

Curricular Connections: The College/University Art Museum as Site for Teaching and Learning

In 1942, Laurence Vail Coleman, then president of the American Association of Museums, sought to define the special nature of the campus museum: “The campus museum should be, above all, an instrument of teaching or research, or of both.”

And, he wrote, “the first duty of a university or college museum is to its parent establishment, which means that the faculty and student body have a claim prior to that of townspeople and outsiders in general.”¹ In *College and University Museums: A Message for College and University Presidents*, Coleman addressed not only art museums but natural history, anthropology and other museums. This slim volume was written at a moment when most campus museum operations were rather humble affairs—effectively departmental resource centers. As one reads Coleman’s book, it is clear that—in his day—art “museum” functions on campus encompassed not only the care and management of the fine art collections, but also the slide library and photo collection.

Between 1942 and 2008 campus art museums increased dramatically in number. From the late 1960s through the 1980s, new waves of professional standards transformed practices not only in civic museums but also in college and university museums. As the Association of Art Museum Directors’ manual on professional practices states: “the broad goals and responsibilities of the independent art museum and the university/college art museum are essentially the same.”²

The campus museum began to resemble the civic or independent art museum not only in its professional practices, but also in its audience. Indeed, a popular phrase, “the community museum on a college campus,” bespeaks the larger mission scope of many museums in higher education locations. Today, most campus museums address “outside”

¹ Laurence Vail Coleman, *College and University Museums: A Message for College and University Presidents*, (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1942), 5.

² American Association of Museum Directors, *Professional Practices in Art Museums*, (N.Y.: AAMD, 2001), 19.

audiences, that is members of local and regional publics, through broadly themed exhibitions and vigorous outreach to K-12 students and to adults seeking cultural uplift and educational enrichment.

Campus art museums solved several problems by embracing community audiences. Most notably, community programming helped fund these institutions-within-institutions. As John R. Spencer noted in his rather cranky but insightful 1971 article “The University Museum: Accidental Past, Purposeful Future,” campus art museums were “coming into existence at an alarming rate, “ at just the moment when monies were increasingly hard to find.³ A new funding formula, drawing on private donors in the community, and foundations and government agencies which favored K-12 programs, increasingly replaced the past system which relied wholly on university coffers. New community-based funding solutions to museum budgeting triggered a re-alignment of mission. As Susan Taylor, then Director of the Wellesley College Art Museum, wrote in 1988: “If a college museum seeks outside funding it is critical that its administration recognize the museum’s responsibility to a broad public.”⁴

A new community-centered mission helped justify the museum as an autonomous entity on campus, authorized to follow professional standards and practices specific to the museum community, rather than being subject to the whims of professors and university administrators who lacked specific knowledge about museum operations. In a keynote address at the 1988 Museums in Academia conference, Alan Rosenbaum, then Director of the Princeton University Art Museum, defined the relations between the academic and museum communities on campus as “nothing less than a territorial and class struggle.” Rosenbaum clearly resented the legacy of the early days, when professors casually carried art objects from museum storage to class and back, and insisted on their right to

³ John R. Spencer, “[The University Museum: Accidental Past, Purposeful Future,” *Art in America*, vol. 59, July 1971, 59, 84

⁴ Susan Taylor, “The Role of the College Museum in the Community,” *Precis of the Proceedings: Museums in Academe II, April 8, 1988* ([Poughkeepsie, N.Y.]: Vassar College Art Gallery and Association of College and University Museums and Galleries,, 1988), 32.

do so even as museum staff wrung their hands. Because “the museum is a stage on which too many people within the academic community wish to play,” the only solution he saw was to create separate spheres—each with its own professional protocols.⁵

The “community museum on a college/university campus,” reaching outside the campus proper for its primary audiences, defies Coleman’s definition of first principles. “There are campus museums . . . that try to be all things to all men; but unless such museums are conspicuously useful in their proper work—that is, work with students—they are inadequate, and no extenuating circumstance can alter that fact.”⁶ Instead of the student, today’s campus museums—according to at least one significant measure—put the “community member” in the place of honor. Robert Frankel, Director of Museums and the Visual Arts at the National Endowment for the Arts, testified at a Miami conference in December 2006 that when college and university museums define audience for the purpose of an NEA grant, “many university museums do not even mention the university.” Others tend to describe an imbalance in favor of community attendance, with “about 60 % of audience as being from ‘the community’ and up to 35% from the university.”⁷

Students, despite their status as a captive audience, can be hard to find in a college/university art museum. Except for those compelled inside by the occasional studio art or art history assignment, students seldom cross the thresholds of many campus museums. Museum professionals effectively admitted this sad fact during the 2001 “Mentoring in Museums: Diverse Programs Engaging Students on Campus,” conference,

⁵ Alan Rosenbaum, “The Museum Program vis-à-vis the Art Department and other Disciplines” *Precis of the Proceedings: Museums in Academe II*, 18; 23.

