

**Professor Charles Mack's (ART)
Comments on Proposals for the McKissick Museum**

Again I prefer to present my comments in a formal fashion. Since I am not a member of the Museum's staff, I begin by explaining my connection with the museum. I have been actively involved with the museum even before its birth, having been a member of the committee established by President Paterson to consider its creation. I drafted its first mission statement launching its focus upon southern folk culture. I served on its first collections committee and then became the first president of its advisory council; I have organized and curated several shows for the McKissick and have made frequent use of its holdings in my classes. I say all this to demonstrate my familiarity with the museum's history and its situation.

To have suggested in public the possibility of closing the museum was a most unfortunate event and one that has been detrimental to its mission, stifling donations and jeopardizing exhibitions, loans, and grant funding -- rumors have a way of being seen as fact. To now formally recommend in the SDI report that the museum enhance its focus on academics is meaningless and demonstrates the committee's failure to understand the museum's role and its history. A focus on academics is at the core of the museum's very existence and has been central to everything it has done. The museum was established to complement the academic life and mission of the university and it has aggressively pursued that aim. If the committee members feel that it has not done so, they only have demonstrated their own failure to utilize the museum's offerings, be they exhibitions, public events, lectures, workshops, festivals, etc. As a museum, the McKissick is unusual in its active research component and in its museum management program teaching mission. Like our Library, the McKissick Museum is central to the academic life of this campus.

The SDI suggestions betray a gross lack of familiarity with the museum, its physical structure, its mission, and its role within the university and the greater community.

The recommendation to reallocate storage space in the museum for some other purposes indicates a failure to understand the physical realities of the building. Storage for the museum is presently located in the former stack area of the old library, an area constructed with low ceilings, solid concrete flooring, and closely-spaced steel supports integral to its structure. In short this space can only be used for storage. The idea expanding the present off-site storage facility would be quite expensive (rental of space, renovation, climate control, personnel, transportation, etc.) and might actually prove detrimental to the conservation of many of the objects (these aren't books but objects, each of which presents different conservation problems). This whole suggestion is ill-conceived.

Although the old Taylor House at Senate and Bull would be better suited to the purpose, relocating the Visitors' Center to the McKissick as proposed might be feasible but only if it did not impinge upon already tight exhibition spaces, upon museum

security, and upon the primary academic mission of the museum. But where would it be located? No suggestion is made. And to accommodate visitors, it would probably mean converting most of the parking lot at the "Little Horseshoe," next to Osborne, into a visitors' lot with administrators and board members having to look elsewhere. Dedicating spaces in the Pendleton Street Garage might be possible but the walking distance might prove discouraging to visitors and an impediment to the handicapped.

The university would be better served if it did not reduce the space allocated to the museum but, rather, would increase it. The McKissick Museum is one major means by which the university establishes its presence in the minds of those in our state and at the national level. If excellence really is our goal, then our museum warrants increased attention, support, space, and funding. Its traveling exhibitions deserve institutional support since they serve to promote the image of academic excellence which the university claims it promotes.

One final comment: I find it curious that the SDI Committee did not take this opportunity to reexamine the museum's administrative affiliation. Originally, the museum reported to the Provost; the reassignment of the museum to the College of Liberal Arts a few years ago ignored the strong presence of scientific materials in the collection. The university's first holdings were scientific specimens and in the first years of operation the staff of the McKissick included a Science curator. Since the museum supports the academic programs of the entire university, it would seem to me that the interests of the museum and the community it serves would benefit if it were to be administratively placed in a position parallel to the Library reporting to the Provost as in the past.