

7-2011

# University Historic Clothing Museums and Collections: Practices and Strategies

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# University Historic Clothing Museums and Collections: Practices and Strategies

## **Abstract**

University historic dress collections and museums provide unique opportunities to actively fulfill critical mission statements of the university, including possibilities for research projects, providing firsthand opportunities for students to view real-life objects, and outreach/service opportunities to the public. Despite the importance of collections in fulfilling university missions, research about current practices and best practices is scarce. The purpose of this study was to document practices, challenges, and opportunities for excellence experienced by university collections within the United States. To explore the topic, a qualitative methodology in which 14 curators and collection managers were interviewed was utilized. The results of this study suggest that many curators and collection managers endure many similar struggles within their departments, such as lack of financial resources, time, and support from upper administration. Yet, all of the participants stated the significant contributions and impact material culture can have on the mission of their institutions.

## **Keywords**

historic clothing, collections, museums

## **Disciplines**

American Material Culture | Fashion Business | Fashion Design

## **Comments**

This is an author's final manuscript of an article from *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 29 (2011): 248–262, doi:[10.1177/0887302X11419361](https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X11419361).

1           **University Historic Clothing Museums and Collections: Practices and Strategies**

2                                   *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*<sup>1</sup>

3           University museums' interpretation of objects in a welcoming environment for the  
4 general public can "play a vital role in providing the bridge between academic staff and public  
5 groups" (Cross, 2009, p. 24). According to Bonner (1985, p. 288), "institutions of formal  
6 learning always have understood that maintaining collections for study and exhibition can be an  
7 important part of the education process." University museums provide unique opportunities to  
8 actively fulfill critical mission statements of the university, including possibilities for research  
9 projects, providing first hand opportunities for students to view real life objects, and outreach  
10 and service opportunities to the public (Boylan, 1999). Despite the importance of university  
11 museums in fulfilling university missions, research about current museum practices and best  
12 practices is scarce. The purpose of this study was to document practices, challenges, and  
13 opportunities for excellence experienced by university historic clothing museums and collections  
14 within the United States.

15           **University Museums**

16           University museums usually exist to serve the student body and the faculty; the synergy  
17 that develops between universities and university museums occurs at several levels. Museums,  
18 including those highlighting art, the natural and physical sciences, and textiles and clothing  
19 provide opportunities for learning outside of the classroom for elementary through senior citizen  
20 groups (Packer, 2006; Spiess, 1996). University museums can reach students in nearly every  
21 discipline by engaging in collaborative projects with faculty and students (Blanco, 2010). A

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

22 university museum provides a unique opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students to  
23 participate in an internship or work study assignment without having to leave the university or  
24 incurring additional expenses (Bonner, 1985). Further, university museums allow students,  
25 faculty, and outside researchers' first hand opportunities to study artifacts not found in other  
26 institutional facilities. The objects contained within collections and museums can be used to  
27 acquire subject specific knowledge as well as more transferable skills such as communication  
28 and critical thinking skills (Chatterjee, 2010). Museum exhibits transform scholarship from a  
29 private act to a public experience because they reach a wider audience than most journal articles  
30 and refereed presentations (Breward, 2008). Further, museums provide a platform for academic  
31 research and a place where the community can provide feedback and interact with the university  
32 (MacDonald, 2008).

33         Many university museums rely on governing institutions for funding, facilities, staff, and  
34 administration. In order to continue to receive their funding, university museums are “under  
35 constant pressure to prove their worth and demonstrate that they are more valuable than a  
36 potential research group that could occupy the same location and probably generate more  
37 income” (Ashby, 2009, p. 43; Boylan, 1999). Due to the recent financial crisis within the United  
38 States, university museums have devised new ways to lessen their expenditures. Full time staff is  
39 often limited and in many cases faculty assume multiple roles: educator, researcher, and leader  
40 within the museum setting, which may or may not be considered a service assignment to the  
41 university (Ashby, 2009). This paper seeks to fill a gap in the knowledge base of current and  
42 best practices in textiles and clothing museums and collections.

43 **University Clothing and Textiles Collections and Museums**

## University Historic Clothing Museums

44           The International Exhibition in Paris in 1900 displayed the first popular fashion history  
45 exhibition. Since then, clothing and textiles have been incorporated in exhibitions around the  
46 world. Fashion exhibits are unique in that they create an intimate setting and can create nostalgia  
47 for the viewer. The visitors are “invited to become involved in museum exhibitions through sight  
48 and a remembered experience of the pleasure of touching and wearing what is on view” (Palmer,  
49 2008, p. 32).