⁶ Coleman, 5.

⁷ Michael F. Brenson, “The University Art Museum in 2007: Hopes, Constraints, Questions,” August 2007, 13. The Miami symposium was hosted by the Princeton University Art Museum and the Wolfsonian Art Museum–Florida International University and. For Brenson’s paper, see <http://www.wolfsonian.org/education/index.main.html>.

sponsored by the Association of College and University Museums and Galleries held at the Washington University Gallery of Art.⁸

The tide may be turning back to Coleman's proper order of things as we move into the 21st century. There are signs that the art museum is being re-defined within the university as an active site for teaching and learning for students and faculty not only in the disciplines of studio art and art history, but all across the curriculum. Indeed, museums are shifting resources, reconfiguring staff, and opening collections to demonstrate direct alignment between museum programs and the core mission of their parent institutions. Two 2006 conferences provided platforms for sharing ideas and inspired attendees to evaluate both new and time-honored methods energizing the field. In April 2006, the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Center, Skidmore College, convened "The College Museum: A Collision of Disciplines, A Laboratory of Perception" and in December, the Princeton University Art Museum and the Wolfsonian-Florida International University staged "Creator, Collector, Catalyst: The University Art Museum in the Twenty-first [Ed: Wolfsonian's spelling] Century" in Miami.⁹

The term "Teaching Museum," which once implied that the museum's collection was of inferior quality and therefore "only good for teaching," is gaining positive resonance. Since 2000, Skidmore College has boldly used the term for the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Center to characterize a new type of museum program, one that now exemplifies the curriculum-focused, interdisciplinary campus art museum. By contrast with the earlier departmental model, the Teaching Museum aims to connect not only to art history courses, but also to multiple and various disciplines extending from the arts and humanities into the sciences and beyond.¹⁰

⁸ This conference was held on May 5, 2001. The Washington University Gallery of Art is known as the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum at Washington University since October 25, 2006.

⁹ For more on the Tang conference, see <http://tang.skidmore.edu/doc/1472/>. For the Wolfsonian-FIU conference, see note 7.

¹⁰ Charles Chetham, "Introduction," *A Guide to the Collections: Smith College Museum of Art*, (Northampton, MA: Smith College, 1986), 12: "Often the term 'teaching' museum carries a pejorative connotation." Spencer, "University Museum," 89, also takes

But while the Tang is indeed an important model and worth further attention in this article, it was the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that catalyzed campus museums' re-orientation back to the curriculum beginning in the 1990s. The College and University Art Museum Program was a response to the apparently growing disconnect between museums and the core constituency of the university. "Campus museums were becoming divorced from the academic pursuits that defined their parent institutions, and as a consequence, losing some of their educational value to the larger institution."¹¹ The foundation, then, funded a program with two basic goals: "To discover and institutionalize effective ways that would enable museums and academic departments to collaborate fruitfully; to strengthen the educational role of the museum and its collections in the teaching and training of undergraduates and graduate students." Eighteen institutions received generous grants doled out over three years, followed by a second round of program grants for thirteen, capped off by opportunities for participating schools with museums to institutionalize the program by creating an endowment. While the number of participating museums in the Mellon program was small, and the results of each institution's experiments closely held until recently, the long term impact may be profound. Large infusions of money, specifically dedicated to forging connections between campus museums and their parent institutions, stimulated fruitful experiments that now serve as blueprints for action to others in the field.

In February 2008, I convened a panel titled "Curricular Connections: the College/University Art Museum as a Site for Teaching and Learning" at the annual College Art Association Conference.¹² My goal was not only to provide a platform for success

the earlier view: "On campus it [the Teaching Museum] may be defined as a museum where one teaches, but off campus or in the dealers' gallery the term becomes a pejorative used to describe any inferior collection of inferior objects."

¹¹ Marion M. Goethals and Suzannah Fabing, *College and University Art Museum Program Summary Report*, November 2007, 1. For the report, see: <http://mac.mellon.org/CUAM>.

