A SURVEY OF EXHIBITION PRACTICES IN NORTH AMERICAN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, RARE BOOK LIBRARIES, AND ARCHIVES-A PILOT STUDY

RBMS 2017, IOWA CITY, JUNE 22, 2017

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THE STUDY

- Pilot study
- Qualitative approach
- Primary question: How do North American Special Collections, Rare Book Libraries, and Archives approach exhibitions?
THE STUDY-SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Secondary questions:
  - How are exhibition programs run?
  - What are their main goals?
  - Who is their audience?
  - What current trends and new emerging approaches do these programs follow?
  - What are the programs’ successes and challenges?
  - What are the differences and similarities with museums?
The Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board, Division of Research, deemed this study “not human subject research,” since it focused on the institution, not the individuals’ personal experience.

Nonetheless, participants received an information sheet, and signed a form to confirm institutional approval.
THE STUDY - METHODOLOGY

- Purposeful sample, including academic and non-academic, public and private institutions, with established exhibition programs
- Approached 13 institutions
- 9 replied
Participants:

- Georgia State University, Special Collections and Archives (Atlanta)
- Getty Research Institute, Special Collections and Exhibitions (Los Angeles)
- The Grolier Club, Exhibitions (New York)
- The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Education and Exhibitions (Austin)
- Santa Clara University Library, Archives and Special Collections (Santa Clara, CA)
- The University of British Columbia Library, Rare Books and Special Collections (Vancouver)
- The University of California, Los Angeles, Library, Special Collections (Los Angeles)
- J. Willard Marriott Library, The University of Utah, Special Collections Division (Salt Lake City)
- Vancouver Public Library, Information Services – Special Collections (Vancouver)
The majority are public universities, one is a public library, one is a religious university, and two are private institutions.
Public Research Universities:
- Georgia State
- UBC
- UCLA
- University of Utah
- UT Austin-HRC
THE STUDY-PARTICIPANTS

Religious University:
- Santa Clara University

Public Library:
- Vancouver Public Library

Private Institutions:
- Getty Research Institute
- Grolier Club
- Open-ended questionnaire
- 17 sections
- 73 questions!
THE STUDY-QUESTIONNAIRE

Sections:
- Respondents Information (2 questions)
- Unit Information (5 questions)
- Exhibition Team (10 questions)
- Exhibition Program (12 questions)
Sections (continued):

- Exhibition Topics and Research (5 questions)
- Exhibition Narrative (4 questions)
- Audience (5 questions)
- Activities Centered Around Exhibitions (1 question)
- Attendance, Impact, Metrics and Assessment (2 questions)
Sections:

- Advertising (1 question)
- Exhibition Catalogues and Brochures (2 questions)
THE STUDY-QUESTIONNAIRE

Sections:
- Exhibition Spaces (9 questions)
- Accessibility (1 question)
- Funding (5 questions)
THE STUDY-QUESTIONNAIRE

Sections:
- Policies and Standards (2 questions)
- Relationship with Museums and Museum Practice (4 questions)
- Additional Input/Notes (3 questions)
I tried to address different aspects of exhibition work.

This questionnaire was mostly focused on physical exhibitions within the institutions, although collaborative exhibitions and online exhibitions were briefly addressed.
HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

- Size of the exhibition team
- Exhibitions per year
- Audience
HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

- What are the main stories told?
- What are the differences and similarities with museums?
EXHIBITION TEAM

- Georgia State: 3 to 4, trained on the job (full size of unit: 12, plus GRAs, student workers and temps)
- UBC: 3, plus help from others; museum and conservation training, plus training on the job (full size of unit: 7, plus help from 4 in Technical Services, and student assistants)
- UCLA: 5 to 10, mostly trained on the job (full size of unit: 35 FTE)
- University of Utah: 4 dedicated to specific floors, plus a larger group; training is a combination of in-house and previous experience (full size of unit: 28 full-time and 25-30 PTE)
- UT Austin-HRC: 4 dedicated (planning and scheduling, 1; preparation and installation, 3), plus a larger group; training from different sources (full size of unit: 145)
EXHIBITION TEAM