50           Throughout the United States, many universities, colleges, and community colleges have  
51 collections of historic dress ranging from very small holdings consisting of a few hundred  
52 garments to large collections of 50,000 plus garments and textiles (Queen & Berger, 2006).  
53 These collections developed for a variety of reasons including to provide hands-on opportunities,  
54 to learn construction details for fashion design students, and to provide examples of silhouettes  
55 from different periods and decades for fashion history and design courses (Arthur, 1997). Many  
56 of these collections are considered teaching collections so that students can touch and explore the  
57 textiles and garments and utilize the collections as material culture libraries of fashion history  
58 (Blanco, 2010; Sauro, 2009). Since their founding, dress and textile collections have been  
59 effectively employed as educational tools to encourage university outreach and community  
60 participation. According to Miller and Portillo (1996): “A heightened sense of community  
61 history and pride in a vital collection supports a cycle of investment and outreach between the  
62 university and the community” (p. 48).

63           Past research indicated that university costume collections face a number of challenges  
64 including lack of space for exhibits and storage, poor climate control, and inadequate resources  
65 (Smathers, 1977). Furthermore, museums that encompass textiles and clothing face challenges  
66 regarding their perceived importance both within and outside of academia. Textiles and clothing

## University Historic Clothing Museums

67 have traditionally been viewed as less important or of a lower status in museums and in academia  
68 (Steele, 2008). Fashion curator, Anderson stated, “Prejudice, fear and suspicion still surround the  
69 status of fashion within many museums....This sometimes takes the form of fashion being  
70 tolerated as a form of ‘entertainment’ which will ‘pull the crowds’, with no acknowledgment of  
71 the serious contribution it makes to the educational role of the museum” (Anderson, 2000, p.  
72 374). In his critique of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute’s exhibit *Dangerous*  
73 *Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, art historian Gaskill stated, “Dress, then,  
74 provides curators with opportunities to explore layers of complex history scarcely available by  
75 other means. It brings its own problems [however, such as] a low position in the art hierarchy...”  
76 (1994, p. 616). While acknowledging that their renowned fashion collection is now given due  
77 credit by the art world, the esteemed Victoria and Albert Museum states on its website, “The  
78 V&A has collected both textiles and dress since its earliest days. For many years garments were  
79 only acquired if they were made of significant textiles, as fashion had a low status within the  
80 decorative arts” (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2011).

### 81 **Methods**

82 To explore the topic of current trends and best practices in textiles and clothing museums  
83 and collections, a qualitative method was selected to obtain “rich” or “thick” data (Esterberg,  
84 2002; Kvale, 1996). This type of data allowed for a deeper understanding of museum practices  
85 through participants’ descriptions of everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). We searched the  
86 Queen and Berger’s *Clothing and textile collections in the United States: A Costume Society of*  
87 *America guide* (2006) for universities, particularly at land-grant institutions with historic textiles  
88 and clothing museums and collections. Purposive sampling of land-grant institutions was utilized  
89 because these schools have a rich legacy of creating and maintaining collections (Eppright &

90 Ferguson, 1971). Further, due to the tri-partite mission of these schools, we were interested in  
91 exploring the diverse ways museums and collections fulfilled the research, teaching, and service  
92 missions. A total of forty requests were sent via email to identified curators and collection  
93 managers, with a total of 14 individuals participating in the study for a 35% response rate. The  
94 researchers visited three of the universities within driving distance in order to physically  
95 experience the museums and collections and learn first-hand from the curators and collection  
96 managers visited. For all of the interviews, we utilized an interview protocol that ensured a  
97 systematic approach to data collection and minimized interviewer bias, yet allowed participants  
98 the opportunity to openly explore the topic (Kvale, 1996).

