**Building Collections**

**Moderator Notes**

***How to use:***

*These notes and accompanying slideshow are designed for use in a group format with a moderator/presenter and several participants. The group size is flexible- with a smaller group it can be run as largely a guided discussion with some background, while for a larger group it can be run with more defined boundaries between presentation and break-out discussions.*

*Discussions are integrated throughout the presentation. If using this in an in-person setting, ensure that participants will be able to easily talk with each other. At the start of the presentation, encourage participants who are scattered to move to sit with the group.*

*If you are in a remote setting, think about strategies for encouraging and moderating discussion appropriate to your audience and platform. If the group size is large, you should be prepared to use breakout rooms to facilitate conversation.*

***Running time:***

*The amount of time this curriculum will take depends significantly on the time allocated for discussion. Typically, at least 50-60 minutes is needed for the program, but it can be extended to two hours with more discussion time and incorporation of additional activities.*

***Suggestions for customization of the presentation***

* *Integrate slides about the history of your institution’s collections*
* *Integrate slides about a new collecting area that your institution has recently expanded into*

***Suggestions for supporting activities***

* *Examine and discuss foundational collections from your institution*
* *Examine and discuss recent acquisitions to your collection*
* *Ask a curator to discuss the current goals for expanding your institution’s collections and how those goals integrate with your institution’s mission*

**Building Collections**

**Presentation Notes**

Plain text can be read directly from the notes when presenting

*Italicized text in boxes provides additional information for the moderator, including suggestions for guiding discussions.*

**Slide 1:**

*Welcome your group of participants. Introduce yourself and any other presenters. If the group size is small, you may also wish to have participants introduce themselves. Depending on the context explain the purpose of this workshop and the goals for the session. We would appreciate acknowledgement either here or at the end of the development of this curriculum by the University of Oregon Libraries and Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (and it will also help explain the focus on examples from these institutions). If you have done so, highlight ways that you have customized this presentation to your institution.*

**Slide 2:**

This presentation explores how museums and archives build their collections. When a museum accessions a collection (or a library a special collection), they are typically making a commitment to care for the collection in the public interest in perpetuity. In our discussion today, we will explore how museums and library special collections decide what to collect, how the accumulation of individual decisions over an institution’s history shapes the collection as a whole, and the challenges and benefits of building new collections strengths.

**Slide 3:**

Let’s start by brainstorming: What are some reasons that museums and library special collections need to be selective in what they collect?

*Depending on your group size, this can either be a full group discussion or a table activity with reports out. Emergent themes could include:*

* *Space/cost of care*
* *Expertise of institution staff*
* *Audience of the institution*

**Slide 4:**

Museums and libraries can’t collect everything. Collections policies, which help an institution decide which collections to accept and which collections to decline, are based in their institutional missions, which are in turn shaped by their histories.

**Slide 5:**

As an example, let’s look at the history of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon. This campus art museum opened in 1933 and was built primarily to house a gift from Gertrude Bass Warner of over 3000 works from Korea, Mongolia, Cambodia and Russia, as well as American and British pieces influenced by Asian art and culture. Gertrude Bass Warner was a curator who had travelled extensively throughout Asia in the early 20th century. She chose to donate this collection after she moved to Eugene to be close to her son, a law professor at the University of Oregon. She was deeply engaged in building Asian studies at the university, advocated for the construction of the museum (originally named the UO Museum of Fine Arts), and served as the museum’s first director.

**Slide 6:**

Here you can see the original deed of gift from Gertrude Bass Warner’s donation

*Read this portion of the deed of gift aloud:*

this collection is presented to help establish and perpetuate friendly relations between ourselves and our neighbors across the Pacific, thereby fulfilling God's law, "On earth peace, good will toward men," and "the God of peace shall be with you." Luke 2:14; Phil. 4:9.

