Professional development of curators and collection managers of historic textile and clothing collections: A conceptual framework

Sara B. Marcketti and Jennifer F. Gordon, Iowa State University

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Textile and clothing collections, as repositories of primary sources, have significant value in learning and teaching within the fashion studies curriculum. The literature abounds with the sensory (Mida & Kim, 2015), experiential (Marcketti, 2011), and intellectual benefits (Cobb et al., 2020) students gain by examining material culture objects. Researchers have reported on the effective use of historic costumes in design (Sauro, 2009), fashion history (Gam & Banning, 2012), theater courses (Jablon-Roberts & Sanders, 2019), and more generally within the higher education setting (Chatterjee, 2010). Published studies have also reported on the practices, challenges, opportunities, and missions of historic textile and clothing collections within academic institutions (Marcketti et al., 2011; Queen & Berger, 2006; Welters & Ordoñez, 2011).

In service to their educational missions, staff and faculty of historic textile and clothing collections teach, research, and create and disseminate public scholarship to diverse stakeholders within university campuses and local communities, and nationally and internationally through digital archives, exhibitions, and virtual programming.

Most recently, a significant publication in *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* presented potential criteria for peer review of fashion exhibitions (Green et al., 2019). In this paper, the authors make the case that “curation, as a form of creative design research, produces numerous outcomes including museum exhibitions, digital archives, and associated publications; however, our field has not yet established a method to peer review fashion exhibitions” (Green et al., 2021, p. 71). The importance of creating shared language, opportunities for peer review, and pathways for professional development is critical in furthering the professionalization and institutionalization of academic collection manager and curator positions. While the benefits of material culture within the classroom setting are lauded within the literature, collections (and even staff members working within these settings) are often misunderstood, overlooked, or confused with other entities (Marcketti & Gordon, 2019).

In this study, we present a conceptual model of the “Dimensions of Activities Related to Curatorial Practice and Collections Management” (DARCCM) which provides a context for collection work along two dimensions: public/private and systematic/informal (Figure 1). The four quadrants provide academics with a conceptual model to outline the scope—both the processes and outcomes—of museum curatorial work within higher education.¹ The model elucidates the varied facets of this work, including the foundational and often hidden or “ghost

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¹ The authors are indebted to Kern, et al, for their permission to adapt their “Dimensions of Activities Related to Teaching” model for application to the historic costume and textile collection focus.
labor” (Scaturro, 2017) that is necessary to achieve successful public-facing outcomes, such as exhibitions. The meticulous record-keeping, cataloging, inventory, and collections care that facilitates objects for curatorial use is often invisible to the public. While some large institutions have clear delineations between curators, registrars, and collections managers, many staff at academic collections have position responsibility statements that cross these categories (Marcketti & Gordon, 2019). Like the Dimensions of Activities Related to Teaching (DART) model from which it is adapted, our model “focuses on the placement of these activities not the quality of these activities” (Kern et al., 2015, p. 4).

The presentation, discussion, and further clarification of the DARCCM will provide staff and faculty working within collections a shared conceptual model in which to articulate the nature of their work, progress, and opportunities. The model will help those working within collections, including curators, collection managers, registrars, as well as academic leaders, to envision a collection’s existing and potential impact on research, teaching, outreach, and the institution more broadly. The goal is that faculty, staff, and administrators will be able to share and assert their value in supporting the academic missions of programs, departments, and ultimately, their institutions of higher education.
References