

Partners in showcasing history: Activating the land-grant engagement mission through collaborative exhibits

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Abstract

The land-grant university in the United States holds a special role in higher education, enacting the ideals of public education, scientific research and direct engagement with the citizens of the state. In this article, three curators from a land-grant university discuss how their exhibit curation work fulfills these ideals through three case studies on exhibit collaborations. By examining lessons learned from their collaborations with students and faculty, campus organizations and community groups, the authors offer suggestions for navigating exhibit partnerships and planning for future collaborations.

Keywords

academic libraries, library exhibitions, partnerships

Introduction

The land-grant university in the United States holds a special role in the nation's higher education environment. The original land-grant vision encompassed ideals of public education, scientific research and direct engagement with the citizens of the state (Oregon State University, 2019). Oregon State University (OSU) was established in 1868 as Oregon's land-grant university and is now one of only two land-, space-, sun- and sea-grant universities in the United States. OSU is located in Corvallis, a college town of about 58,000 people in central western Oregon, United States. While the university's main campus is in Corvallis, two other campuses are located on the Oregon

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coast and central Oregon; in addition, the university has a growing online e-campus program. The largest university in the state, OSU has over 30,000 enrolled students. The Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC) at OSU engages with the university's outreach mission by offering wide-ranging opportunities for the public to critically interact with historical collections and unique primary sources, including the co-curation of exhibits with diverse partners. SCARC collects in six main areas: the History of OSU, the History of Science, Natural Resources, Multiculturalism in Oregon, Hops and Brewing History and Rare Books. We also administer the university's records management program and are home to a robust oral history program. In our roles as collection curators, we develop and maintain relationships with a wide variety of students, institutional entities and community members, actively connecting people and collections. Partnerships are fundamental to our work as exhibit curators, taking on many forms depending on the intended outcomes, audiences or format of an exhibit. In our outreach work, which we define as direct engagement with citizens, curation is not limited to selection and contextualization activities. As a result of our work, scholars, citizens and students can connect with their communities as they discover, use and interpret collection materials.

In this article, three of SCARC's curators – Anne Bahde, Curator of History of Science and Rare Books, Tiah Edmunson-Morton, Outreach and Instruction Archivist, Curator of the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archives, and Natalia Fernández, Curator of the Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA) and OSU Queer Archives – will share case studies describing our experiences with exhibit co-curation and partnership. These case studies are representative examples of our partnerships with faculty and students, campus advisory groups, and community organizations. Our case studies will explore the full range of exhibit activities, including details on partnership goals and purpose, materials selection, related outreach and events, enduring exhibit products and ongoing impact. Particular emphasis will be given to navigating the challenges of partnerships and ways to learn from those experiences for future collaborations.

Literature review

Within the professional literature, special collections librarians and archivists, especially in a university setting, have written about their experiences curating exhibits with a variety of collaborators. The reasons they cite for curating exhibits range from the goal to engage with the public to promote collections, attract new users, inspire research projects, drive donor support, promote themselves as producers of research and not just collectors and to educate the public by providing context for archival materials (Brannock, 2009: 32; Chen et al., 2015: 63, 70; Keith et al., 2017: 392; Shankweiler and Seguin, 2018: 306). In addition, many specifically note the experiential learning opportunities exhibit curation can offer undergraduate and graduate students to develop their research skills sets (Prendergast and Totleben, 2018: 134, 138, 149; Sand et al., 2017: 12; Swanick et al., 2015: 19). Not surprisingly, the intended audiences for a university special collections exhibit include students, faculty and researchers, as well as the broader community of local residents and visitors (Brannock, 2009: 32;

Rakityanskaya and Rukhelman, 2018: 202). As Swanick et al. state, '[t]he concept of libraries using exhibitions as a way to showcase their collections and to appeal to the larger community is hardly new' (2015: 3) and this is especially true for the land-grant university whose vision is to serve the people of its state. In fact, many authors express the importance of connecting their exhibit curation work and partnerships with institutional missions, strategic plans and administrative initiatives (Baron and Swan, 2016: 114; Chen et al., 2015: 63, 77; Harris and Weller, 2012: 295; Shankweiler and Seguin, 2018: 308; Taylor, 2018: 128). Swanick et al. specifically reference the missions of academic libraries and write 'exhibitions are an important means of communicating the library's role in the cultural identity of an institution' and are '[i]ntegral to the various aims of numerous academic libraries [with] an emphasis on outreach and collaboration with the community' (2015: 4, 9). For a land-grant university's cultural identity, that emphasis on collaboration with the community is of utmost significance.

