

Students in Public exemplar details

Faculty, School and Subject Area: Humanities, SALC, Institute for Cultural Practices

Course Unit/activity: SALC61061 Managing Collections & Exhibitions, SALC60232 Professional Practice Project

Course Unit Director/activity leader: Kostas Arvanitis

What is the assignment/knowledge product?

In Semester 1 MA Art Gallery and Museum Studies (AGMS) students perform a range of collections management, interpretation and exhibition development tasks with about 40 objects from the University's Museum of Medicine and Health (MMH). Students research and document objects, assess their conservation and environmental needs, examine the long-term sustainability of the collection, propose possible uses of the collection and examine possible collaborations between the MMH, University Heritage and other local cultural organisations. All this work informs then the development of a pop-up exhibition of the objects to reach members of the wider public (December every year). In 2015, the exhibition, titled "The Medicine Cabinet", took place at Chetham's Library <http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/icp/study/student-projects/the-medicine-cabinet/>. In 2016, the exhibition 'Healing Histories' took place in Manchester Central Library, <http://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/icp/study/student-projects/healing-histories/>

Why was it introduced?

The project focused on the production and evaluation of student-led work that aims to engage with external local audiences and communities by giving them access to the University collections through the platforms of the University' and city's cultural assets. In this context, the project aimed to contribute to the cultural and social life and well-being of local audiences. The particular emphasis of the exhibition on medical objects offered an opportunity to engage with topics and issues relevant to people's everyday lives and concerns. The project, also, enabled the Museum of Medicine and Health MMH to use its collection to benefit both internal and external to the University audiences.

Also, the project aimed at increasing the employability of AGMS graduates, by focusing on developing practice-based learning activities around real-life settings that aim to bring students in collaborative partnerships with cultural professionals, allow students to learn by critically reflecting on their own practice and in the process gain valuable career-oriented and transferable skills that will prepare them for the workforce.

Where is/could it be published/disseminated/exhibited?

Various exhibition venues.

What are the challenges (e.g. copyright)?

Most of the challenges relate to the University's unpreparedness and lack of procedures and support in treating student work as potentially work that has a public engagement element. For example, there aren't structures and systems in place to support students' acquisition of materials needed to e.g. host a public event or develop an exhibition. This results to students needing to pay for expenses themselves and then submit reimbursement forms, which is time and resource consuming

and it also creates problems in sourcing the necessary goods. Other challenges include the lack of public-friendly (including family-friendly) spaces on campus and the hurdles one needs to jump to book rooms that are for public events (including after hours). In our particular project, we also need a public exhibition space. We've been relying on external partners for this, which can work well in terms of reaching a broader audience and being part of public engagement structures and processes run by experienced cultural professionals. However, establishing and managing these collaborations is also very resource heavy and time consuming and there is no guarantee that partners will always be able to help. Also their production timeframes are different to a University course's timeframe, which can also lead to added complexity in project and relationship management. Finally, another challenge that we have faced is the difficulty in setting and managing financial relationships with cultural freelancers. This is very time consuming and can often lead to long delays in payments. The University's financial structure and process seem not to be geared towards catering for freelancers and small cultural and heritage companies.

What are the student perceptions/responses/attainment?

As mentioned above, the project aimed at developing students' practical and employability skills. Indeed, two months after class of 2016's graduation, a number of students who participated in the project secured employment and internships in national museums directly relevant to the collections management experience gained on this project. This includes Joel Fagan, who got a job as Assistant Collections Manager at the British Museum and Emma Frith (internship at Science Museum), who actually took to Twitter to express her thanks to the course and the cultural partners:



Similarly, graduate Jeni Allison said: "I felt that through this project [...] I developed not only my skills but also my confidence in putting together performance programmes, organizing events and understanding the logistics of engagement activity at museums. [...] I felt confident enough in my abilities to apply for my current position; Families & Communities Learning Coordinator, National Galleries of Scotland. At the end of the project, myself and one

other student co-authored a journal article about the process of using performance as an interpretive strategy. This article was published in November 2016 in the *Research in Drama Education* journal.