¹² February 22, 2008. Papers included Andrew Raftery, "A Faculty fellow at the RISD Museum"; Susan J. Bender, "What Does Real Partnership Mean? Or Beware of what happens when you invite faculty in"; Scott Murray, *Transforming Facades: A Case Study of Engagement between Architecture and Art on Campus*"; Celka Straughn, "Study Centers: Sites for Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Learning and Collaboration"; Alison Barnes, respondent. Pamela Franks, was unable to deliver "Bringing the Arts into the

stories, but also to identify obstacles, and to plot solutions to the challenge of aligning curation with curriculum and strengthening the educational role of the museum in teaching and training students. In this article, I will summarize and quote from papers by four of the five session panelists to animate a broad, somewhat polemical presentation of issues and ideas surrounding this new/old Teaching Museum in the larger context of recent trends in American higher education.

Since 2000, College and University Presidents and Deans at some of our most prestigious universities including Princeton, Yale, and the University of Chicago, seeking to cultivate the creativity that the future requires, are beefing up arts programs, and pointing to campus museums as vital resources in developing “the Creative Campus.”¹³ For example, in January 2006 Princeton President Shirley Tilghman announced an ambitious arts initiative—expanding University activities and resources in the creative and performing arts, and enriching support not only for existing programs including the art museum, but adding new ones including a new Interdisciplinary Society of Fellows in the Arts.¹⁴ This follows the April 2003 recommendation on the future of Yale College

Mainstream: New Directions in Liberal Arts Education” at the conference but spoke with the author by telephone on February 17, 2008.

¹³ Steven J. Tepper, Associate Director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Emory University, defines the “creative campus” in these terms: “Creativity thrives on those campuses where there is abundant cross-cultural exchange and a great deal of ‘border’ activity between disciplines, where collaborative work is commonplace, risk taking is rewarded, failure is expected, and the creative arts are pervasive and integrated into campus life.” “Taking the Measure of the Creative Campus” *Peer Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Spring 2006, 4, http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-sp06/pr-sp06_analysis1.cfm.

¹⁴ President Tilghman expanded on the theme of the arts, museums and higher education in her December 5, 2006 keynote address at “Creator, Collector, Catalyst,” the symposium organized by the Princeton University Art Museum and the Wolfsonian-Florida International University. See <http://www.princeton.edu/president/speeches/20061205/index.xml>

Education: “We recommend that the arts be brought into the mainstream of liberal arts education.”¹⁵

Campus art museums win mention as vehicles to activate what Daniel Pink has termed “right brain thinking” within the university.¹⁶ Yale’s 2003 recommendations extended to the University Art Gallery and the Yale Center for British Art. “In addition to wishing to strengthen the links between the academic and the creative study of art, the Committee [on Yale College Education] is eager to see Yale’s collections brought more fully into the education of undergraduates.”¹⁷ The University of Chicago’s 2001 “The Future of the Arts at the University of Chicago” advocates for an enhanced Smart Museum as one of seven key recommendations.¹⁸

With important educators affirming the value of the arts to a liberal education, and creativity rising as the vehicle of choice for navigating the future, campus museums may become privileged places for pedagogical innovation. By returning to first principles, that is, through service to the curriculum and core populations, the campus museum has the potential to become a vital site for educating 21st century learners. But as the following examples demonstrate, success requires flexibility and resources. And flexibility is often difficult to achieve in the hierarchical [Ed query: I am not familiar with this usage of the term siloed. Will you please explain or (perhaps preferable) replace with a more common synonym?] higher education universe in which academic departments and administrative units function in isolation with very little coordination. Resources of time and money are chronically scarce and getting scarcer.

Andrew Raftery, a printmaker at the Rhode Island School of Design, stepped out of his faculty role to serve in the campus museum as a Faculty Fellow. Susan Barnes,

¹⁵ The Committee on Yale College Education, inspired by the university’s 300th anniversary in 2001, presented its report on April 3, 2003.
<http://www.yale.edu/cyce/report/index.html>

¹⁶ Daniel H. Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, (N.Y.: Penguin, 2006) theorizes that the global economy is shifting from an “Information Age,” that values knowledge (left brain values) to a “Conceptual Age” that values creativity and other right-brain directed aptitudes.

¹⁷ <http://www.yale.edu/cyce/report/index.html>

¹⁸ “The Future of the Arts at the University of Chicago,” August 2001.
<http://artscenter.uchicago.edu/arts/report.shtml>.