There are both benefits and challenges to the collaborative curation of exhibits, but ultimately, within the literature there is a consistent emphasis on the benefit of ensuring the afterlife of a physical exhibit in order for the exhibit content to reach beyond its initial audience. Collaboration benefits tie in to the purpose and audience of an exhibit, with a strong emphasis on relationship building with collaborators, both personal and institutional, especially other library departments, faculty, university programs and community members (Rakityanskaya and Rukhelman, 2018: 202; Sand et al., 2017: 14). As Taylor notes, '[e]ven after an exhibit has ended, it is likely the people it brought together will continue to seek each other out well into the future' (2018: 129), potentially leading to more collaborative endeavors. However, collaborative exhibit curation relationships pose challenges. While some challenges, such as limited gallery and exhibit space, the need to narrow scope, set timelines, lack of staffing and barriers to successful promotion may be a part of the exhibit curation experience regardless of a collaboration, they may be amplified within a co-curated exhibit (Brannock, 2009: 34; Chen et al., 2015: 67; Prendergast and Totleben, 2018: 143; Rakityanskaya and Rukhelman, 2018: 204–205). In their article describing their collaborative process, Baron and Swan (2016: 117–119) discuss the challenges exhibit collaborations may bring; these challenges include balancing the desire to be inclusive with the reality of needing an exhibit lead and project manager, developing a shared vision for the exhibit and deadlines with lack of follow through on the part of collaborators meaning more work for the librarians. And yet, despite these challenges, collaborative exhibit curation is strongly encouraged, because in addition to benefits for the collaborators and exhibit audience, there are benefits to the special collections librarians themselves, including opportunities to 'diversify portfolios [and] unleash hidden talents' (Swanick et al., 2015: 9). Taylor poses the question, 'If you curated a major library exhibition and no one came to see it, would you have wasted your time?' (2018: 121) with the answer being a resounding no. The numerous benefits to librarians include the improvement of writing skills, the ability to showcase exhibit materials on social media and the possibility of using exhibit content to update collection information (Taylor, 2018: 125–127). Additionally, the types of benefits that extend beyond the collaborative experience are greatly enhanced when the content of a physical exhibit is available online. In various case studies, the authors describe the

importance of an exhibit's afterlife, expressing the desire to provide permanent access to learning opportunities for the public by extending an exhibit's reach to the broader university community and beyond to 'enhance the academic library's impact both within and outside of its home campus' (Chen et al., 2015: 63; see also Prendergast and Totleben, 2018: 146; Shankweiler and Seguin, 2018: 310; Taylor, 2018: 125). It is exactly this kind of extended outreach that supports the mission of a land-grant university to serve not only its campus community but also the broader communities of the state, nation, and beyond.

About our exhibit program and space

Exhibits occupy an important role in SCARC, enacting our mission of engagement with the broader Oregon citizenry. They allow visitors to explore the breadth of our cultural heritage work, showcasing our collection development efforts as well as collection concentrations and overlaps. We mount two or three exhibits per year, striving to use exhibits to direct other instruction and outreach work. Past exhibits include 'Manuscripts to Molecules: The Four Signature Collecting Areas of SCARC', 'The Rural World', 'The Art of Beer: What's on the Outside' and 'Beautiful Science, Useful Art: Data Visualization through History' (Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, 2012, 2014, 2015).

Our exhibit gallery is a stimulating but challenging space. Two large, 20 ft × 7 ft × 2 ft, cases were custom-built into facing walls of the gallery space. These cases are accessed from the front through glass doors, whose steel frames visually divide each case into seven sections. The actual cases themselves have a wooden floor about 4 ft from the gallery floor and have no internal shelves or dividers. We use risers, mounts and various supports on the case floor to create visual variety and facilitate materials placement. The back wall of the case is upholstered to allow pinning of material onto the wall, and for the blank space above the display area, we create a visually attractive 'wallpaper' using exhibit images or related graphics. At the top of the walls of the gallery are windows; this creates an airy feel but poses a preservation challenge when sunlight streams through these windows and directly onto the exhibit case glass. The case glass is protected by ultraviolet-resistant film, which helps with light and heat issues. The cases each have two electrical outlets inside, which facilitates the use of audiovisual and interactive elements in exhibits, such as videos and iPads. A gallery bench faces each case, inviting visitors to pause in the space.

The exhibit space is a visitor's first interaction with the department, welcoming them as they pass through to get into the reading room. While this integration of our materials with public services functions is desirable, it does mean that the gallery is not accessible during hours SCARC is closed, which poses a challenge to our access mission.

Case studies

Case study 1: Partnership with faculty and graduate students

The History of Science collections at Oregon State have long enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the History of Science graduate program. In recent years, this

relationship has strengthened further, as the SCARC not only supports graduate research with our collections but also provides numerous educational opportunities for graduate students in the form of student assistantships, guided for-credit internships and other ‘studio’ classes, and referrals to remote researchers needing to employ onsite proxy researchers for intensive consultation of collections. History of Science graduate students working for SCARC learn crucial skills for success in their field. Student writers for our popular Pauling Blog develop important expertise in writing about science for a public audience; other student assistants and interns learn archival research methods and practice critical thinking skills while interacting with the collections for various projects. The present project sought to capitalize on those existing connections between the programs, deepen relationships and develop similar skills in the context of exhibit curation.