If published, how do you monitor use of the resource/s?

ca180 visitors in the 1-day exhibition in Chetham's Library (December 2015) and ca200 visitors in the 1-day exhibition in Manchester Central Library (December 2016).

Any other comments

SALC61061 Managing Collections and Exhibitions

Overview

The course is designed to equip AGMS students with a range of critical, theoretical, methodological and professional knowledge and skills to the management and development of objects and collections. It also offers students an introduction to exhibition planning and development. In particular, it focuses on strategies and current and good practices of documentation, collection management and conservation; and overviews of exhibition briefs, media and audiences.

Seminars and workshops on the above themes run by staff and visiting museum professionals will be followed by a relevant group project student activity every week. The group project will draw on scenario-based practical collection management activities on objects collected by students in the context of imaginary new museums. The outputs of these activities will form sections of a group project portfolio.

This is a core and compulsory Semester 1 course for MA Art Gallery and Museum Studies students and replaces the existing core course 'Objects and Exhibitions' with an updated curriculum that draws, also, on student and graduates feedback and suggestions.

Aims

1. To provide students with theoretical and practical knowledge and skills in key areas of museum operation, namely collection management, documentation and conservation
2. To introduce students to contemporary theoretical and practical approaches to exhibition development, audiences and media.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding

- Describe and analyse the relationship between theory and practice in collection management and exhibition development.
- Examine and define key issues in relation to documentation, conservation, collection management, exhibition planning and text writing in museum environments.
- Demonstrate ability in articulating the relevance of objects and collections for museums and audiences
- Analyse the role of audiences in collection documentation and exhibition development
- Position the role of objects and collections in the overall museum strategy and operation.
- Identify ethical issues relevant to conservation and documentation of collections

Intellectual skills

- Understand the links between theory and contemporary practice in key areas of the museum

operation

- Draw on relevant current and best practice and theoretical discussions to inform the management of collections and development of exhibitions.

Practical skills

- Use a collections management software
- Plan for and perform basic object conservation
- Design an exhibition brief
- Write exhibition panels and labels

Transferable skills and personal qualities

- Design and plan projects
- Team work and communication skills

Syllabus

Week 1: Collection Management I (Collecting, Acquisition and Disposal Policies and Practices)

Week 2: Collection Management II (Handling, Storage, Loans and Disaster Planning)

Week 3: Conservation (Preventive Conservation; Light; Temperature and Relative Humidity; Pollutants; Ethics)

Week 4: Documentation (Contemporary approaches; Standards)

Week 5: Documentation Practical

Week 6: Reading Week

Week 7: Exhibition Development (Planning; Brief)

Week 8: Exhibition Media (Text; Digital Media; Audiences)

Week 9: Group Project Installation and Portfolio

Week 10: Group Project Installation and Portfolio

Week 11: Group Project Installation and Portfolio

Week 12: No class

Teaching and learning methods

Each week will include:

- 3hr Seminars and workshops on the weekly theme and
- 2hr group work on an activity related to the weekly theme (e.g. writing a collecting and disposal policy, documenting the collection etc). The outputs of these activities will form sections of a group project portfolio.

In Weeks 10 and 11, groups will install their project and collate all their activities into the submitted group project portfolio.

Assessment methods

Group Project Portfolio (Collection Management Outputs, Exhibition Brief and Critical Reflection) -
3,000 words - 30%

Individual Exhibition Review - 3,000 words - 70%

SALC60232 Professional Practice Project

Overview

This new option unit will be targeted at students on MAs in Arts Management, Policy and Practice and MA Art Gallery and Museum Studies. It will also be open to students on other MAs within SALC.

The unit is intended to facilitate the development of practical skills and critical reflection on this skills development in the context of cultural event production and exhibition making.