99         The interview schedule, included in Table 1, included demographic questions such as  
100 “What were your education and work experiences that led you to become curator/collection  
101 manager?” and museum related questions including, “How is the museum/collection utilized in  
102 your department?”, “How does the museum/collection support the university’s mission related to  
103 education, research and service?”, and “What are the challenges of serving as the collections  
104 manager/curator of the museum?” With informants’ consent, all in-person interviews were audio  
105 taped and transcribed to ensure accuracy in data analysis. These interviews ranged from one to  
106 four hours in length. After reviewing the transcripts, theme analysis was used to extract themes  
107 from the data. In theme analysis, themes that emerged from the interviews were pieced together  
108 to form a comprehensive picture of the collective experiences of the curators and collections  
109 managers. According to Leininger, themes are identified by "bringing together components or  
110 fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (1985, p.  
111 60). This study was reviewed and declared exempt by the university institutional review board.  
112 The following section provides results and discussion with both quantitative findings and

113 statements from informants to give greater understanding to the data. To ensure confidentiality,  
114 no university or college names are used and all informants were assigned pseudonyms.

115 “Insert Table 1 About Here”

116

## 117 **Results and Discussion**

### 118 *Demographic Information*

119 Participants’ work experiences ranged from 2 to 30 years with an average of 11 years as  
120 curator or collection manager. The age of the participants ranged from the late 20s to over 70,  
121 with an average age of 53 (Table 2). The ages of the participants suggests that retirements at  
122 certain institutions may be forthcoming, providing opportunities for new hires. Education  
123 experiences that led to the curatorship/collection management position included undergraduate  
124 and graduate work in anthropology, textile and dress history, museum studies, art history, and  
125 textile conservation. Six of the participants (primarily faculty members) earned doctoral degrees;  
126 eight participants (primarily staff members) earned what they viewed to be terminal masters’  
127 degrees in subjects including textiles and clothing, museum studies, and anthropology. Melissa, a  
128 curator at a land-grant university spoke of her circuitous path, including jobs in fundraising,  
129 publishing, and research before her current position. She mentioned both an attraction to the  
130 educational mission of academic institutions as well as an aversion from some of the “nasty  
131 politics” at private museums that led to her current position. Many of the participants mentioned  
132 working as graduate assistants or volunteering in historic textile and dress collections, museums,  
133 and historical societies prior to their academic careers.

134 Responsibilities as part of the museum/collection manager included management tasks of  
135 registration, cataloging, and garment care and preservation (n=14), collections acquisitions







## University Historic Clothing Museums

181 or shelving units often included acid-free tissue paper or muslin “slings” so that the garments  
182 were protected from each other. The muslin wrapped around garments facilitated moving objects  
183 separately without having to disturb multiple layers. Shoes in storage were stuffed with stockinet  
184 filled with 100% polyester fiberfill tucked into the shoe. This gave the shoes shape without  
185 undue stress. Further, accession tags could be stitched into the shoe insert without having to  
186 mark the actual object itself. The process of making padded hangers was described by Margaret.  
187 She stated her institution used unvarnished wood hangers. Then two layers of needle-punched  
188 batting in about 3.5” strips were wrapped around the hanger twice so that it doubles back on  
189 itself. Then muslin covers were slipped over the hangers (the covers were washed periodically).  
190 Tracy and Margaret both spoke of creating padded hangers as extra credit opportunities for  
191 students in their historic dress courses. Informants mentioned purchasing mannequins from the  
192 companies ACME Mannequins and Manne-King. Nylon stockings or black jersey was used as  
193 mannequin coverings that both protected the inside of the objects as well as allowing the “body”  
194 to be built to whatever shape was required.

195         The majority of participants stated objects in their collections were numbered according  
196 to the year of the donation, specified donor number, the number of the garment that was donated,  
197 and finally a letter to signify the parts of the garment (i.e., 2011.10.5a or 2011 - year donation  
198 was received, 10 - donor number, 5 - fifth object donated by donor, a - part of donated object  
199 such as a jacket in a three piece suit). There was some variation in donor numbers; several  
200 collections managers stated the donor number stayed the same from year to year, while others  
201 gave new numbers to donors each year they contributed objects to the collections.

202         The museum in the study with the largest staff included a curator, 20 hours per week  
203 collection manager, two graduate assistants working seven hours per week, and four volunteers

## University Historic Clothing Museums

204 working 3-15 hours per week. The collection in the study with the smallest staff included only  
205 the participant who devoted 1-10 hours per week to the collection depending on her other  
206 teaching and research responsibilities.