Professor of Anthropology and former Associate Dean at Skidmore College, participated as faculty co-curator in one of the early collaborative exhibition projects at the Tang Teaching Museum. Raftery's and Barnes' 2008 CAA Conference papers were both inspirational guides for those seeking to set up collaborations and to model partnerships, and cautionary tales revealing structural and conceptual issues which may prevent a Teaching Museum vision from cohering and enduring within many institutional settings.

Andrew Raftery, with "A Faculty Fellow at the RISD Museum," offered a win-win tale about his experience crossing the faculty/staff divide to work in the campus museum. He benefited from one-day-a-week service in the print room, enriching his own knowledge of prints and works on paper through direct contact, invigorating his teaching by observing colleagues engaging the collection in their own courses, deepening his understanding of museums and museum practices through hands-on experience. The museum also benefited from the addition of a knowledgeable "loaner" staff member who was assigned to tasks ranging from basic cataloging of objects to advising faculty on how the collection could serve their course agendas. The Faculty Fellow functioned as a hinge between two complementary but administratively separate units of the same institution. What better way to enhance the utility of a museum collection in an art school than to bring a faculty member and artist in to observe, design programs, and collaborate with museum staff?

Raftery deems the program a success, but admits to some doubts as to whether it will continue. To date, Raftery *is* the Faculty Fellows program. To institutionalize the program, two separate units of RISD – the school and the museum – need to think beyond business-as-usual. The Dean will waive classroom teaching obligations and give credit for harder-to-quantify contact hours, as the faculty member performs roles in the museum ranging from lowly assistant to research fellow and object-based learning specialist. The museum director and department heads must alter work routines and empower a non-curator to handle collection objects. While it seems simple enough to place a Faculty Fellow in the print room, where objects tend to be small and handled with relative ease, what of other curatorial departments holding large, fragile or unwieldy objects where access requires staff time that might otherwise be allocated to exhibitions and collection care?

Susan Bender, writing with Alison Barnes, assumed a polemical stance in “What Does Real Partnership Mean? or Beware of what happens when you invite faculty in. . .” She could have trumpeted the success of the Tang Teaching Museum, which represents a major milestone along the road to reconciling the college museum with the college curriculum. The Tang, which opened its doors in October 2000 at Skidmore College in upstate New York, has already entered the annals of “New Museum Theory and Practice.” To quote from the 2006 text by that title co-authored by Janet Marstine and Lyndel King: With the opening of Skidmore’s Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Center, “the college launched an ambitious and radical plan to make new museum theory a linchpin of arts, humanities, and science education.”¹⁹ Yet Bender -- a Skidmore insider who, as Dean, had stewarded the museum through planning and opening days, and been a participant in Fred Wilson’s Luce-funded seminar on “Object, Exhibition and Knowledge” -- focused her talk on the challenges of integrating faculty-driven teaching with museum-centered exhibitions and related programs.

Bender, after acknowledging the trend toward integrating college museum exhibition programs with the educational mission of their institutions, interrogates the notions at the heart of this enterprise. Partnerships are key--between the academic side of the college or university and the museum, between museum staff and “active, independent scholars and teachers.” And yet, as Bender points out, the partnerships at the heart of the Teaching Museum project range from a fairly passive model to more active “real partnerships.” In the passive, “brief partnerships,” which are the most typical, the faculty member soaks up the authoritatively delivered messages of the museum and forges creative links with teaching.” By contrast, “the active user will, . . . shift their focus to the process of exhibition creation, interrogating the underlying ideas that structure the making of an exhibition.” While “our hunch is that the college museum professional would mentor as many active faculty users of their exhibitions as possible. We will venture the suggestion that this form of faculty engagement with their campus museum may not always be a comfortable fit.”

¹⁹ Lyndel King and Janet Marstine, “The University Museum and Gallery: A Site for Institutional Critique and a Focus of the Curriculum,” in Marstine, ed., *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 282.

Where are the fault lines in the collaborative model that brings faculty into the museum as partners with curators to create exhibitions that have curricular value *and* research potential? One lies in the relationship between museum staff and professors. As Bender points out – once a faculty member becomes museum savvy, they may seek to direct the exhibition in ways that strain museum conventions to “deepen their scholarship and the exhibition’s teaching potential.” Bringing students into the process– within the constraints of a single academic term – can add an experimental edge to the exhibition, with “messy” results conflicting with the “polished visual presentation” style favored by the museum profession. One of the most basic tensions results from the different working schedules and calendars of the college and the museum. Exhibition projects require a two to three year planning curve while student academic life, and that of the faculty, is parsed out in ten to 15 week term increments.