The nuclear history collections in SCARC broadly document the history of the nuclear age. Among the dozens of archival and manuscript collections are the papers and records of pronuclear advocates, Manhattan Project scientists, nuclear treaty negotiators, bomb test journalists, the campus Radiation Center and antinuclear activist organizations (Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center, 2018). Along with thousands of published books, serials and reports, a sizable collection of ephemera and artifacts and additional photographic, audio and film materials makes the combined collections a major resource for research on the political, scientific, economic, technological and social issues that have characterized the nuclear age. The collection takes no stance or particular emphasis and has been developed to represent the wide range of human perspectives on a number of nuclear issues; the collecting scope is intentionally broad and reflects the local and regional diversity of opinions on these matters. This has resulted in a collection which comprehensively documents early scientific discoveries, the Manhattan Project; the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States in World War II; military aspects of atomic energy, civil defense, nuclear testing, nuclear engineering, the effect of the nuclear era on society and culture; and even fiction, poetry, drama and music related to the atomic age. A cornerstone collection in SCARC, the Ava Helen and Linus Pauling Papers, details the couple’s 40 years of antinuclear activism in a massive trove of correspondence, ephemera, published material and more.

In other words, the collection was suited to a broad review of the nuclear age to honor and observe the defining event of that age, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. As the 70th anniversary approached, Bahde envisioned an exhibit that would showcase the breadth and depth of the collections while critically interpreting a wide variety of different types of sources and saw the potential for a unique, rich learning experience for graduate students in the History of Science program. In August 2014, 1 year before the observance, Bahde approached the graduate coordinator Professor Jacob Hamblin to discuss the idea of graduate student participation in an exhibit, suggesting that practicing the act of curation would allow opportunities to build research confidence, explore the collections for their own knowledge and research gains and develop advanced research skills such as how to do a ‘deep dive’ into a broad subject collection. Hamblin noted that the partnership advanced several of the History of Science

program goals and would give students important exposure to ‘alt-ac’ (or alternative-to-academia) career options, urging them to consider their own goals in pursuing graduate study. Together, they developed a plan and timeline for student involvement.

As lead curators, Hamblin and Bahde selected six topical areas to frame the exhibit and guide our work: Weapons, Science, Nations, Power, Environment and Futures. Over the fall quarter of the academic year, Bahde prepared research guides and identified potential collections and collection series to mine for exhibit content. Bahde also compiled resources for curation activities, including materials on selection parameters, space restrictions, collection features and gaps and design possibilities. Hamblin worked over the fall quarter to identify potential interested students, while Bahde worked with him to develop a funding proposal to submit to Library Administration requesting support for outreach events and the production of a short catalogue of the exhibit. Late in the fall quarter, the finalized curation team met to prepare and chart actions for the next quarter.

The three graduate students selected for the curation team had individual research interests in nuclear history, including Leo Szilard’s work, waste disposal at the Hanford Site and international nuclear weapons treaties, and each chose topical areas to curate for the exhibit based on these interests. In the winter quarter, each student took a two-credit independent study course directed by Hamblin and Bahde, during which they would review preselected collections or sections of collections, narrow subthemes, choose selections for display and interpretation and write contextualizing text and item panels. In the 10-week quarter, the team met every week to discuss selections, potential areas of overlap and thorny curatorial issues.

These weekly meetings provided a graduate seminar-style atmosphere to dwell on questions that arise in the process of curating an exhibit for the public and to consider how these issues relate to and manifest in the work of the historian. When the curator has many ‘representative’ items to choose from, how does one define ‘representative?’ How does a curator concisely represent the complex issues surrounding, for example, nuclear waste disposal, at the exhibit-standard 12th-grade reading level? When does one stop reviewing material and start making selections, suspecting that that perfect item may yet be awaiting discovery in the collections and may not be uncovered in time? How does the curator ethically handle disturbing or sensitive imagery? What is the line between contextualization and interpretation, why is it there and when is it okay to cross it? How can one primary source show multiple messages? Each week these questions, and many more, gave the group a chance to workshop research solutions, link these issues to the scholarly work of the historian and think about how to use primary sources toward multiple goals in service to the public.

In the spring quarter, Bahde synthesized all selections and texts into final form, worked with a graphic designer and prepared items for exhibition and installation. The team came together twice during the spring to finalize the exhibit. Over the summer, Bahde prepared and arranged production of a short accompanying catalog reproducing the exhibit text and item lists to hand out to visitors. Installation occurred the first week of August 2015 and culminated with an August 6 observance and exhibit opening event. ‘The Nuclear Age: Seventy Years of Peril and Hope’ featured hundreds of items selected

and interpreted by the students in the six topical areas, covering a far-ranging set of subthemes such as industry and agriculture, secrecy and espionage, reactor development, uranium mining and prospecting, accidents and disasters, nuclear fallout and recent advances in nuclear technology.

To promote the exhibit, the team prepared a news release, advertised on campus radio and ran announcements in the local newspaper events section. At the opening event, the curatorial team led attendees on a tour, offering their reflections on the selection process and answering questions about collection items and themes. Hamblin read several moving passages from source material and some moments of silence were observed for the victims of the bombings.

A series of outreach events had been planned to occur over the months the exhibit was on display, including themed panel lectures and pop-up exhibits. However, an outreach opportunity was presented early in the planning process that was difficult to pass up. A campus activist with ties to an Oregon hibakusha (survivor of the atomic bombs) wished to bring this survivor for a public lecture. The curation team decided to use the funds that would have supported previously planned outreach events to co-sponsor Dr Hideko Tamura Snider's on-campus presentation in October, knowing that this one event could have more potential impact than the others combined. Over 200 undergraduates, high-school students and members of the public were riveted by Dr Snider's quiet, powerful story and call-to-action in a standing-room-only auditorium.