*Pose the following questions to your audience:*

* What was Gertrude Bass Warner’s goal in creating her collection?
* Why did she think that displaying a collection of art from East Asia in Oregon would facilitate friendship and good relations?
* How can museums and special collections work to promote international friendship and understanding today? How might strategies have changed since the 1930s?

**Slide 7**

The founding of the museum with the Gertrude Bass Warner collection and her early leadership of the institution immediately established a strong collections focus in Asian Art, one which the museum has maintained and built upon by consistently adding new Asian art acquisitions ranging from classical pieces akin to those in the founding collection as well as work by contemporary artists. Today, over one-third of the objects held by the University of Oregon’s art museum (now called the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art) are from East Asia.

**Slide 8**

Over its first 20 years, very few objects were added to the art museum’s collection aside from a collection of North American art allocated to the university by the Works Progress Administration. Beginning in the 1950s, buoyed by post-war prosperity and several major donations, the collection began to grow more rapidly.

**Slide 9**

In addition to East Asian works, the museum added several donations of European and North American Art. Significant gifts in the 1970s from Virginia Haseltine, a patron of modern Pacific Northwest artists such as Morris Graves bolstered a regional focus on the Pacific Northwest, on which the museum has continued to build.

Haseltine lived in Portland and aspired to be an influential arts patron, but as a newcomer was not welcomed by the established arts patron community at the Portland Art Museum. She instead turned her attention to the UO Museum of Art as a struggling institution where her patronage would have a significant impact. In 1963, in a catalog of her collection, Virginia recalled that:

“For twelve years when I had children at the University I tried the great bronze doors in order to see the Murray Warner exhibit but the state could not afford to keep the doors open. When Dr. Baldinger was appointed director in 1954, there began a fermentation of interest which led to the ‘open door’ and to the organizing of a fast growing statewide organization called ‘Friends of the Museum.’”

Virginia Haseltine had a significant influence in the growth of the UO Museum of Art and her enthusiasm, dedication, and resources, along with those of other Friends of the Museum revitalized the institution. I’d like us to take a minute to think a little bit more about the role of donors in shaping collections. Please get together with a partner and discuss the questions on the next slide.

**Slide 10:**

*Break the audience up into small groups for this discussion. Allow to discuss the full suite of questions, then report out.*

*What are some of the positive impacts that donors and patrons can have on museums and libraries?*

*Discussion themes: Resources are always in short supply   
Can make connections for the museum, have ideas about what might be of interest, access to collections the museum or library may not otherwise be able to reach*

*Why do you think the UO Museum of Art followed Virginia Haseltine’s encouragement to start collecting Pacific Northwest artists more actively? What types of factors should a museum or library consider when approached by a donor who wishes to donate a large collection that would take the institution in a new direction?*

*Discussion themes: Adding a regional focus made sense for the museum due to local interest, potential easier access to visiting artists, etc.*

*How does the collection fit with the mission of the museum or library?*

*Who is the audience for the museum? Could this collection serve existing audiences well? Could it help the museum or library reach important new audiences?*

*Are the resources (space, money, labor) available to expand in this direction?*

*How can museums and libraries enable input from stakeholders who are not able to donate to shape their collections? Why is it important for museums and libraries to seek out these voices?*

*Important that museums and libraries serve whole community, not just wealthy individuals or individuals with special connections or access*

*Diversity of voices leads to more creative, robust ideas, helps avoid groupthink about what is and isn’t “important”*

**Slide 11**

Following another collecting plateau that began in the 1980s, in the early 2000s the museum was extensively renovated and expanded and renamed the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. Following on its reopening, a strong institutional commitment and reinvigorated community of patrons fueled expansive growth in collections.

**Slide 12**

This growth was broad-reaching. It reinforced existing strengths, including Pacific Northwest artists like Brian Lanker and Rick Bartow and new additions to the Asian Art collections, and, as we will discuss, the development of a major new collecting area in Latinx, Latin American and Caribbean Art. The museum also worked to increase geographic diversity to support teaching in a broader range of areas, including the addition of small collections of African art and classical antiquities.

