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McKissick Museum at the Core of the University of South Carolina's Curriculum

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McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina engages audiences through a variety of experiences that provide information, generate awareness, and promote introspection on topics of regional life and the interdependent roles of culture, community traditions, and the natural and built environment. At the heart of these activities is an interpretive commitment to "telling the story of southern life." The themes through which this vision is presented focus on the cultural, political, and scientific history of South Carolina and the southeastern United States; contemporary artistic trends in the region, and the history of the University of South Carolina.

A brief background will explain the impetus for demonstrating McKissick Museum's value to the University. The Museum faced economic challenges long before the 2008 recession. In 2004, the staff was cut in half, from sixteen to eight, which included the education department. Gallery space was also reduced. The first floor was reallocated to house the University's Visitor Center. The rationale for downsizing and merging departments was to save the museum from closing, but the compromise was to our detriment. The museum's front door virtually disappeared, as was much of the museum's visibility on campus. For example, now when visitors entered the building, they were most often families with high schoolers, who came for a specified appointment to learn more about the University in anticipation of matriculating. However, communication problems arose because USC Ambassadors did not make guests aware that the building also houses a museum, where they can learn a lot about the school from the exhibitions displayed on the upper floors.

The positives, however, far outweigh the negatives. In 2005, a new Dean was hired for the College of Arts and Sciences. She has worked closely with the museum staff on developing strategies to sustain the institution. For example, she encouraged the Museum to revise its mission and redirect its programming from focusing on K through 12 school groups to a more localized population of students, faculty, and staff on-campus. Thus, the mission changed from one that tried to be all-encompassing to one that is more succinct focusing on the museum's strengths. Comparing the two statements on the slide, one can see that the vagueness has been clarified.

Looking to achieve the museum's mission, the Dean also created a new position, a faculty curator. While Faculty Curator's are not new to university museums, they have historically served as content specialists for scientific collections. This case, however, is different. As the person that holds the position in a teaching museum, my primary responsibility is to increase the learning potential of all persons affiliated with the University through active engagement. I see my role as an educator, but more as an outreach coordinator, idea generator, and project manager. Some of the initiatives on which I have worked are the focus of today's presentation. These include examples of facilitating student research projects, expanding the role of faculty as exhibition guest curators, developing discipline specific courses that utilize critical inquiry and object-based learning, and encouraging increased visitation by undergraduates.

Student research projects

Museum collections have long been the subject of theses and dissertations. While this type of scholarly activity is important to McKissick, the Museum strives to create partnerships that deepen the level of interpretation presented through its exhibitions. In 1979, McKissick Museum began offering an 18-credit hour graduate certificate in museum management. Since the program's inception, groups of students have been producing collections-based exhibitions as course assignments. Over the last couple of years, however, programming has expanded to feature research projects by individual graduate students in a dedicated gallery. For instance, directed independent research resulted in the exhibition "To Make a House a Home: The Archaeology of Freedmen Living on James Island, 1865-1906," curated by Melanie Neil. The exhibition presented over 75 archaeological artifacts and images interpreting recent excavations on the South Carolina coast completed by USC students, faculty, and staff of the Diachronic Research Foundation. The show explored settlements of emancipated African Americans was organized to coincide with a national conference hosted by the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology. It has since traveled to small non-profit venues around the State.

A second example "Urban Archaeology in Columbia, South Carolina," was produced by USC graduate student Helena Ferguson. Ferguson excavated the grounds surrounding the Hampton-Preston Mansion, a planter-class family's city residence, for her thesis research. Her work was part of a series of excavation projects done at the six properties under the stewardship of Historic Columbia Foundation. As she was writing her thesis, she came to me asking if she could enroll for internship credit to produce a display some of the found artifacts, as well as to organize attendant programs. Helena's goal was to teach people about urban archaeology, hoping to inform visitors

that archaeology is not limited to remote, ancient sites. Her contract for academic credit required that she draft an exhibition proposal, submit a grant application, produce an exhibition, schedule and facilitate the educational programs. The results included the exhibition, images of which you see here, a \$1,000 award from the Humanities Council of South Carolina to fund a lunchtime lecture series, and a half-day "Diggin' History" program, where K-12 students visited the exhibition and then toured the sites and participated in hands-on activities including grid planning, digging, and cleaning artifacts. Because Helena took the initiative to make the most of her internship, she was successful in developing skills that combined her interests in archaeology, exhibition development, and museum education. Furthermore, she added a link to the chain that is the on-going relationship between McKissick Museum, Historic Columbia Foundation, the University of South Carolina, and the Richland and Lexington County school districts.