As the exhibit continued, and in lieu of further public outreach events, the curation team hosted tours for multiple groups, including a retirement association, a high-school class, an on-campus staff group and undergraduate classes from the History department and Peace Studies minor. The colorful exhibit catalog was a popular takeaway and some groups requested batches of copies to distribute; a second printing was done about halfway through the exhibit. SCARC often creates free-standing online exhibits in Omeka, or to support physical exhibits; however, an Omeka exhibit was not planned for this one due to lack of labor. This means, regrettably, that there is little lasting evidence or impact for the exhibit. However, this absence could spur further partnership between the programs. Creating an online version could be a new project for another crop of students, with potential for creating extensible and expanding item sets in Omeka for each subtheme, as new material is uncovered. Such a project would use this exhibit as the basis for creating an online resource with ongoing educational and research value.

Through this exhibit curation partnership, the bonds between the programs were strengthened, and new ones were forged that may lead to future partnerships, such as with OSU's Peace Studies program. SCARC strengthened its educational role in the History of Science program and represented the department as a laboratory for the program's students to gain valuable experience with and exposure to advanced archival research problems and solutions. The project also created new ways for the departments to advocate for each other's vision and mission to different audiences. Most importantly, through the collaboration on this exhibit, the two programs forged a working student curation model that can be easily adapted to other efforts or other on-campus departments.

Case study 2: Partnership with a campus organization

The initial idea for the 2018 'Women's Words/Women's Work' exhibit emerged from an Honors College class taught by two of SCARC's faculty members, but by the time the exhibit was installed, many other collaborators were involved and follow-up projects were planned.

In winter term 2018, Edmunson-Morton co-taught an Honors College class on oral history and women's experiences; the goal was to engage students with campus history through readings and discussions on cultural and social expectations, employment and enrollment issues, home economics and secretarial science curricula and the impact of Title IX on sports and education. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 is a federal law that states 'No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance'. Students also studied the complexities of recording personal stories. Edmunson-Morton wanted to share the class content with a larger audience, and in January 2018, the SCARC exhibits group decided to design a 'women at OSU' exhibit. The three curators knew this would be an intrinsically political exhibit, especially given the contemporaneous sexual harassment and assault allegations of the #metoo movement, but given the limitations of a physical case, they were more concerned with how to address the inevitable exclusion of individual women or the potentially shallow analysis of complex topics.

Concurrent to this early planning in SCARC was a meeting between the chair of the university's sesquicentennial commemoration committee (OSU 150), the two co-chairs for the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCOSW) and the University Librarian. The PCOSW actively works to advance a positive campus environment for all university women including students, staff, faculty and administrators; in addition to their traditional advocacy work, PCOSW had partnered with OSU 150 on a new awards celebration called 'Breaking Barriers: A Celebration of The Accomplishments and Impact of OSU Women'. They were interested in incorporating historical resources into the event and approached the University Librarian about an online gallery of '150 Notable OSU Women', which would include a photograph and brief biographical narrative on a range of influential women. In initial conversations, PCOSW committed to funding two student intern positions, one to work on the physical exhibit and another on the digital component. Edmunson-Morton was tapped to be the project manager and intern supervisor.

News of this potential project was shared in late January, and the exhibits team met to discuss ways current plans could shift to incorporate new stakeholders, new sources of funding for new team members, a new timeline and the additional online gallery end product. At that time, the team also produced and shared a list of potential future projects; this included research on other women and groups at OSU, oral histories, updates to the online exhibit based on research findings, full processing of the PCOSW archival collection and the potential acquisition of additional campus records. On one hand, it seemed like an excellent opportunity to deepen the relationship with PCOSW

and other campus groups, as well as take advantage of potential partner connections to deepen the documentation of women at OSU. Additionally, in 1992, SCARC became the repository for the PCOSW organizational records, so there was also potential for collection additions as a result of a collaboration. On the other hand, with so many people at so many levels involved, it was difficult for Edmunson-Morton to get clear and timely feedback on PCOSW's expectations for outcomes and deliverables. The 'simple' repurposed exhibit became more complicated, with a tight timeline for Edmunson-Morton to hire students and the exhibits team to research, design, write, code and install an expanded online exhibit by May and physical exhibit by June.

Very little moves quickly in academia, but there was plenty of work for the team to do in the short-term while funding details were decided. Although conversations were initiated in January and a proposal for two student positions was submitted in February, discussions about the total funding were delayed due to the PCOSW meeting dates and a final decision was not made until mid-March. At that time, rather than funding two student positions for spring term, PCOSW funded a single position for exhibits assistance. That provided money for a student to work 10 h for 8 weeks to review the Women's Center scrapbooks, conduct online research and review and transcribe quotes from oral histories and event recordings. Though the exhibits team continued working in the interim, this delay compressed an already tight timeline for hiring a student by April 1. Since there was a reduction in funding but not in scope expectations, the Library provided money to increase a part-time professional staff member from 32 h to 40 h in April and May. She helped with deeper research and created two supplemental research guides, one for collections used in designing the exhibit and another more general guide for researching women at OSU.