The brave new world of the Teaching Museum requires more than the mantra of interdisciplinarity, curricular connection and partnership. According to Bender’s seasoned opinion, re-tooling the exhibition program to align with curricular aims demands revised standards, new or re-allocated resources in both time and money, and museum literacy training for faculty. Through a Henry R. Luce Foundation grant, and considerable start-up support from Skidmore, the Tang had the resources to entice faculty into the new museum. From 2004 to 2006, select faculty (21 total) from across disciplines became museum literate through a seminar led by artist Fred Wilson, the Luce Distinguished Visiting Fellow for the Program in Object, Exhibition and Knowledge. “As faculty explored the pedagogical possibilities that arose from applying this [museum] vocabulary to their teaching and research, they refined their ability to use the museum as a site that provokes critical and engaged learning. This faculty involvement with the museum serves the college’s eventual goal of making museum exhibitions as integral to college learning as the library, the science laboratory and the studio.”²⁰ This program was not inexpensive. In addition to paying Fred Wilson for three consecutive spring terms in residence, and supporting a seminar coordinator, the program provided for group travel to museums and individual stipends for further travel and research.

²⁰ <http://tang.skidmore.edu/3/education/doc/179/>

Tang seminar participants have gone on to develop exciting interdisciplinary exhibitions in collaboration with curators and other museum staff. Even before the Luce grant came in, Susan Bender organized *The World According to the Newest and Most Exact Observations: Mapping Art and Science*, 2001, in collaboration with Bernard Possidente, professor of biology, and Richard Wilkinson, professor of anthropology at the University of Albany, State University of New York. *A Very Liquid Heaven* brought together Margo Mensing, visual art; Mary Crone Odekon, physics and astronomy; and Ian Barry, curator in 2005. *Molecules That Matter*, which opened at the Tang in 2008 and is now traveling, was co-curated by Raymond Giguere, professor of Chemistry and John Weber, Dayton Director of the Tang Museum, with contributions from a team of Skidmore College students working with Susi Kerr, museum educator.

The mantra of interdisciplinarity, which enlarges Coleman’s vision for the college/university art museum, finds form in a new exhibition paradigm. Art works join with non-art objects within the Teaching Museum as co-curators range across and between disciplines to create exhibitions as public scholarship. At the Tang, contemporary art works retain center stage, but are presented in dialogue with evocative objects from meteorites to maps to molecular models. Art museum practice foregrounds artistic quality, and reveres the authentic (art) object. The “new” Teaching Museum exhibition, encompassing more than art, may cause discomfort among curators who fear compromising their mission to deliver high quality artistic experience to audiences. And indeed, overly didactic presentations – loaded with reproductions, facsimiles, and texts – are probably better delivered as illustrated articles or poster sessions rather than as exhibitions. The challenge is to create an experience through objects, which the audience will experience both intellectually and aesthetically.²¹

²¹ Mary Crone Odekon, physicist and faculty curator at Skidmore on the *Very Liquid Heaven* exhibition, muses on how this Tang Teaching Museum project differed from conventional science exhibitions. “*A Very Liquid Heaven* was not really a science exhibit. . . Or perhaps it was a science exhibit in contemporary art’s clothing—a stealth method to lure people who don’t seek out science or history museums into thinking about the development of astronomy.” She goes on to reflect on curating and the creative work of astronomy: “visiting an object-oriented exhibit mirrors the creative process of doing astronomy; its more about observing objects than reading text, more about creating a

While the Tang's method of generating museum-literate faculty collaborators is unique, "real partnerships" between faculty and curators/museum staff are no longer rare in museums within higher education settings. In many organizations, the addition of a Coordinator of Academic Affairs has ushered in a new era of cooperation between the college and the museum. This staff position, variously titled Curator of Academic Initiatives, Curator of Academic Programs or Programming, Curatorial Liaison, Coordinator of Academic Affairs is one of the most important outcomes of the Mellon College and University Art Museum Program. According to the final report: "having identified faculty as a primary constituency, the more successful museums assigned one person to function as a liaison with them on behalf of the museum. Without this dedicated faculty liaison, the staff usually fell into a reactive mode."²² Clearly, these coordinators must be proactive, functioning as a human bridge between separate units of the institution. As the identifiable go-to person, the academic coordinator is the point person not only for scheduling class visits, informing faculty about new acquisitions, future exhibitions and other events potentially relevant to teaching but also a match-maker and deal broker, bringing resources to bear on the fragile framework of joint faculty/curator projects.

