

## PREFACE

The primary motivation for producing *Museum Studies: Perspectives and Innovations* was to honor the memory of Carolyn Rose as an individual who dedicated her career to the preservation of cultural property through unwavering professionalism and strong commitment to academic education. Her professionalism was repeatedly demonstrated by her practical approach to challenges, whether in questioning traditional museum practices or coordinating the work of enthusiastic people to produce exceptional results ranging from sound decision-making to new resources for the museum community. Examples include promoting the concept of preventive conservation and developing conservation assessment programs, preservation literature, and new funding for the museum field. Her diplomacy and intelligence contributed to organizations such as Heritage Preservation (formerly the National Institute for Conservation), American Institute for Conservation, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. Carolyn Rose was committed to academic education involving preservation of cultural property. In her eyes, every student was an investment in the future of cultural property worldwide. Larry Reger, Carolyn's friend and colleague for almost 20 years, provides great insight and detail about her life and career accomplishments. In doing so, he clearly demonstrates the relevance of and justification for this volume.

The other motivation for producing *Museum Studies: Perspectives and Innovations* was to demonstrate the depth and diversity of new information that is produced in academic environments serving the museum field. Contributions were selected for: (1) broad application to the academic discipline of museum studies, (2) theoretical, proactive, or innovative approaches to museum issues, and (3) specific applications to natural history museums. There are other unpublished works that address topics beyond the scope of this volume.

This volume offers an array of sources and topics. Faculty contributions tend to integrate traditional perspectives with new challenges ranging from professional issues in museums to academic education and training. Interestingly, student contributions involve a broader scope of topics, ranging from professional and academic issues to important details, such as professional practices and cultural concerns. This next generation of museum workers presents fresh perspectives, some of which may not be consistent with traditional views.

## PROFESSIONALISM IN MUSEUMS

Topics on professionalism are subdivided into assessments of museum organizations, museum positions, and the museum community in general. Museum organizations usually are viewed as representing the interests of the museum community. At the same time the evolution of the roles and responsibilities in museums is directly related to the professional development of individuals. A comparison of socially recognized professions provides insight to the challenges of moving the museum community closer to professional status.

The importance of a professional organization that truly represents the membership cannot be overstated. While Katherine Emhart acknowledges the need for this role in museum organizations, she notes that

representation is compromised by several factors, in particular the very low percentage of individual memberships compared to the total workforce in the museum community. The reasons for this include overlapping services among organizations, emphasis on serving institutional members versus individual members, and insufficient attention to professional development within the museum field.

With regard to professionalism, the roles and responsibilities of museum workers are common topics, particularly as modern needs challenge traditional concepts of positions. Martha Morris demonstrates that today's museums face new and diverse challenges that demand a different kind of leadership. Instead of relying on traditional, discipline-specific expertise, the new leadership must have a business mindset blended with established museum values. The business qualities include the ability to create a vision, develop a strategic plan, utilize resources effectively, make decisions, motivate staff, and communicate and negotiate with all constituencies. The established values include focusing on the institutional mission, endorsing ethical guidelines and professional standards, and supporting the values that make such institutions unique within a social structure. While these leadership qualities would rarely be found together in any single individual, they constitute a goal for the museum community and the academic programs responsible for educating and training such leaders.

The challenges of changing roles and responsibilities are not restricted to institutional leadership. While the curator is traditionally the most symbolic position of a museum community, Elizabeth Chambers reveals how this long-revered title has evolved in recent times. In an attempt to associate the modern curator with traditional roles and responsibilities involving collections, she notes that the authority and specialization of the position might vary among institutions. Confusion about the position seems to be related to personnel management objectives equating the curatorial position to other functions in the institution. In doing so, the curatorial position takes on new dimensions, and roles and responsibilities related to collections, directly or indirectly, may be reduced. In the end the author recognizes curatorial groups as general curators, tiered curators, function-based curators, subject curators, and split-appointments. While the complexities created by this evolutionary process pose new challenges for human resource management, they also pose new challenges for trainers and trainees in museum studies programs.