The additional staffing allowed one of the exhibit curators to shift his focus to the online exhibit. He also worked with a SCARC student to add newly indexed oral history interviews to the 'Voices of OSU Women' portal, which uses the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer and was designed as a platform for hosting interviews conducted by students in the 2018 oral history class.

The physical and online exhibits made extensive use of SCARC's manuscript, photograph, oral history collections and video content. Both were divided into six sections: Student Communities, Professional Communities, Academics, Administration, Athletics and the Built Environment. Photographs of people, buildings and activities were paired with quotes from oral histories that spoke to women's experiences on campus and in academic programs. Books, pamphlets, zines and even sewing sample books were added to the physical exhibit as artifacts to complement the words and images. Two audio/video listening stations were included: one played clips of interviews conducted with four OSU alumnae from four decades and the other a compilation video that showed various aspects of student and academic life from the 1930s to the 1960s. Although the exhibits team wanted the focus of the exhibit to be on the unfiltered words of women, there were also eight narrative panels, co-written by three members of the team, with factual information about people, places and dates. The online exhibit mirrored the structure of the physical exhibit; however, since physical space was not a consideration, all the images and quotes found during the research process were included.

As selection and design progressed, organizers for the May 2018 ‘Breaking Barriers’ celebration event requested photographs, exhibit fliers and stories to include in the ceremony, which two of the team members attended. The exhibit opened in June, but because many campus partners were absent for summer term, the exhibit reception was planned for the fall to coincide with National Archives Month. There was a short article about the exhibit in the library’s summer newsletter, which is mailed to all university faculty, and SCARC staff gave exhibit tours for campus visitors and students in classes.

The October exhibit opening was shared through email, Facebook and other SCARC social media outlets. In addition to the exhibit itself, Edmunson-Morton selected supplementary original archival materials for the opening, including a set of photographs and biographies of former librarians. Edmunson-Morton also gave a short talk about the exhibit. There were 40 people in attendance, including several women who were featured in the exhibit, students from the 2018 Honors College class and members of PCOSW. Although SCARC does not have a formal, quantifiable mechanism for assessing exhibits, there was a ‘feedback whiteboard’ at the opening with the questions ‘what did you like?’ and ‘what did you learn?’ There were two comments that were positive, but not transformative.

Beyond the positive reception at the May 2018 PCOSW event, there was little feedback from partners or stakeholders until promotion for the October 2018 reception. Although the exhibit had been up for 4 months and would only be up for 2 more, three women on campus wrote to express concern about programs or people who they felt were not adequately represented. To remedy this, Edmunson-Morton removed one of the video monitors and added additional content to the physical and online site before the opening event; unfortunately, the women did not attend the events to see these changes.

There were several unexpected outcomes from the exhibit that had a direct impact on student learning and engagement. Three student journalists contacted Edmunson-Morton for articles on the impacts of WWI on women at OSU, history of gender segregation in campus buildings and general exhibit content. Edmunson-Morton partnered with a student from the Women and Gender Center on a public event entitled ‘Picture This: Stories of Women at OSU’, which included a picture-based lecture with stories of women in Pharmacy, Secretarial Science, Botany, Seed Science, Food Science and Home Economics. Finally, Edmunson-Morton supervised two undergraduate interns to do additional post-exhibit work. The interns used personnel files and university publications such as yearbooks, course catalogs and alumni magazines to write biographies for 300 women who were employed as faculty or staff between 1910 and 1972. It is quite significant to have names and biographical details for clerical staff in any era.

Despite surprises related to scope and funding, this exhibit stands as an excellent example of how important flexibility and adaptability is for collaborative exhibit work. Additionally, positive ‘post exhibit’ outcomes such as internships for students and a permanent digital form of the exhibit are important when assessing the long-lasting impact of this work (Petersen and Edmunson-Morton, 2018).

Case study 3: Partnership with community organizations

In 2012, as curator of the OMA, Fernández began working with two performing arts organizations, Milagro Theatre and the Obo Addy Legacy Project (OALP), to document their histories by archiving their collections. The OMA was established in 2005 and is a part of SCARC. Its mission is to build relationships with Oregon's African American, Asian American, Latinx and Native American communities and, if they desire, to assist in preserving their histories and sharing their stories. Milagro is a Latino-based theatre company, and the OALP was a West African dance and music group; both organizations were established in Portland, Oregon, in the mid-1980s. Recognizing that performing arts organizations and archival repositories share the goal of outreach and engagement with communities and their missions to tell great stories, Fernández proposed that the collaboration included curating an exhibit featuring both Milagro and OALP. The collaboration first included acquiring and processing both organizations' archival collections, with the goal to curate an exhibit shortly thereafter.

