file will be deleted after transcription and the notes will be kept for 3 years following the completion of the research.

Your name will be linked to notes, and transcription by a random four-digit number in a locked Excel file, stored and backed up on an encrypted flash drive that will be housed in my major professor's office. The notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the same location, also for 3 years following the completion of research.

If you would like to participate in the study, please let me know by responding to this email or contact me separately: (Arianna Gutierrez, Master student, via email at ariagut@uri.edu) You may also contact Dr. Karl Aspelund, Principal Investigator at the University of Rhode Island via email at: aspelund@uri.edu or by phone at 401.874.4176.

Please feel free to contact either of us if you have any questions before deciding to participate.

Thank you for your consideration,

Arianna Gutierrez

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Location: ___________________________ Date: ____________________

Script: My name is Arianna Gutierrez, and I will be conducting this Zoom interview. The goal of this interview and project is to further understand accessioning practices and policies implemented in university teaching collections in the United States. The information from this interview will be used in my thesis alongside an extensive literature review to develop a comprehensive understanding of accessioning policies in university teaching collections and how they may be improved upon.

You were chosen as a participant because you are a collections manager at a university teaching collection or otherwise involved with the accessioning practices in a university teaching collection.

The interview will take up to 60 minutes and will follow a designed interview protocol.

Prior to this interview you were sent an introductory letter and a digital "Agreement to Participate."

Do you have any questions? If you have no more questions, I will read you the "Agreement to Participate." Following that, if you agree to be recorded, I will document your agreement in my written notes, and begin recording the interview.

Questions:

1a. Please state the institution you work at, your name, and your position.

1b. Do you follow an accession policy?

This could branch and lead to follow ups

I.e.

· Yes

· No

· Sometimes/ mostly/ it depends….

1c. How did you arrive at this practice?

2. Describe the process by which an item becomes housed in the collection.

3. What are the limitations that you work within to make a decision?

I.e.

Duplication

Funding

Equipment

Culture

Space

4. Is your practice working well for you [your collection/ your institution], given any limitations involved?

5. Is there a decision tree and/ or a chain of command in making an accession decision?

If so, describe it, please.

If not, why isn't there one?

If not, should there be, in your opinion? (If this is not already clear from the answers above.)

6. How and when does the state of the item play into decision making?

(Specifically, disrepair or damage)

7. Do you have literature or theories you follow?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Alliance of Museums. (2012). *Alliance activity guide.* Retrieved July 7, 2024, from https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/acquisitions-activity.pdf.

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. The Qualitative Report, 13(4), 544-559. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/ 2008.1573.

Bonner, J. P. (1985). Museums in the classroom and classrooms in the museum. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 16*(4), 288-293. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/3216300.

Boylan, P. J. (1999). Universities and museums: Past, present and future. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, *18*(1), 43-56. doi:10.1080/09647779900501801.

Brahm, W. (1977). A Regional Approach to Conservation: The New England Document Conservation Center. The American Archivist, 40(4), 421–27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40292788.

Chatterjee, H. J. (2010). Object-based learning in higher education: The pedagogical power of museums. *University Museums and Collections Journal*, 179-181.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., Marshall, P. L., & McCulloch, A. W. (2011). Developing and Using a Codebook for the Analysis of Interview Data: An Example from a

Professional Development Research Project. *Field Methods*, 23(2), 136-155. DOI: 10.1177/1525822X10388468.

Hackbart-Dean, P., & Montgomery, T.J. (1998). Look Before You Leap: Weaving Preservation into Appraisal, Acquisition, Accessioning, and Processing Practices. *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists, 16*(1), 75-92.

Hopf, C. (2004). Qualitative Interviews: An Overview. In U. Flick, E. von Kardorff, & I. Steinke (Eds.), A companion to Qualitative Research (pp. 203–208). essay, Sage Publications.

International Council of Museums. (2020). *Standards on accessioning of the international council of museums.* Retrieved July 7, 2024, from https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Accessioning-Standards_EN.pdf.

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *17*(T&L Art, 6), 1-10.

Josephson, B. E. (1945). How Can We Improve Our Historical Societies? The American Archivist, 8(3), 194–201. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40288454.

Kendall, L. (2008). The Conduct of Qualitative Interviews: Research Questions, Methodological Issues, and Researching Online. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), Handbook of Research on New Literacies (pp. 133-150). Routledge.

Kozak, Z. R. (2016). The role of University Museums and Heritage in the 21st century. *The Museum Review*, *1*(1), 1-13.

Linneberg, M. S., & Korsgaard, S. (2019). Coding qualitative data: a synthesis guiding the novice. *Qualitative Research Journal, 19*(3), 259-270. DOI 10.1108/QRJ-12-2018-0012.

Marcketti, S., Fitzpatrick, E.J., Keist, C.N., & Kadolph, S.J. (2011). University Historic Clothing Museums and Collections: Practices and Strategies. *Clothing & Textile Research Journal, 29*(3), 248-262. DOI: 10.1177/0887302X11419361.

Merriman, N. (2008). Museum collections and sustainability. *Cultural Trends, 17*(1), 3-21. doi:10.1080/09548960801920278.

Moynihan, K. L. (2011). Care of textile and costume collections in small museums and historical societies (Order No. 1500324). Available from Dissertations & Theses @ University of Rhode Island; ProQuest One Academic. (899274130). http://uri.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/care-textile-costume-collections-small-museums/docview/899274130/se-2.

Rose, J. & Johnson, C. W. (2020). Contextualizing reliability and validity in qualitative research: toward more rigorous and trustworthy qualitative social science in leisure research. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *51*(4), 432-451. DOI: 10.1080/00222216.2020.1722042.

Rusch, S. & Herro, H. (2000). Midnight in the Garden of Soggy and Damp: The Newyear's Eve Disaster at the Virginia Historical Society. Journal of the American Institute for Conservation, 39(1), 127-134. DOI: 10.1179/019713600806113329.

Smathers, D. G., & Eastin, B. D. (1977). Responsibilities of Curating a Small Costume Collection. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, *20*(2), 157-62.

Spiggle, Susan. (1994). Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*, 491-503.

Stake, R. E. (1995). The Art of Case Study Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Staller, K. M. (2021). Big enough? Sampling in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Social Work*, *20*(4), 897–904. https://doi.org/10.1177/14733250211024516.

Strege, G. (2000). Expanding textile studies through the use of a university costume collection. *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, 790. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/790.

Welters, L., & Ordoñez, M. (2011). Historic textile and costume collections in the academic setting. *ITAA Monograph*, *11* Retrieved from http://itaaonline.org/associations/12469/files/Monograph11-TC_Collections_Academic_Setting.pdf.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.