The dilemma of curatorial positions also relates directly to the need for defined career tracks for individuals as part of institutional human resource management. In traditional systems, it is possible for an individual to fill and retain a curatorial position for an entire career. This does not serve the interests of the individual, institution, or museum community. Paisley Cato and Hugh Genoways address this problem of professionalism by proposing a system, based on orientations toward administration, research, collection management, conservation, information management, or objects. The authors propose standardized titles and expectations by providing descriptive information (i.e., education and experience, knowledge and skills, and key responsibilities) that is compatible and complementary with descriptions of other collection positions. The proposed system would provide direction for education and training in museum studies programs.

The issue of professionalism in the museum community is addressed directly as Melissa Cunningham compares in detail the developmental stages of four publicly recognized professions (law, medicine, teaching, and accounting) to those of the museum community. One major distinction is that other professions have evolved within an academic setting where codes and standards are established for the field, and individuals can become certified based upon successful completion of regimented education, training, and evaluation. The author also compares organizational representation, methods of entering the workforce, and special requirements, such as endorsing a code of ethics and participating in continuing education. In comparison with these other professions, museum work as a profession lacks academic requirements, and the existing academic programs have done little to standardize curricula and degree requirements. The author recommends several

approaches to the problem, including the identification of an organization that can represent and serve individual members of the field as a whole, forming a common code of ethics, accrediting museum studies programs, and eventually developing a certification program for museum workers.

The contributions to this section show considerable interest in the professional development of the museum field. This interest is multifaceted, ranging from critical evaluation of current roles and representative organizations, to recognition that traditional personnel systems must change to accommodate modern challenges, to strategies for promoting professionalism within the museum field. These are issues that should not be ignored by the museum community.

## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Topics on academic programs involve overall status of programs, program development, challenges for students, and challenges for the museum community. Contributions for this section come from both academicians and students.

Graduate-level museum training programs have become established in academic settings throughout North America. While these continue to expand in terms of numbers of programs and numbers of graduating students, there are challenges that may compromise future development. John Simmons provides useful background information for over 60 programs. He recognizes that the most serious " . . . short-coming of graduate museum studies programs is the lack of standards for what new museum professionals should be expected to know." As a result, he proposes standardization of basic coursework offered by museum studies programs, as well as preparing for doctoral degrees in museum studies.

The challenge of standardizing coursework for museum studies programs has perplexed the national and international museum community for three decades. Stephen Williams and John Simmons provide the background of interest in such standards. By collectively incorporating concepts from museum organizations and academic programs they recognize four levels of coursework based upon concepts of shared and functional competencies. The only standards proposed involve the first two levels of coursework. However, the incorporation of progressive competencies in areas of information, systems, resources, and technology, as described by the U.S. Department of Labor SCANS report, provides fresh perspectives for holistic curriculum development for museum studies programs.

While there may be justification for developing basic curriculum standards for museum studies programs across North America, this should extend to individual courses as well. Catharine Hawks and David Goldsmith provide considerable background information that establishes the need for education and training in occupational and environmental health in museums. The authors expand and support the concept with lists of course objectives and topics.

Developing a progressive museum studies program from the standardization of coursework among programs to curriculum development for individual courses can be a formidable challenge, particularly where resources are limited. Recognizing inherent similarities between programs for museum studies and library sciences, Jennifer Sheehan provides arguments for merging such programs to diversify program offerings, build faculty, increase student enrollment, and maximize the use of resources. This proposal is innovative, but perhaps not surprising, given that the two fields have been combined in a federal funding program (Institute for Museum and Library Services). The future of academic programs may require such resourcefulness and collaboration.

The clients of museum studies programs are the students seeking academic advancement to pursue careers

related to museums. Unfortunately, the concerns of students are rarely expressed to the museum community. Based upon the student contributions to this volume, the primary concerns involve successfully entering the workforce and avoiding excessive financial burdens as part of academic preparation. Alison Miller and Laura Vannorsdel investigate mentoring, networking, internships, professional organization membership, and publication as ways of making the transition from academics to the workplace. They report mixed feelings among faculty members, museum administrators, and students about which of these methods are most useful. Jennifer Sheehan, Melissa Cunningham, and Katherine Emhart document the disparity between the costs of graduate education in museum studies and initial employment compensation in the museum community. Students can incur heavy debt loads from student loans, such that it is exceedingly difficult to simultaneously repay debt and develop a decent lifestyle. Both articles provide important information about changes needed in the museum community, if education and training in museum studies are to effectively serve the field.