Academic coordinator positions, initially stimulated by the Mellon CUAM grants, are spreading beyond the initial group of colleges and universities. And recent job advertisements reveal a new round of Mellon grants, and demonstrate the importance of this position in integrating public and academic programs. This spring (2009) the Ackland Art Museum at UNC is seeking a Coordinator of Academic Programs (3 year position funded by 1.25 million grant.) Vassar College published a call for applicants to the position of Andrew W. Mellon Coordinator of Academic Affairs. Acknowledging the trend toward greater curricular/curatorial connections, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon – *not* a Mellon beneficiary – has added "Academic

narrative than learning someone else's." *"A Very Liquid Heaven," Mercury. The Magazine of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, 34/5, Sept-Oct 2005, 39-40.*

²² Goethals and Fabing, *College and University Art Museum Program Summary Report*, 15-16.

Support” to its Chief Curator responsibilities; the job title is now Chief Curator of Collections and Academic Support.

Ideally, the academic coordinator is hired at a senior level, equal to the object curators, so that they have the authority to conceive and implement schemes within the museum and across campus. Yale’s Dean understood this; the 2003 Report from the Committee on the Yale College Education recommended a new position in the University museums “appointed at the curator level,” and charged with strengthening “links between the academic and the creative study of art.”²³ Pamela Franks, hired in 2004 as the first [Curator of Academic Affairs—Ed: Is this Frank’s correct title? Please check, and see Kate Ezra’s current title in that post, at end of this paragraph. Perhaps ask Franks or Ezra (who is field ed for African Art at caa.reviews) for help in sorting out their titles and relationships to the Mellon grant?] at Yale, worked energetically and creatively with multiple academic departments *and* museum colleagues. As academic curator, Franks was expected to work with every museum department including the registrar, the database specialists, the art handlers, as well as curators and educators, in order to deliver objects to classes for temporary study, assist faculty in consulting collection records to identify relevant objects, collaborate with education staff to extend programs within the university, enlist curators in the larger educational enterprise. Academic initiatives became a catalyst for improving the internal workings of the museum. Franks’ success eventually contributed to a strategic reorganization of the YUAG staff and her elevation to Deputy Director for Collections and Education and Nolen Curator of Academic Affairs

The academic coordinator functions best when appointed at a high level within the museum. Status issues, crucial to a coordinator’s effectiveness within the museum, also condition the success or failure of partnerships between museum staff and faculty members. To quote from the Mellon CUAM Report: “One of the knottiest problems affecting the CUAM outcomes is the unequal status of academically qualified curators and faculty members.” Ideally they would function as peers. Yet on many campuses,

²³ <http://www.yale.edu/cyce/report/index.html>. Katja Zelljadt, who researched academic programming positions for the Harvard University Art Museums concluded that the “position be on a par with object curators.” “Report: Academic Initiatives and Student Interactions at University Art Museums,” December 2004 (unpublished).

there is great reluctance to grant curators faculty status, and other museum staff members are almost never seen as potential instructors.²⁴ Academic units closely aligned with the art museum – for example art history departments– often do not allow museum staff to teach in their programs, because of different hiring and promotion standards for faculty and staff. One staffer from an upstate New York museum wrote me about her college. “Courses taught in museum studies have never included the museums’ staff. Ironically, none of the faculty members teaching the museum studies classes have ever worked at a museum.” Another academic curator reported “in my experience the disjuncture between faculty and staff status . . . [has] posed sometimes insurmountable obstacles” to effective partnerships. Within the rather inflexible academic system, staff members—including those with Ph.D.s—are deemed unqualified to teach the very skills and activities that fill their working days because they have not been vetted by the academic hiring process.²⁵