It aims to do this through a Problem-Based Learning model in which students create a small exhibition and related public programme in collaboration with a local cultural organisation. This programme and exhibition will be billed as a 1-2 day mini festival for which students will be responsible for all aspects of production. Partner organisation staff and course tutors will act as a steering group, monitoring progress and providing support throughout.

For example, students might be tasked with displaying a part of the Manchester Museum's collection not normally on display and producing a themed day of activities aimed at different audiences e.g. a daytime event for families and an evening event for students. Students would need to plan and access appropriate resources, develop a marketing strategy, install the display and run the event.

The initial brief will be developed by the course tutors in collaboration with key staff at the partner cultural organization. This will establish the time slot, available resources, space and thematic guidelines. The brief will be presented to the students at the intensive workshop sessions at the start of the module. During these sessions students will be divided into groups to work on different aspects of live event(s) and the exhibition/display. These workshop sessions will also introduce the functions students will be required to fulfil (fundraising, budgeting, marketing and communication, producing/curating, interpretation/engagement and project management) and set out the milestones they will be required to meet before the culmination in the mini festival.

From this point on students will work in small teams and also collaborate as a whole group on the production process. They will be supported by a series of masterclasses covering different skills and functions required by some or all of the students. These masterclasses will be run by course tutors with expert input from staff at the partner organization. Group milestone meetings will be chaired by one of the course tutors. These meetings will monitor and support the practical project development as well as providing opportunities for reflective and critical discussion about learning.

Students will work on two defined and assessed group/individual tasks/roles as part of the project. These could be closely related (e.g. development of social media strategy + design, delivery and maintenance of social media) or may be different (e.g. development of social media strategy + technical management of evening music event). Students will agree an outline of the work to be assessed with their course tutor, which can include a defined aspect of the festival as well as specific elements of a portfolio of documentation. Internal examiners will attend the festival and external examiners will access work via the portfolios.

Aims

The aims of the unit are to:

1. Support the development of key skills in exhibition making and producing cultural programmes
2. Develop techniques in reflective practice in arts and museological contexts
3. Explore real world contexts for creative and cultural production including inter-organisational and inter-personal collaboration and engagement with communities.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of functions, roles and practices involved in the production of exhibitions and/or public programmes.
- Identify key factors within specific local contexts that influence curating, producing and programming practices.
- Show awareness of relevant practices in other contexts that might inform project development

Intellectual skills

- Conduct independent and collaborative research to inform professional practice
- Critically and creatively evaluate own and others creative practice

Practical skills

- Employ project and time management techniques appropriate for cultural projects
- Demonstrate competence in at least one specialist function involved in the project (content creation, interpretation, marketing/engagement, fundraising, facilitation, object research, planning, programming)

Transferable skills and personal qualities

- Demonstrate an ability to communicate ideas to expert and non-expert audiences in writing and verbally
- Work effectively in groups under time and resource constraints

Syllabus

Week 0 : Planning and Briefing Workshops

Delivering the creative brief for the project, examining the conditions and constraints and introduction to project management

Week 2 Milestone 1 Group Meeting

Groups required to produce and present a plan for a strand of the project (exhibition/display or programme/event element) which will be discussed and on which they will receive feedback. Division of tasks will be agreed for next milestone meeting.

Weeks 2-4: Masterclasses

Venues & Spaces

Interpretation and Communication Strategies

Funding

Week 5 Milestone 2 Group Meeting

Within groups, individuals/pairs will present strategies articulating the creative development of a project element (exhibition/event) or a specific functional task (communication or fundraising/budgeting). Additional tasks will be allocated for next milestone meeting.

Weeks 5-7: Masterclasses

Technical Management

Health & Safety

Documentation and Evaluation

Week 8 Milestone 3 Group Meeting

Project updates in which there will be final sign off for all aspects of the project.

Week 9-10: Group Work

Week 11: Project Exhibition & Public Programme

Week 12: Evaluation & Wrap-Up

Group meetings will reflect on and evaluate the overall outcomes as well as individual learning.

Assessment methods

Exhibition and Event (30%)

Group Project Portfolio (30%)

Individual Essay (40%)