Both Milagro and the OALP have rich and diverse histories. The mission of Milagro, co-founded in 1985 by executive and artistic directors José González and Dañel Malán, is to 'provide extraordinary Latino theatre, culture, and arts education experiences for the enrichment of all communities'. Milagro produces classical and contemporary performances, both Spanish and bilingual, through its main stage in Portland and 'Milagro Tour', a national touring group. Milagro strives to raise awareness and address significant issues of the Latinx community through partnerships with schools and social service organizations. The mission of the OALP was to 'offer authentic experiences with the music and dance of Ghana'. Obo and Susan Addy served as artistic and executive directors; they co-founded the group in 1986 as the 'Homowo African Arts and Cultures' organization. OALP worked to share the dance tradition of Ghana, West Africa, to increase cultural awareness and understanding through educational offerings, an annual festival and performing arts groups. Obo Addy was a Ghanaian master drummer who performed all over the world, wrote music and taught at the primary, secondary and college level. After Obo Addy passed away in 2012, Susan Addy and the OALP committed to continuing his legacy of creating, performing and teaching African arts. The OALP closed in 2018. Both Milagro and the OALP, while active, support and empower through their art the communities they represent.

The OMA's relationship with Milagro began in fall 2012 through a referral from an OSU colleague who had met José González; in early 2013, González introduced Fernández to Susan Addy. Both Milagro and the OALP decided to donate their organization's materials to the OMA. In Fernández's conversations with González and Addy, and after initially reviewing the organizations' materials, she knew that the content could make for a wonderful exhibit. In consultation with departmental colleagues regarding SCARC's exhibit schedule, Fernández included the idea of a joint exhibit featuring both organizations as part of the pitch to acquire the collections. After acquiring the collections, Fernández prioritized their arrangement and description. The two archival collections were initially processed and made available in early 2014. In 2019, the collection guides were updated to include additional materials and to reflect the 2018

closure of the OALP. While OMA archival student workers were processing the collections, Fernández asked them to note interesting and historically significant materials; concurrent with processing, Fernández talked to both González and Addy about her vision for the exhibit.

Because both organizations were established around the same time and gave voice to communities of color, it made sense to exhibit the two histories together; additionally, the co-founders knew each other. Since the SCARC exhibit space includes two large rectangular cases facing each other, each organization occupied a case. In the 3 months prior to the exhibit's debut in April 2014, Fernández borrowed instruments, textiles, props and costumes to supplement the archival content. She also ordered two viewing stations (a small television and headphones) where patrons could watch performance clips. She curated the textual information and images as a set of five large printed poster panels (30 × 40 in) for each group. She purposely designed the panels, mounted on foam core, so they would be easy to transport and set up on easels so both organizations could use the exhibit for future outreach and education events. Both sets of panels included an introductory panel with information about the organization and the OMA. The OALP panels featured the history of Obo Addy and Homowo African Arts and Cultures, the organization's performing groups Okropong and Kukrudu, the Homowo Festival and education and outreach activities. The Milagro panels included the theatre's history, information about the theatre space, creative programming and community outreach.

At the beginning of the curation process, Fernández shared her ideas with both executive directors and asked them how involved they wanted to be. Each had a different approach to involvement with the exhibit. Milagro wanted to be more directly included in the development of the panels, while the OALP was more interested in Fernández's selections and only wanted to give feedback once the panels were finished. As Fernández began drafting the panels, she sent them to González and Addy several times for review. She also worked closely with the SCARC graphic design student to develop panel colors, layout and an overall exhibit aesthetic. Because she intended to offer both groups the sets of panels, she made sure exhibit branding matched the organizations in color, font and logo use. She also curated the Milagro exhibit in both English and Spanish to reflect the organization's bilingualism.

To promote the exhibit, Fernández designed small fliers with information repurposed from the two introductory panels. These fliers did not contain exhibit specific information so they could also be used as general collection promotional materials. She titled the exhibit, 'Applause!' and installed it in early April; a small reception for the two groups to celebrate followed installation. Fernández did not publicize the event to the OSU and Corvallis area community to host a more private reception, but in retrospect would have invited the general public. Over the next several months, she promoted the exhibit and collections through Society of American Archivists' Archives and Archivists of Color and Performing Arts Roundtable newsletters and gave a presentation as part of the annual conference meeting of the Performing Arts Roundtable. The exhibit remained on view from April to September 2014.

Fernández wanted the exhibit content to be repurposed; both organizations took advantage of the opportunity. Milagro used the set of exhibit panels as part of its 30th

anniversary celebration in June 2014, and the OALP used them for an October 2014 concert. Both events were also fundraising opportunities. The panels offered an easy way to highlight history and community impact for attendees and donors.

Fernández also took advantage of other collaborative endeavors. In fall 2014, an OSU graduate student with an interest in digital book publishing approached her with the idea of collaborating on writing eBooks featuring the OALP and Milagro. The development process involved storyboarding, conducting research, drafting content and creating the design for each book. To fund the project, Fernández applied for a university grant to cover the costs of equipment, including three iPads, and student worker salaries. They used exhibit content in the storyboarding process because the panel topics easily translated into chapters and expanded sections with additional archival materials. Each eBook, available free of cost through the Apple iTunes store, features materials from the archival collections that include text and photos, as well as video and sound.