207 For database management systems, six participants used PastPerfect, three used Excel;  
208 three utilized proprietary systems and two used Filemaker Pro. Six of the fourteen  
209 museums/collections maintained a collections manual /governance document. Several collections  
210 managers mentioned their manuals included information about exhibit materials and archival  
211 supply companies, as well as handling, dressing, and packing procedures. Tracy commented that  
212 the process of developing the collections manual was time-consuming, yet necessary. The  
213 historic collection committee comprised of five faculty and staff members spent two years  
214 developing the document which underwent numerous drafts. The document proved helpful in  
215 that it provided institutional history regarding the collection and helped justify acquisition  
216 decisions to potential donors.

217 Several of the collections/museums had websites (n=10), primarily for the purpose of  
218 extending the reach of their facilities beyond the university to the general public. According to  
219 Camille the website “provides artistic inspiration and educational opportunities to a world-wide  
220 audience and maintains connection to [textile] enthusiasts and scholars world-wide.” Melissa  
221 commented that her museum would be “invisible” without their website. The desire to update the  
222 websites with searchable garment and textile images was frequently mentioned, but lack of time  
223 and money limited the initiation of these projects. Several participants who utilized the  
224 PastPerfect database management system mentioned the desire to create virtual exhibits with this  
225 software, but indicated other tasks, such as database entries of objects were of higher priority.

## University Historic Clothing Museums

226 Social media, such as Facebook and blogs were mentioned by several participants as fairly  
227 straight-forward, yet time consuming means to publicize their collections and museums.

228 Five of the fourteen institutions maintained a “Friends of the collection/museum”  
229 sponsorship and membership program. Three of the five respondents gave their Friends  
230 programs a tepid endorsement, citing the bi-annual newsletters, special invitations to exhibit  
231 openings, and annual membership renewal letters as helping to attract new audiences to the  
232 collection, but also entailing tedious book-keeping work. One curator even stated she was going  
233 to let the Friends group become inactive because board members were adding to her workload  
234 and not actively helping with fund-raising for the museum. Melissa stated while most of her  
235 “Friends” were “lovely people who just want to be involved and helpful” there were a few that  
236 expected “red carpets at their feet and curator at your service.” The two collections that seemed  
237 to have the strongest Friends group were either governed by a Director specifically in charge of  
238 this group’s activities or maintained by the university’s development officer who sent invitations  
239 for fundraisers, updated events on Facebook, and planned all Friends tours and trips. According  
240 to Margaret, “the development office does a yeoman’s job for us!”

241 All of the collections and museums relied on a mix of financial support from the  
242 university, college, department, donations, endowments, and grants. Several of the participants  
243 (n=5) mentioned that they were not allowed to seek financial support from individual or  
244 corporate donors, as this was the function of their university’s development foundation. The  
245 Institute of Museum and Library Services and Costume Society of America were mentioned as  
246 viable sources of possible grant funding. The participants that acquired grants included both  
247 small and large facilities, yet they all had in common perseverance and dedication to regular  
248 grant writing as part of their responsibilities. Many participants stated even with backgrounds in

## University Historic Clothing Museums

249 fundraising, grant-writing courses and seminars, and assistance from grant officers at their  
250 universities, acquiring external grants was difficult. Roadblocks to successful grant writing  
251 included lack of time to properly dedicate to the grant writing process and ineligibility either due  
252 to their status (i.e., were not classified as museums by their universities), or their needs did not  
253 meet the criteria of the grant agencies (i.e., the museums needed graduate assistance for  
254 cataloging and data entry and the grants did not allow funding for salaries or hourly pay).

### 255 *Importance of Collection*

256 All of the participants (n=14) described the valuable teaching, research, and outreach  
257 opportunities their collections provided to their academic department, university, and  
258 community. Tracy viewed the museum as representative of the tripartite land grant mission – it  
259 provided opportunities for students to view garments that they learned about in their historic  
260 dress courses, it allowed faculty and students opportunities to gain and share knowledge through  
261 material culture research, and it created an important service opportunity through educational  
262 programming and the website that made the museum available to a world-wide audience. The  
263 participants that taught courses routinely brought garments into their classes; Tracy specifically  
264 mentioned the positive educational outcomes of having students examine first-hand the styles,  
265 design details, and silhouettes of garments in the history of fashion and design courses. She  
266 believed the use of garments in her courses added to students' enjoyment as well as learning and  
267 helped keep enrollment fully subscribed, thus contributing student credit hours and  
268 supplementary fees to the department budget. The collections and museums were valued because  
269 of their role in recruiting new undergraduate, graduate students, and faculty to the academic  
270 departments. Camille stated the museum also acted “as a resource to expand course offerings, to

## University Historic Clothing Museums

271 help build the reputation of the department through research, and as an important high-visibility  
272 link to the department.”