If the traditional museum is best likened to a treasure chest or temple, the new/old Teaching Museum is often characterized as a laboratory. As Elisabeth Rodini points out in her essay in this journal on museums and public scholarship, this term is “still the preferred metaphor for a creative and engaged use of museum spaces and collections.”²⁶ At the 2008 CAA conference, Celka Straughan added “study center” to “laboratory” and other terms connecting museums to larger pedagogical trends in higher education emphasizing active learning methods and environments. Her paper summarized an examination of Study Centers jointly conducted by the Harvard University Art Museums (HUAM) and Project Zero of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Straughan and her Project Zero colleagues sought to research the type of learning that goes on in the Agnes Mongan Center for the Study of Prints, Drawings and Photographs at the HUAM and the Study Room of the Busch-Reisinger Museum. As the Project Zero website states, “more dynamic, participatory and self-directed than the museum galleries, the

²⁴ Goethals and Fabing, *College and University Art Museum Program Summary Report*, 18, 25

²⁵ Email exchange, 11/19/07. Email exchange, 3/15/07. Both senders requested anonymity.

²⁶ Elisabeth Rodini, “The Ivory Tower and the Crystal Palace: Universities, Museums, and the Potential of Public Art History,” *caa.reviews*, November 27, 2007, <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/1055>.

HUAM study centers enable visitors to view a far greater variety of objects than appear on display in the galleries.” “Sophisticated forms of thinking and learning that lead to complex aesthetic understandings” result from direct interaction with objects. This is the very sort of cognition or “habit of mind” identified by the University’s Task Force on General Education as an essential element of undergrad learning.”²⁷ A HUAM curator admitted that the open access Study Center, staffed with knowledgeable professionals, is expensive and people intensive. “But it’s really important because it will help us make better use of our collections within the University and beyond.” As Straughn suggested during the question/answer period, Project Zero verified the value of the “old-fashioned” print study room by re-introducing it in the context of current pedagogical best practice models.

Coleman advocated for what today would be called Study Centers or object-based learning classrooms in campus museums: “University museums above all others should set the example of having space for the reference function as well as for exhibition.”²⁸ Today, the specially designed classroom, along with the museum staff person charged with catalyzing collaborations, demonstrates a campus museum’s commitment to curricular connections. What are the consequences for the exhibition program when staff and space are allotted to curricular service? How should campus museums balance their responsibilities to conserve, protect, and research the collection with a mandate to offer up the collection on demand to classes across the college? How far down the road should college/university museums go toward becoming resource centers, operating on a service model more similar to the library than the current museum model?

Some campus museums, especially those based in art and design schools, have long histories as active resource centers. The Museum at Fashion Institute of Technology, with over 80,000 objects, accommodates over 500 classes and groups a year to view garments, textiles and fashion accessories up close.²⁹ But many college and

²⁷ *Building our Future* newsletter, spring 2007, <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/research/HUAMPZStudyCenterLearning.pdf>

²⁸ Coleman, *College and University Museums*, 31

²⁹ Emails from Molly Sorkin, Associate Curator, The Museum at FIT, February 2 and March 4, 2009

university art museums, committed to a curatorial research agenda, and an authoritative stance toward community audiences that includes “don’t touch” policies, might not welcome the recent fashion for hands-on, object-based learning.

Any museum with curricular aspirations must allow students into the game of interpreting the collection and orchestrating exhibitions. In Elisabeth Rodini’s “museum as laboratory,” students are welcome members of a learning community. Her notion of the Teaching Museum, centered on collaboration and teamwork, challenges the solitary, even cloistered, cultural norms of humanities research. Students drawn into the pedagogical and research initiatives of the university through exhibitions become sophisticated readers of museum “texts.” Like faculty at Skidmore, students come to see beyond the typical “declamatory” mode to engage the inquiry process behind an exhibition.

Despite the currency of worthy goals including flattening hierarchies and increasing student participation in curatorial projects, it remains a tricky proposition to bring students in as full partners in museum functions. Janet Marstine identifies the university museum as a “third space” outside the classroom and the traditional museum gallery, where a certain “messiness” prevails. Protected by a culture of intellectual freedom, these institutions have “the power to mix things up, to challenge museological rituals, express diverse political viewpoints, and experiment with alternative design strategies, even if they run counter to the museum’s standard practice.” Yet Marstine qualified this utopian vision with the following: By messy, “I certainly don’t mean to advocate poorly written wall texts, bad paint jobs, poor framing, technical glitches, disorganized programming, sloppy handling of objects and the like. It is imperative that students learn ‘best practice’ before and while producing their exhibitions.” The author finds several exemplary programs including one at Dartmouth’s Hood Museum. But the project of empowering student voices even while maintaining professional standards related to rigorous scholarship and effective public programs is difficult to pull off.³⁰

³⁰ Janet Marstine, “What a Mess! Claiming a Space for Student Experimentation in the University Museum,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* vol. 22, no. 3, Sept 2007, 303-315.