Faculty as guest curators

University faculty have long been involved in and supportive of the Museum. Faculty as guest curators date back to the early 1990s, with art historian Randy Mack producing exhibitions such as *Paper Pleasures: Five Centuries of Drawings and Watercolors* selected from local collections to *Talking with the Turners: Conversations with Southern Folk Potters*, an exhibition that highlights the changing role of ceramics from functional to artistic. Probably the most popular faculty-curated project was public historian Katherine Grier's *Pets in America*, the story of human and animal interaction at home. The exhibition traveled to venues in Indiana, Massachusetts, Florida, Delaware, Michigan and Connecticut.

Beginning this year the museum is expanding its collaborative projects by reaching out to new disciplines with which to partner. The exhibition schedule includes one faculty curated exhibition per semester. Topics range from an exploration into civic action, which has resulted in photographs taken by Columbia residents documenting their lives in public housing communities and organized by Social Work faculty, to an exploration into the history of factory tours in America by a cultural historians to an examination of how nanotechnology has changed the public's understanding of the non-visible world through partnerships with History of Science professors, scientists working at the University's NanoCenter, and the College of Engineering.

Developing these types of large-scale interdisciplinary projects require substantial prior planning in order to secure funding to underwrite the exhibition component of the project, as well as fully integrating the production process into the affiliated department's curriculum. For example, College of Social Work professors Darcy Freedman and Ronald Pitner received a three-year \$650,000 grant from the Kresge Foundation to improve Columbia neighborhoods. More than 1,000 people live in the public-housing neighborhoods that border downtown Columbia. While there are many assets in these communities, the area has fairly high rates of violent and property crimes and is plagued with dilapidated housing, graffiti, homelessness and vagrancy.

Freedman and Pitner partnered with the Columbia Housing Authority and McKissick Museum to implement the first phase of the project. The goal was to ask residents to identify concerns about crime and safety in the community, to become more involved, and to create healthy spaces in their neighborhoods. Using the PhotoVoice methodology, conceived by Drs. Mary Ann Burris and Caroline Wang, participants were empowered to use cameras to document strengths and concerns, reflect on the meaning found in the photos, engage in critical dialogue with others, use their photos and voices to ignite social change. The photographs were used to spark discussions among participants about what is going on in the community and what changes should be made. During the summer and fall of 2010, eighteen residents- six youths between the ages of eleven and seventeen and twelve adults- captured aspects of their neighborhood through photographs. The photographs are currently on view in the Museum in an exhibition that opened last week. One hundred fifty guests attended a reception in which the artist participants were the featured guests. Community members who have never visited the University campus or its Museum were in attendance.

To facilitate the exhibition's production, weekly meetings with participants, and related events, the grant provided for four graduate assistantships. Without the assistance of the student dedicated to the exhibition, a large part of the work would have to have been sent off-campus for completion. Instead, the student learned about project management, as well as the practical skills of museum preparation work, such as framing and hanging photographs. She was also tasked with the exhibition's design and interpretive texts. Thus, this partnership was especially

successful as a model for the types of interdisciplinary work that needs to continue for the good of the Museum, the University, and the greater Columbia community.