273           Scholarship related to the collection and shared at peer-reviewed conference  
274 presentations and in peer-reviewed journal articles were cited as the most important outcomes for  
275 promotion and tenure purposes. Other scholarship related to the museums, such as its use in  
276 innovative teaching and exhibit curation was viewed as providing ancillary support for  
277 promotion and tenure. Gabrielle stated her collection “is a rare scholarly resource for  
278 clothing/textiles/material culture that can be utilized for research across several disciplines: arts,  
279 humanities, social and physical sciences.” She cautioned, however, that not many scholars are  
280 familiar with how to use three-dimensional objects as “documents” in their research and this  
281 necessitated careful training and education efforts on her part. Steele (1998) contended that many  
282 academics and even many fashion historians spend little or no time examining actual garments,  
283 preferring to rely exclusively on written and visual sources. Yet, object-based research can  
284 provide unique insights into the historic and aesthetic developments of fashion. Collection  
285 managers and curators may consider developing “how to” research guides for examining  
286 material culture for scholars interested, yet not familiar with this line of inquiry.

287           Community outreach was viewed as one of the most important aspects of the collections  
288 by the participants. Andrea, curator at a large land grant university stated, “The collection gives  
289 the department visibility in the community. It documents the history of the university, state and  
290 region, and it serves as a window to the international community through its collection of  
291 international dress.” Andrea further stated that the collection “gets me out into the community  
292 meeting prospective donors, giving programs across the state, and collaborating with museum  
293 professionals in the city, state, and world.” Tracy’s university museum regularly hosted school

## University Historic Clothing Museums

294 and church groups from the region as well as providing commentary on the history of dress on  
295 the local public radio station. The completion of community presentations often resulted in  
296 increased donations of artifacts and financial support to the collection as well as public relation  
297 opportunities to bring attention to the department and college within the university setting.

### 298 *Professional Benefits*

299 Professional benefits cited by the informants included the satisfaction of preserving state  
300 and local history, introducing the museum and its holdings to the community, educating citizens  
301 of the state regarding textile and historic clothing preservation, and collaborating with museum  
302 professionals in the city, state, and world. Several participants mentioned the opportunity to  
303 travel to research sites and the satisfaction gained from expertise in a particular area. Suzanne  
304 proudly stated, “There is always something to learn and actually looking at the garments  
305 provides the best perspective for doing so.” Participants stated that museum curatorship provided  
306 them with recognition as professionals within the textile, clothing history, and conservation  
307 communities. Dana commented, “Every time I tell someone that I work at the textile collection,  
308 they’re always like ‘whoa.’ It’s kind of a nice place that everybody seems really interested in and  
309 they all want to learn more about it.” She also stated that with a small staff of two people, “it is  
310 nice to be able to get involved in so many different aspects of the collection and get to do all of  
311 these different tasks. It kind of gives you a more holistic view of how this will work with this.  
312 Instead of just everybody having their own little thing and that is all they do.” Melissa  
313 exclaimed, “I like being ‘the curator,’ the big fish in a little pond!”

314 The creativity necessary to research material culture for publications, presentations, and  
315 exhibits was an often cited professional benefit of museum work. Gabrielle stated, “It is  
316 personally very fulfilling because it is amazing to have an idea...and work towards the goal of



## University Historic Clothing Museums

317 presenting the idea to the public, whether it is an exhibition, working on a catalogue, or working  
318 on a presentation.” Tracy loved how information learned through curation of exhibits was  
319 infused into courses and how students often commented to her “how lucky they were” to have  
320 the collection and exhibits to learn from as part of their undergraduate career.

