

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

Keywords: Historic textile and clothing collections, labor, curation, collections management, conceptual model

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

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).

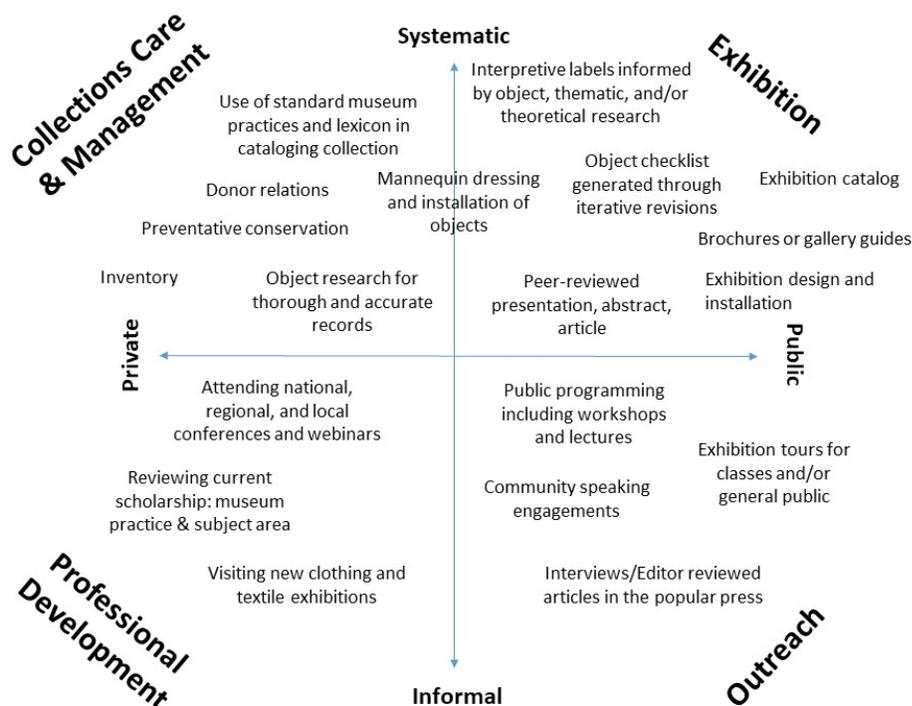


Fig. 1: Dimensions of Activities Related to Curatorial Practice and Collections Management (DARCCM) model

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

- Chatterjee, H. J. (2010). Object-based learning in higher education: The pedagogical power of museums. *University Museums and Collections Journal*, 3, 179-182.
- Cobb, K., Orzada, B., & Lopez-Gydosh, D. (2020). History is always in fashion: The practice of artifact-based dress history in the academic collection. *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice*, 8(1), 4-23.
- Gam, H. J., & Banning, J. (2012). A collaboration to teach students to utilize historic dress as inspiration for apparel design. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 41(1), 56-68.
- Green, D. N., Du Puis, J. L., Xepoleas, L. M., Hesselbein, C., Greder, K., Pietsch, V., Getman, R. R., & Estrada, J. G. (2019). Fashion exhibitions as scholarship: Evaluation criteria for peer review. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 39(1), 71-86.
- Jablon-Roberts, S., & Sanders, E. (2019). A theoretical framework for the creative process of theatrical costume design for historically set productions. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 37(1), 35-50.
- Kern, B., Mettetal, G., Dixon, M., & Morgan, R. K. (2015). The role of SoTL in the academy: Upon the 25th anniversary of Boyer's scholarship reconsidered. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 15(3), 1-14.
- Marcketti, S. B., Fitzpatrick, J., Keist, C. N., & Kadolph, S. J. (2011). University historic clothing museums and collections: Practices and strategies. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 29(3), 248-262.
- Marcketti, S. B., & Gordon, J. (2019). "I should probably know more:" Reasons for and roadblocks to the use of historic collections. *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, 17(1). doi: doi:10.5334/jcms.169.
- Mida, I., & Kim, A. (2015). *The dress detective: A practical guide to object-based research in fashion*. Bloomsbury.
- Sauro, C. (2009) Digitized historic costume collections: Inspiring the future while preserving the past. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 60(9), 1939-1941.
- Scaturro, S. (2017). Confronting fashion's death drive: Conservation, ghost labor, and the material turn within fashion curation. In A. Vanska & H. Clark (Eds.), *Fashion curating: Critical practice in the museum and beyond* (pp. 21-38). Bloomsbury.
- Queen, S., & Berger, V. (2006). *Clothing and textile collections in the United States: A costume society of America guide*. Texas Tech University Press.
- Welters, L., & Ordoñez, M. (2011). *Historic Textile and Costume Collection in the Academic Setting*. ITAA Monograph #11. International Textile and Apparel Association, 2011.