Discipline specific content tied to the curriculum

Another way in which the museum's collection is tied to the student learning is through object-based classes offered outside of the museum management program in the Public History Program, the Art Department and through the Honors College. Each fall a foundation course in material culture studies uses museum objects as the focal point for teaching methodologies from the disciplines of history, art, business, and public policy, across different time periods and different geographic regions. Students are required to develop their research and writing skills by generating object labels for "mystery objects" pulled from the Museum's permanent collection. Parameters require students to only use online sources for one draft and only printed materials for the second, which teaches students to use their critical thinking skills to analyze and determine reputable sources.

During the spring of 2010, a special topics course was developed for the Department of Art and the African-American Studies Program on the History of African-American Art. Knowing that the Museum was mounting the exhibition, *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art*, I scheduled the class to coincide with the exhibition. At the same time I curated an exhibition of contemporary African-American art for the Columbia Museum of Art downtown. The two exhibitions worked as bookends for the course and offered original objects from which to work, as well as active learning experiences taking students out of the classroom. The point is that as Faculty Curator for McKissick Museum, I have the content knowledge about collections and exhibitions that I can share with faculty as the basis for developing new courses or enhancing existing courses.

Increased participation by undergraduates

The museum staff has identified the undergraduate population at the University as an underserved audience. Those who visit now participate in scheduled tours as part of the visitor's center or with their classes, or visit they on their own to complete a class assignment. Through formative evaluation, the Museum is actively seeking new methods to engage more students to use the museum as a place to learn and to explore subjects outside of their academic discipline, or as a place of entertainment and personal reflection. The museum has reinstated a marketing campaign targeting students who live on campus. To keep costs minimal, posting upcoming events and exhibitions in dormitories, libraries, dining halls, and recreational facilities, as well as through social media outlets, letting students know that their campus does have a museum. Our greatest opportunity, however, comes as the University has just passed a new undergraduate curriculum called the *Carolina Core*.

The *Carolina Core* is a coherent curriculum beginning with foundational courses such as English or Math at the beginning of the undergraduate experience. These foundational requirements are balanced by an integrative course requirement, for three credit hours, near the end of the undergraduate experience, in which selected core learning outcomes are integrated into discipline specific study. This integrative course may be a capstone or upper division course in the major, or it may be an interdisciplinary offering. In addition, *Carolina Core* learning goals will be incorporated as fully as possible into coursework throughout the undergraduate experience.

Seven components make up the core of a liberal arts education at the University of South Carolina. They are aesthetic and interpretive understanding; analytical reasoning and problem solving; effective, engaged, and persuasive communication; global citizenship and multicultural understanding; information literacy; scientific literacy; and values, ethics, and social responsibility. Many of the learning outcomes that were adopted for mastery are outcomes that are already integrated into McKissick Museum's programs. Having these general components clearly stated, the Museum now has its directive. Staff can better develop interpretive goals for exhibitions by targeting the learning outcomes they meet, which will make the argument for integrating the museum into the classroom more persuasive. The result will be a document, much like the State Standards required by public school systems that are aligned with the *Carolina Core*. This will be distributed to faculty within departments that teach subjects related to the Museum's permanent collection, such as *Natural Curiosity*, which meets the scientific literacy component as it explores why people collect natural specimens and artifacts, and what they tell us about our relationship with and obligations to the natural world. Additional copies will be provided to new hires, as well as faculty who teach in disciplines related to special exhibitions.

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Because of the budget reductions in South Carolina in the early part of the last decade, McKissick Museum was forced to develop interdisciplinary partnerships in order to demonstrate its value to the University. Consequently, the Museum was better prepared to weather the severe financial crippling of September 2008. Focusing directly on the University community has generated wonderful and somewhat unexpected results. The Museum has not only strengthened ties with the on-campus community, but with residents of the City and surrounding counties as well. Partnering with faculty and students has afforded the Museum the opportunity to generate important scholarly and civic-oriented endeavors through outside funding sources to which the Museum is ineligible to apply. Furthermore, the work conducted by faculty and students has virtually increased the museum staff allowing us to produce programming of high quality on par with what the Museum did with twice the staff and twice the budget. I am proud to represent the University of South Carolina's McKissick Museum as its Faculty Curator who works creatively to meet the needs of the University community.

Thank you.