- Santa Clara University: 1 to 3, trained on the job (full size of unit: 6 full-time, 1 part-time, and student assistants)
- Vancouver Public Library: 2, with previous museum experience (full size of the unit: 4 full-time and 1 part-time)
- Getty Research Institute: 2 full-time and 35 other contributors; training: exhibitions are designed by Getty Museum designers, and independent designers are occasionally hired, who generally hold degrees from art schools (full size of unit: 27 in Curatorial and 23 in Special Collections)
- Grolier Club: 1, with degrees in Museum Studies and Information Studies, hands-on training and work experience (full size of unit: 7 full-time, 5 part-time).
PHOTOS-GEORGIA STATE
PHOTOS-GEORGIA STATE
Getty Research Institute, Gallery I, upper level, as installed for *Concrete Poetry: Words and Sounds in Graphic Space*
PHOTOS-GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
Evermore: The Persistence of Poe
(September 17- November 22, 2014)

Image by Grolier Club, taken on October 19, 2014, flickr (B3V1526)
https://www.flickr.com/photos/grolierclub/15414619978/in/album-72157648505219660/
PHOTOS-HARRY RANSOM CENTER (TWITTER IMAGE)

Harry Ransom Center, June 18, 2017 Tweet (https://twitter.com/ransomcenter)
Dialoguing with Sacred Texts: Past, Present, and Future (February 15 - June 30, 2013)

Photo by Cari Ferraro,
http://cariferraro.com/2013/03/28/sacred-texts-talking/
PHOTOS-UCLA
Level 1. https://www.lib.utah.edu/services/exhibitions.php
EXHIBITIONS PER YEAR

- Georgia State: no regular schedule; Women’s Collections exhibitions are updated each year
- UBC: 4 to 8
- UCLA: 6 to 12
- University of Utah: 7 in the Special Collections Gallery, 6 in the Reading Room Gallery, and 3 elsewhere in the Library
- UT Austin-HRC: 2
EXHIBITIONS PER YEAR

- Santa Clara University: 2 (used to be 3)
- Vancouver Public Library: changed every two months
- Getty Research Institute: 3 in the space, and 2 off-site
- Grolier Club: 9 in two galleries
GOALS OF THE EXHIBITION PROGRAM

- Georgia State: the goal used to be creating “something nice to look at;” they are now revamping the program and making it more purposeful

- UBC: highlight materials; engage with community members; provide iSchool students with a learning experience

- UCLA: promote materials, providing context for interpretation, for different communities
GOALS OF THE EXHIBITION PROGRAM

- University of Utah: highlight materials; expand user base; attract donors; further the Library’s mission

- UT Austin-HRC: Make an intellectual contribution; innovative; broad appeal for diverse, intergenerational audiences, including school groups and families; build community interest, understanding, and support; showcase Ransom Center collections
GOALS OF THE EXHIBITION PROGRAM

- Santa Clara University: Support student success and support overall marketing and donor development strategy

- Vancouver Public Library: promote discovery of Special Collections diverse resources; complement the city’s cultural calendar
GOALS OF THE EXHIBITION PROGRAM

- Getty Research Institute: promote collections and spur research on art historical subjects.

- Grolier Club: foster appreciation for books and prints, their history, art, production, and commerce
GOALS OF THE EXHIBITION PROGRAM

- Promote collections
- Support students and attract new donors
- Engage communities
- Promote interest and research in specific topics and themes
- Be innovative and promote cultural discourse
Exhibitions are open to the public and free of charge at all the participating institutions.

- Georgia State: primarily students and researchers; audience does not really change depending on topic.
- UBC: UBC community; researchers; the general public.
AUDIENCE

- UCLA: UCLA community and the general public

- University of Utah: University community, the larger cultural community, and the international audience of researchers and supporters

- UT Austin-HRC: UT community, the greater Austin and Central Texas community, and visitors to Austin
Santa Clara University: campus community

Vancouver Public Library: audience varies according to the theme of the exhibition; all exhibitions are designed to be inviting and visually appealing to school-age children and their families

Getty Research Institute: general public

Grolier Club: general audience
STORIES AND NARRATIVE

Focus:
- Events, individuals, ideas, concepts, trends and innovations, activism
- Showcase collections
- Promote institutional landmarks
- Promote the culture of the city/town
- Connection to the world of books and prints
- Intellectually-engaging narratives and educational content
DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES WITH MUSEUMS

- Many similarities: promote collections, engage with communities, design visually appealing exhibitions, etc.
- Differences: exhibitions are only one aspect of everyday work and curators and archivists often learn on the job; exhibition programs do not always have a formal structure; some curators/archivists play multiple roles; the physical space is at times not very flexible; the exhibitions do not always have a planned itinerary.
- Some institutions already apply a structured museum approach; others are in the process of becoming more intentional and plan more. Overall, there is a strong acknowledgement of museum practice.
Questions?

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