OSU also invited both organizations to perform on campus. Fernández partnered with campus organizations to co-sponsor performances by the two groups. She wanted to provide OALP and Milagro with opportunities to showcase their current productions and gain new audiences. Fernández collaborated with two of the university's cultural resource centers, the Lonnie B Harris Black Cultural Center (BCC) and the Centro Cultural César Chávez (CCCC) on promoting the project to the campus and local communities. The BCC co-hosted a panel discussion and *Cross-Cultural Rhythms* performance by the OALP for Black History Month in February 2015. The CCCC, in turn, co-hosted a workshop and performance of Milagro's touring production, *Searching for Aztlán*, as part of the campus' April celebration of Latinx heritage. The benefits were manifold. The exhibit panels were printed in small format to give away to attendees of both performances. Additionally, media specialist students filmed and edited these events to publish with the eBooks and added them to the archival collections.

Fernández's work is an excellent example of how archival processing can be married with exhibit work. Her work has strengthened relationships with the students she supervised on the projects, campus cultural groups and the two community organizations.

Discussion and lessons learned

Planning and developing partnerships

Each curator in each project gleaned lessons learned about the importance of clearly establishing roles, goals and expectations throughout the life cycle of the collaborative exhibits. Articulating goals and expectations helps detect inconsistencies in individual visions to create a shared vision where everyone knows the part they play. To accomplish this, the nature of a partnership should be fully scoped before proceeding on the mechanics of selection or opportunities for engagement. Similarly, establishing the role and authority scope of the exhibit lead is essential. When there are disparate stakeholders, it is crucial to determine authority for decision-making, whether that is a single person or a subgroup. At the point that decisions need to be made, an exhibit lead who does not have the authority to make decisions will cause delays and miscommunications.

If an entity is a financial or collection donor, they may have unanticipated expectations that can change the course of the exhibit; in other words, funding may mean unseen project expectations and may not always mean equal capacity for work. These case studies show a range of engagement; in some cases, the curator assumed a level of investment from collaborators that did not manifest, while in others the partner was clear from the outset about their expectations for involvement. It is important to make time at the beginning to thoroughly articulate who will be responsible for and involved in each stage of the project. Although partners may not be able or willing to participate in the physical creation of the exhibit, they can still have important roles to play in promotion. Further, when that partner is a campus organization, their connections at a local level can bring indispensable community attention to the exhibit.

In our land-grant environment, for many of our exhibits, including those outside the scope of the case studies, we found it was crucial to have clarity around expected exhibit audiences. Working at a land-grant university requires that we define our public audience broadly, selecting materials and writing content that will appeal to a wide swath of Oregon citizens. In collaborative projects, determining who the collaborator wants or needs to reach is an important facet of conceptualizing the exhibit. In instances where the partner had a narrower audience in mind, we found it necessary to adjust or expand expectations so we could also fulfill our larger mission. On the other hand, in instances where the partner did not express concerns regarding audience, we had to work to narrow our focus or target our marketing.

Finally, one vital consideration is capacity. When working with volunteers or students, it is crucial to balance the expectation of work with the intended product and the time needed to create an exhibit. Many partners are unaware of how much labor goes into producing an exhibit and, once they learn about the multiple stages of exhibit production, may find that the original idea should be scaled to match the available labor. Similarly, if a team is selected to produce the exhibit, the exhibit lead should have input on and direction over the makeup of that team. We have found that a lead curator usually has the most experience with exhibits involving archival materials and has a broader understanding of how various aptitudes can combine to achieve a successful exhibit.

Below are lessons learned from our experiences:

- Be clear about audience and work with partners to identify key communities.
- Funding does not always mean collaboration. Stakeholders may not be partners.
- At the beginning of the partnership, articulate roles, goals and expectations.
- Being a project lead without authority can be problematic in a project with multiple stakeholders and differing concepts of the final product. Each project needs someone steering the ship and their decisions need to be respected.

Production and mechanics

In many ways, sole curation is easier than partner or team curation, while working with others can be messy and challenging. However, since collaboration is central to the land-grant mission, incorporating multiple perspectives is a vital element of exhibit planning.

Good communication and project planning can make the mechanics of exhibit design and installation easier and more rewarding.

As mentioned above, clearly delineating roles and responsibilities for the entirety of the exhibit cycle is important. This includes research, selection, writing, review and feedback for content, design, installation, promotion and assessment. It can be difficult to determine exactly what will be needed when, but clearly articulating all the stages of the exhibit, explaining expectations for partner participation at various stages and discussing their influence over content and design can ameliorate confusion over who does what when.

For example, if the partner is not integrated into selection and writing, what influence should, or can, they have over the final product? At what point in the process can feedback be incorporated into design or message? If a partner lives in a different city, can they be involved in materials selection or physical preparation? If there are multiple members of an exhibit team working on separate facets, can there be consistency in voice or depth of research? Because installation is a part of the curation process and physical space limitations may necessitate cutting items or rewriting text, how can communication about the expectations for the process circumvent hurt feelings if someone feels their work was cut?

Below are lessons learned from our experiences:

- The people making the selections, people doing the writing and people funding the project need to have the same timeline and outcomes.
- Be clear about the myriad of opportunities for support and involvement.
- Confirm the scope of the partner investment and make sure it matches 'compensation'.
- Be sure partners have something to 'own', something that is their responsibility; obligation can mean involvement and inclusion can mean investment.
- Always have a backup plan for collaborator underperformance. Prepare for partners to have shifting priorities.
- Prepare for norming of 'voice' and accept it will take time to make a collaboratively curated exhibit cohesive.