### 321 *Challenges*

322         Several of the participants referred to their collection and museum work as “a labor of  
323 love.” A lack of money was the problem cited by every participant in the study. Cynthia  
324 succinctly stated, “There is no money and there is no support.” Alice commented, “Money,  
325 money, money- always a challenge.” Because of extreme budget cuts, one collection manager’s  
326 sole help, an undergraduate student worker paid 12 hours per week, had her position eliminated.  
327 The faculty member was so desperate for help; she considered paying the student worker herself  
328 if funding through the department was not available. The cutting of extension workers at two  
329 universities added to the collection managers’ tasks at these institutions. Melissa stated, “The  
330 University used to have a much larger extension service....I get questions about, ‘how do I wash  
331 my sneakers.’ I don’t have any filter for that, so I answer my phone a lot less than I used to. You  
332 get to the point, where you get to the fifth call and you just stop picking up the phone.” Melissa  
333 also spoke of how lack of funding impacted her museum. Due to the lack of funding for a new  
334 building, the textile center, “is sometimes spoken of, sometimes not spoken of, there is a huge  
335 lack of clarity not only in terms of timing and focus, but also scope and mission.” Dana  
336 commented due to budget cuts:

337         The upheaval of it all, the environment at the whole school, everybody is on edge, and  
338 everybody is fighting for what they need because everyone is getting their resources  
339 reduced and you’re all getting shoved in these tiny little spaces and it’s not ideal for  
340 anybody and it’s hard to kind of keep moving forward if it seems like all of these  
341 resources are being taken away and everyone is fighting over the little bit that there is.

342 But, it's temporary. I figure working with collections, I am always going to be in a  
343 windowless office.

344  
345 Time constraints were consistently mentioned, both with regards to the need for  
346 balancing other responsibilities, particularly for faculty members, and the amount of clerical  
347 work necessitated by the collection. Lisa, a professor, mentioned the difficulty of providing  
348 adequate time to the collection. She stated, "I am working 65 to 80 hours a week and my focus is  
349 supposed to be research, so I have little time for the collection." Since her university  
350 administrators seemed to value only high quality, peer-reviewed journal articles with impact  
351 factors, she perceived little appreciation for her collection-related work. Melissa stated, "I would  
352 just love an hour to do some research. It is heavily administrative and programming, and that's a  
353 great disappointment." This comment was echoed by Gabrielle who complained there was "too-  
354 much multi-tasking." Other curators mentioned the complexity of planning exhibits. Ruth stated,  
355 "There is never enough time. Exhibits involve more than just selecting objects and picking a  
356 theme. Objects need to be dressed, researched, photographed, didactic material written and  
357 printed, and then publicity materials created and forwarded to appropriate news outlets. Getting  
358 everything done on time, let alone ahead of time can be challenging." Deidra optimistically  
359 commented, "My time is broadly spread in a small department. However, I wouldn't have it any  
360 other way. I enjoy this work!"

361 Lack of support from upper administration and fellow faculty members, in regards to  
362 financial support and basic understanding of the importance of the faculty members' and historic  
363 dress collections, was another consistently mentioned challenge. Alice stated, "The collection  
364 remains under-appreciated within the larger university. As dollars dry up, the collections  
365 manager position remains part-time and at the grace of the dean of the college." Gabrielle  
366 commented on the constancy of having to "educate academic administrators who do not

## University Historic Clothing Museums

367 understand the value of museum artifacts in an educational institution.” Melissa believed  
368 university administrators perceived material culture research as less “important” than other fields  
369 even within the apparel program and thus “I feel as a poor step child, very strongly that we are  
370 trotted out for display purposes.” Suzanne complained, “Administration has no idea why, for  
371 example, a student can not do my job.” Several curators mentioned perceived jealousy from  
372 colleagues over the amount of space and attention the collection garnered; another curator  
373 commented on the general disinterest from her peers evidenced by lack of attendance at exhibit  
374 openings and other museum related events. Deidra wished that fellow faculty members utilized  
375 the historic collections more, yet understood that the collection was often considered her  
376 “domain” since she was the instructor of the historic dress courses.

377         Several collection managers/curators mentioned the careful balancing act their jobs  
378 required. Andrea stated, “It is a huge responsibility taking care of people’s objects and memories  
379 yet representing the needs and limitations of the collection and university. It always requires  
380 explanation and education when dealing with students, faculty, and community members to let  
381 them know the value of a museum, of clothing as history, and of protecting the objects so people  
382 in the future can enjoy them.” Suzanne stated, “Juggling the desire to please an important donor  
383 with the reality of the lack of space and time. I’m pressured to be three things, a fashion  
384 collection, a history of the college, and a history of the geographic area. We just can’t be all  
385 things to all people. So, when I am with the chair of the department and I say, shouldn’t we just  
386 be a fashion collection, and she says yes, but there’s a little old lady donor who graduated from  
387 the college and she just can not be refused. So it is a huge problem.”