Because she works extensively with students at Skidmore, Alison Barnes represented the student point of view at my February 2008 CAA session. Barnes served as coordinator for the Luce seminar at Skidmore; as a lecturer in the English Department she offers “Writing in the Tang,” and “Writing for Museums” courses. In response to my request that she respond to the session panelists in something resembling the voice of the undergraduates she teaches, Barnes suggested that students appreciate the opportunity to peek behind the curtain in museums, but come away confused as to where museum boundaries lie --between audience and staff, between private learning and public scholarship. Referring to faculty and museum staff, Barnes’ hypothetical student muses: “I am thankful that they want me to learn, but sometimes it seems as though they want to make my voice visible as a way to show that the museum and the college are fulfilling their teaching missions.”

Despite difficulties related to the staff/faculty divide, the risks to professional autonomy in collaborative ventures, and dis-synchronous timetables that complicate curricular/curatorial cooperation, the campus museum and its parent – the college or university – are currently engaged in a dynamic rapprochement. This return to Coleman’s first principles may have come just in time. If the need for money provided the initial impetus for academic museums to reach beyond their campuses, Mellon CUAM program findings suggest that aligning museum programs with the teaching and research agendas of the college/university may yield increased internal funding in today’s climate. “The economic position of the more successful CUAM museums within their larger institutions is stronger now because, as their value to the academic endeavor is heightened, more institutional resources were allocated to them.”³¹

The Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University provides a cautionary tale, embodying the complex and shifting connections between the campus art museum and its parent institution, between curating and curriculum, between funding for museum collections and programs and funding for the host college or university. Faced with a multi-million dollar shortfall in the university budget, Brandeis University President

³¹ Goethals and Fabing, *College and University Art Museum Program Summary Report*, 20.

Jehuda Reinharz announced in January 2009 that he would close the museum and liquidate the art collection. The estimated \$350 million value of the distinguished modern art collection, converted to cash, would shore up the finances of the parent institution. Reinharz claimed that he was closing the museum in order to better serve the university's educational mission. "We're turning it [the Rose] into a gallery and a teaching site for the faculty of the fine arts. We don't want to be in the public museum business."³² The Rose, established in 1961 as a public museum on the Brandeis campus, functioned with considerable autonomy within the academic system. With its own endowment, the Rose was not beholden to the University for salary and program funds. But this very autonomy, which other campus museum directors might envy, may have left the Rose vulnerable. While Reinharz eventually modified his plans to close the museum in the face of public outcry, the perception of the Rose as "a community museum on a university campus," rather than a college-wide resource for teaching and learning, may ultimately prove fatal to this distinguished campus museum.

Holland Carter penned a stirring rebuttal to Reinharz's devaluing of campus museums in the *New York Times* this February. With "Why University Museums Matter," the critic reviewed three exhibitions at various Yale University museum venues. Carter sees the academic museum as the ideal vehicle to sustain museums and museum practice through hard times. Ruled by the "research mentality" rather than the blockbuster approach, the college/university museum offers lively experiences to both on-campus and off-campus audiences. The very questions that drive teaching and learning also arise in organizing exhibitions, which invite intellectual as well as aesthetic engagement with objects. Multiple voices –of students, faculty, artists, outside researchers – are a refreshing alternative to the anonymous, omniscient institutional narrator one usually encounters in public museum didactic materials. "At their best, [university museums are] equal parts classroom, laboratory, entertainment center and spiritual gym where good ideas are worked out and bad ideas are worked off." With big-budget public museum shows in hiatus during the economic downturn, "the university

³²Tracy Jan, "Q &A: Brandeis President Jehuda Reinharz," *Boston Globe*, February 5, 2009.

museum offers a model for small, intensely researched, collection based, convention-challenging exhibitions that could get museums through a bumpy present and carry them, lighter and brighter, into the future.”³³ Apparently, campus museums do not need to choose between serving the outside public and internal campus stakeholders. Research-driven exhibitions, inclusive of the questions and experiments at the heart of academic discourse, can also please outside visitors including Pulitzer Prize–winning *New York Times* critics and may be essential to the survival of all museums in the 21st century.

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³³ Holland Cotter, “Why University Museums Matter,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2009.