Extending exhibit life

In the midst of planning for selection, design, and installation, it can be difficult, but necessary, to consider the 'afterlife' of an exhibit. Sometimes this is determined by the needs of the department or desired outcomes of the exhibit partner, but again communication about expectations and shared authority is key.

Engagement is fundamental to the land-grant mission, which says that research needs to be shared, collaboration is expected, and outreach is seen as a part of the public good. This can be an exciting way to connect and reconnect with patrons, as well as to have new partners, new opportunities and potential for new collections. At the same time, while archivists at land-grant universities try to be accommodating despite concurrent projects, their connection with collections and interest in new partnerships may not translate to the authority or decision-making power needed to host events, successfully implement post-exhibit online projects or assign work to department support staff.

Beyond the physical exhibit, there are many opportunities for varied audiences to engage with exhibit content. This includes outreach to campus and community groups, individual tours, exhibit openings or other related events, brochures and promotional materials, student research projects and exhibit-based instruction sessions. Further, considering the ‘after’ of an exhibit also includes thinking about how the intellectual content will be accessed after de-installation. This could be an online version of the exhibit or online research guide for future research projects. When taken together, an internship focused on biographies of people in an exhibit, exhibit research that led to newly processed collections, LibGuides on exhibit topics represented or engagement with new groups on social media all make a compelling story on the ways the exhibit impacted the lives of those in the land-grant community.

However, while collaborating with a person or group outside of the department can connect disparate audiences, it can also be logistically challenging. Who has the authority to make decisions about exhibit reuse? Who decides what type of ‘afterlife’ is suited to the exhibit? Who is at the table when discussing the methods for ensuring an exhibit has a continuing impact? Who has the skills to evaluate the exhibit?

Below are lessons learned from our experiences:

- Build in time for reflection, gathering statistics and processing feedback.
- Define goals and outcomes early, be reasonable about impact and be creative about assessment.
- Talk with IT staff and learn more about online tools to gather online exhibit data.
- Be open to unexpected projects and think broadly about ‘packages’ of impact.
- Share and promote exhibits with stakeholders beyond those involved in the exhibit. Do not assume others will share your exhibit. Be aware that there is not always communication between allied groups.
- Know that while you cannot always please everyone, if unsolicited constructive criticism is offered, consider what changes can be made based on your capacity and feel confident to respectfully disagree and not make any changes.

Assessment

One challenge we have faced is assessing the impact of our exhibits in a meaningful way. Assessment of outreach and engagement is a library-wide challenge, and all curators in SCARC have grappled with fundamental questions that are not unique to a special collections environment. These include questions about the purpose, audience and stakeholders for assessment data, as well as the impact data would have on practice. In other words, we need to ask who wants to know about impact of our exhibits and would that change our curation, design or promotion?

Due to our physical exhibit area setup, numerical data from a gate count are not feasible, and unless there is an event related to the exhibit, there has not been a targeted assessment of user experience and satisfaction. Instead, we have gathered anecdotal responses, conducted informal self-assessment among colleagues and gathered feedback from exhibit partners. Another important qualitative assessment strategy has been

repeated engagement with partners: the PCOSW used the women's history online exhibit for their 2019 event, the 'Applause!' exhibit content has been used at other public events, and some graduate students who worked on the nuclear history exhibit became passionate about special collections and continue to process related collections.

However, while this information has been helpful for us as curators, more formal data need to be gathered for library reports, proposals to future collaborators and for promotion dossiers. Further, as curators at a land-grant university, demonstrating the impact of sharing the story of the university and collections in SCARC is fundamental to our mission. We have begun working with the OSULP assessment librarian to develop formal and informal assessment strategies; these include formal follow-up meetings with partners, observational assessment at events and surveys of visitors. One idea for assessment is to internally determine what the purpose of the exhibit is and what we want people to learn, and then assess the experiences of exhibit viewers based on that. This could potentially be accomplished with paper forms or a link to an online form. For online exhibits, we plan to gather metrics data and study where viewers are located, which pages are popular, and what connections, if any, there may be between exhibit content and reference inquiries.

Conclusion

Exhibits embody our land-grant mission in ways that impact and inform the public and forge new partnerships for our department and our institution. To enhance our future partnerships and to help others understand what we do, the three of us recently came together to prepare an educational exhibit called 'Piles to Files: Behind the Scenes at the Archives', which answers basic questions about the functions, missions and products of an archive through a close look at collection development, organization and description, teaching and engagement and more. Such efforts, we hope, can prepare the next generation of scholars, researchers, donors and general appreciators of history to see themselves as an essential part of our work.

Each of the three partnerships shared within the case studies demonstrates the challenges and rewards of our service orientation to the citizens of Oregon, as well as our commitment to engage diverse communities with historical collections under our stewardship. These partnerships have offered opportunities to explore our own expectations for collaboration, including those around credit and recognition, distribution of work, authority and subject expertise. Our collaborative experiences have helped shape how we choose and manage future projects and how we navigate the tensions within the product and partnership itself. While these partnerships come with challenges, in most cases, for everyone involved the rewards far outweigh the trials. We look forward to a future of discovering new collections, making new connections and working with new citizen communities.

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