388         Three of the participants mentioned the challenge of “branding” their facilities. Tracy  
389 commented that her university included both an art and historic clothing museum; the galleries

## University Historic Clothing Museums

390 were even located within the same building. These facilities were constantly being confused by  
391 faculty, students, and community members. Since the university art museum had a longer history  
392 in the community, creating an identity for the textiles and clothing museum was problematic.

### 393 *Innovative Strategies*

394         Despite the real as well as perceived challenges experienced by the curators and  
395 collection managers in this study, many cited innovative strategies to ease the stress of their  
396 multiple responsibilities as well as bringing needed financial and community support. Deidra, a  
397 collection manager who teaches the historic costume courses, requires students in her class to  
398 spend one hour per week in the collection. Students earn participation points by vacuuming a  
399 certain number of boxes of artifacts per week and are assigned to work in teams to use collection  
400 contents to prepare mini exhibits in the decades of the late 19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Deidra  
401 stated, “This is quite a production, but they really enjoy it, and they begin to understand the  
402 importance of maintaining a collection. My goal is to get the artifacts vacuumed and also to  
403 encourage students to volunteer in the future to help local museums.” Margaret described a  
404 documentation project in which students in the class use primary and secondary sources to  
405 describe and interpret an object from the collection. She found that this hands-on project makes  
406 the students realize, “it’s not just a costume in the collection; it is their costume. And these  
407 students often become wonderful donors, not only of costume, but also of financial support.”

408         Several curators/collections managers mentioned the importance of undergraduate work-  
409 study students, independent-study students, and honors students in the completion of both day-  
410 to-day tasks in the collection, such as re-housing shoe and hat collections and making padded  
411 hangers to more detailed work, such as researching information to provide background for future  
412 exhibits. Tracy commented on the dual benefits of having undergraduate students work in the

## University Historic Clothing Museums

413 collection. She stated, “The honors undergraduates who worked in our collection were  
414 immeasurably helpful; they researched, curated, installed, and provided educational talks for two  
415 of our exhibits. This freed up faculty from this time-consuming duty, but also provided the  
416 students an incredible hands-on experience. Two students are considering graduate studies in our  
417 field, largely due to their work with our collections.”

418 Exhibit collaborations were also discussed by the informants. At Tracy’s university, the  
419 first and second place winners of the student fashion show were displayed over the summer  
420 months in the museum gallery space. This exhibit had multiple benefits. Exhibit attendees were  
421 able to see the garments in greater detail than when they were shown on the runway, student  
422 curation of the exhibit provided an opportunity for student engagement with museum practices  
423 (and lessened faculty responsibility to curate), and cross-promotion helped publicize both the  
424 fashion show and museum space. Other informants mentioned the importance of guest curators  
425 including graduate students, faculty from different departments at their university, and faculty  
426 from other institutions as providing valuable ideas and new viewpoints to their exhibits. Tracy  
427 commented a future exhibit would be the results of a competition in which fashion designers,  
428 both professionals and students were asked to redesign an object such as a paisley shawl from the  
429 collection. Other ideas for cross-collaboration included utilization of internal grants such as the  
430 “Big 12 Faculty Fellowship Program” that provided opportunities for faculty within the Big 12  
431 Athletic Conference to travel to visit faculty at member institutions to exchange research ideas.

432 Due to limited funding from the university and very limited staff, many of the informants  
433 developed innovative ways to earn money to support their collections and museums. Several of  
434 the informants used funds derived from de-accessioned items in the collection as well as auctions  
435 to help fund their collections. Margaret’s university sold de-accessioned items from the

## University Historic Clothing Museums

436 collection through an online seller. Suzanne held a “vintage fashion sale” each year right before  
437 Halloween with de-accessioned items. Alice also mentioned that the department’s yearly fashion  
438 show raised money to partially support the collection. One fundraiser in particular was held at a  
439 historic home. Community members were invited to the event, where there was a cash bar and  
440 silent auction. On the invitations, an extra line for additional donations was provided. Other  
441 innovative ideas included charging money for tours that were provided during closed hours with  
442 donated money applied to a costume acquisition fund. Dana commented that each donor of a  
443 textile or garment is informed of the extensive amount of time and resources that it takes to  
444 properly preserve their objects. A monetary gift amount of \$200 to help off-set these costs is  
445 suggested at the time of the donation.