**Slide 13**

Let’s talk a little more about the expansion into this new collecting area. Creating new collecting areas can be very challenging: it requires dedication, investment, and a strong institutional commitment. In this case, the expansion into Latinx, Latin American and Caribbean Art served not only to diversify the collection, but also to more closely connect the museum to a significant growing population in Oregon.

**Slide 14**

People of Latinx heritage have a deep and rich history in what is now the state of Oregon. Mule-packers, miners, and vaqueros (cowboys) were important members of 19th century communities. Latinx communities grew throughout the 20th century, many initially attracted by work on railroads and farms. Until mid-century, many people of Mexican heritage came to Oregon through formal government labor contracting programs, like the Bracero program. While Latinx people contributed significantly to Oregon’s economy and culture, they also faced waves of anti-immigrant sentiment, hostility, and even threats of deportation. From the 1970s, Oregon farmworkers have been engaged in both local and national activism focused on improving the conditions of agricultural labor and promoting Latinx culture and heritage. Beginning in 1980, the Latinx community in Oregon began to grow rapidly, a trend that has continued. Between 1980 and 2015, the Latinx population of the state grew from 2.5% to over 12% of residents. Despite a growing role in the culture, politics, and community of Oregon, Latinx, Latin American, and Caribbean Art remained largely outside the collecting strategy of the UO Art Museum. In 2007, there were only 6 works of art by Latin American artists in the collection.

**Slide 15**

In 2008, the University of Oregon hired a new director for the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art. Jill Hartz not only had a passion for the arts of Cuba, but she also saw the importance of adding works by Latinx artists to the collection and of connecting local Latinx communities to the museum.

**Slide 16**

Between 2008 and 2020, approximately 10% of newly acquired works in the art museum were by Latinx artists, including artists from Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Peru, and Guatemala as well as by US artists of Latin American heritage. The commitment to building the museum’s engagement in this area extended beyond the collections themselves: this new focus was associated with exhibits, catalogs, events, collaborations with university courses, and partnerships with local organizations. In 2016, a dedicated curator was hired for this area, which now includes almost 500 works in the permanent collection.

**Slide 17**

At the same time, a parallel effort was taking place at the UO Libraries, where the special collections also contained relatively little material from Oregon’s Latinx community. Starting in 2013, the library co-sponsored the Latino Roots project, let by UO professors Lynn Stephen and Gabriela Martinez, through which students gather oral histories from Latinx Oregonians and archive documentaries, interview transcripts, and family photos. Special collections has also made an agreement to house materials from PCUN: Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, an Oregon Farmworker Union.

**Slide 18**

*Break the audience up into small groups for this discussion.*

*Themes for discussion:*

* *Importance of commitment that is deep in both building collection and in other arenas*
* *Linking with communities and experts in the field*
* *How can you build trust with communities that have been historically underserved by your collection?*

**Slides 19 through 24: Activity on adding collections**

*This activity is available both as a set of slides and as a printable handout available on the Uniting Collections Canvas site.*

*The core collecting areas of the University of Oregon Libraries are listed on the main slide. On the subsequent four slides are four entirely fictional collections that have been offered to the group. For each fictional collection, consider how it matches with the collecting strengths, its degree of historical interest, and the resources that might be required to care for it.*

*This activity may be completed as one large group with discussion of each item, or as a set of small groups. With small groups, each group should make their decision independently and compare the results.*

**Slide 25: Closing Reflection**

*Ask participants to reflect on this closing question. Consider asking them to think quietly and write a few notes, then to share their thoughts with a small group or the participants as a whole.*

*The closing reflection provides an opportunity to think as a group about the ways in which structural inequities, systemic biases, and individual prejudices have shaped collections.*

*Consider asking participants to take a few minutes to think individually and write down their responses before discussing as a group.*