Collectively the academic programs and the graduating students provide a valuable resource for the museum community. From this, one might wonder how the absence of this resource could affect the future of museums. Stephen Williams and Hugh Genoways provide information about this possibility with their examination of the future workforce for natural science research collections. Their study reveals two disturbing issues. The first is that there are only two universities in North America currently able to provide broad education and training in both museum studies and disciplinary specializations that are essential for responsible management and care of natural science collections. The second is that the number of students graduating with expertise in both natural sciences and museum collections is almost non-existent. The combination suggests strongly that these collections may not have qualified workers in the future. This potential compromise of the management, care, and use of natural science collections should be a practical and philosophical concern for the entire museum community.

## CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD

Students were the primary contributors of articles dealing with challenges facing the museum field. The challenges recognized by the students were diverse and included issues such as federal regulations, environmental risk assessments, technology applications, collection terminology, and dealing with collections requiring cultural sensitivity.

Michael Bradle challenges the museum community and governmental representatives to take action to insure compliance with federal regulations involving the management of cultural resource repositories. He demonstrates that major problems of non-compliance do exist, and that the lack of resources and enforcement has placed archeological collections at risk of deterioration through mismanagement and neglect. This contribution demonstrates the level of awareness, as well as the expectations of the future museum workforce.

Anita Benedict applies environmental risk assessments to paleontological sites to identify problems and solutions for *in situ* sub-fossil bone material. The concept of risk assessments is relatively new to the museum community. The preservation of consolidated *in situ* bone that may be subjected to various environmental agents of deterioration has not been well researched. This is the first published use of a new methodology to address long-term preservation of these special objects and exhibits.

Other contributions involve combining technology and tradition to resolve new challenges. Catherine Dean applies readily available technology to resolve old loans that often consume immense amounts of staff time in museums. Using the Internet, the author discovered efficient, reliable, and inexpensive ways of tracking the owners of objects to which a museum lacks clear title. Her contribution is particularly useful because of the list

of recommended Internet sites. Mariko Kageyama and her coauthors apply traditionally established concepts to resolve issues created by new technology. In this case the concept of vouchers in biological collections is extended to insure proper documentation and preservation of derived research materials. This concept is particularly relevant and applicable to research involving molecular biology.

Finally, cultural sensitivity in the management, care, and use of some cultural objects presents several new challenges that require innovative solutions. Unfortunately, the solutions often vary among the cultures in question, and ultimately affect access, handling, storage, and use of collection objects. Authors Sara Summers and Gillian Flynn, accept the challenge of these difficult and complex issues with their contributions on the topic. In both cases, increased sensitivity and collaborations between museum workers and cultural representatives are encouraged to effectively address the challenge.

## DISCUSSION

The contributions in this volume are representative of the depth and diversity of new information generated through the academic programs serving the museum community. Collectively and individually, these articles provide fresh perspectives that are worth further investigation. Of particular interest are the issues repeatedly stressed by different authors, often representing views from different museum studies programs.

Several authors directly or indirectly promote professionalism. In doing so, they are searching for organizational representation, unified code of ethics and standards of practice, and possibly eventual certification of individual museum workers. At the same time there is a willingness to assume new responsibilities as part of the services provided to society.

Both academicians and students promote standardization and accreditation of museum studies programs as a mechanism to advance education and training for the field as a whole. This is important to students in marketing themselves for employment opportunities. Equally important, it provides potential employers with applicants having comparable qualities that can be understood and appreciated. Finally, the establishment of academic standards and accreditation creates a foundation for museum studies programs to build upon in the future.

The museum community must recognize the importance and value of academic programs in moving the field forward. Formal education and training are much more comprehensive and efficient than approaches involving on-the-job training. Students graduating from museum studies programs should have a solid foundation of the theoretical and practical aspects of museum work, such that their collective knowledge and skills can be applied effectively in the work environment. The process of academic education and training is extremely important, but the product, in the form of graduating students, defines the future of everything that the museum community offers to society.

*The Editors*