446         To provide additional support for the museum/collection, several collection managers  
447 mentioned the importance of partnerships. Four of the participants commented on partnerships  
448 with their libraries, both in the lending of objects and documentation for display and as a way to  
449 raise the visibility of both entities on campus. Other participants mentioned partnerships with  
450 businesses. With funding from an internal university grant and a donation from the conservation  
451 company Gaylord, Dana developed a free conservation workshop for community members. She  
452 developed a PowerPoint and then provided examples of materials such as acid free tissue used to  
453 preserve historic pieces such as wedding dresses. Donated quilt boxes were given away to  
454 participants through a drawing. This program was considered so successful, that Dana will  
455 institute it each year. Tracy spoke of collaborations between the museum and the undergraduate  
456 graphic design program. Students in graphic design classes enrolled in independent study credits  
457 in the apparel program and developed promotional and didactic signage for selected exhibits.



481 and museums. Collaborations with students and guest curators allowed another means of saving  
482 faculty time and providing another viewpoint for the curation of exhibits.

483         The authors of this study suggest collections managers and curators consider creating  
484 governance documents/collection manuals. Each time something new happens or something  
485 rarely experienced occurs, the collection manager/curator has to create a new process and/or  
486 form or try to remember "what did I do last time?" This suggests a lack of consistency in  
487 working with the collection. It also suggests a lack of commitment from the person in charge of  
488 the collection and the program. A collection manual/governance document is something that can  
489 be used to convince department, college, and university administration of the professionalism of  
490 the collection and the manager/curator. In addition, with changes in staff, new procedures do not  
491 have to be invented and forms developed. It means that standard procedures are documented and  
492 forms are available so that new staff can continue with consistent practices and not waste time or  
493 lose momentum with their professional development and use of the collection.

494         Participants interviewed for this study included both faculty and staff classifications. It  
495 seems that the most appropriate classification depends on the institution, the promotion and  
496 tenure document, the individual(s) working with the collection, and their other commitments (on  
497 campus and elsewhere). Staff classification seems to have several advantages, it does not affect  
498 promotion and tenure or productivity expectations, and time allocated to the collection could be  
499 identified in the position description. Cons of staff classifications include major decisions may  
500 need to be approved by faculty or administration. A faculty classification may include more  
501 autonomy in working with the collection and scholarly work related to the collection is more  
502 likely to be shared beyond campus at professional meetings and in publications. Cons associated  
503 with a faculty position working with the collection include the time consuming commitment that



## University Historic Clothing Museums

504 may adversely impact promotion and tenure and productivity expectations and collection work is  
505 often unappreciated by administrators as “important.”

506         This study sought to provide information on current and best practices of historic textile  
507 and dress collections and museums in the United States. Increased collaboration and  
508 communication by curators and collections managers is necessary to provide support as well as  
509 the sharing of additional strategies for best practices. It is suggested that curators and collection  
510 managers seek out one another at conferences such as Costume Society of America (CSA) and  
511 International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) to share information. A webpage on the  
512 CSA and ITAA websites could be developed to encourage collaborations among departments  
513 with collections. People could post ideas regarding exhibits or grant possibilities. An "expert" list  
514 could be developed as a resource for others to contact for help. This list could include individuals  
515 who have successfully developed friends groups, individuals who have successfully written  
516 internal or external grants, and individuals who have experience in mounting exhibits or  
517 preparing exhibits to travel to other museums. The page could include a checklist related to  
518 planning and mounting exhibits, a list of upcoming exhibits at each institution to see if others  
519 want to borrow or rent the exhibit (working out details related to shipping, and so forth would  
520 have to be undertaken by the institutions involved), ideas as to how to share exhibits with others  
521 (like virtual exhibits), and educational ideas including how to use an exhibit to enhance student  
522 and public education and interest. Just as the design group often sets aside time to meet at ITAA,  
523 collection managers and curators could schedule a time to meet during ITAA's annual meeting.

524         Due to the small sample size and response rate of this study, future researchers may wish  
525 to interview additional curators and collection managers at land-grant institutions as well as other  
526 types of schools such as community colleges and private and public colleges and universities.

## University Historic Clothing Museums

527 This additional research will further the knowledge and understanding of the ways in which  
528 collections and museums impact faculty and students' academic lives.

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