

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE PROGRAM REVIEW PANEL
ON THE MUSEUM

Introduction

These findings and recommendations are based upon the Museum's self-study, the internal review report, and the external team report. The self-study and external report produced large areas of agreement on the current status of the Museum. All three reports pointed to the urgent need for improvement in the physical plant. There was also agreement about the need for a more clearly stated acquisitions policy. There was substantial disagreement, however, between the recommendations of the internal review team on the one hand and the self-study and external team, about future staffing, administration and budgeting for the Museum. In making its recommendations the Program Review Panel has sought to build upon present strengths, cause the least possible disruption of currently successful operations and improve the future standing of the Museum.

Findings

A. Present Condition of the Museum--Overview

The Museum is organized into seven sections (Anthropology, Archaeology, Herbarium, Zoology, Geology/Paleontology, Museology, Museography, Exhibits, and Public Education/Public Programs). Basically a regional natural history museum, it attempts to preserve its holdings, acquire and catalogue new ones, make them available for research, and display them in an attractive and intelligent fashion. The Museum occupies the Henderson, Hunter and some portions of the Chemistry buildings. The Herbarium will soon move to a large area in the basement of the Clare Small Gym. All reports agree that the current space allocations are, as the external team put it, "completely inadequate and must be improved if the Museum is to be expected to function at anything approaching modern standards for museum practice."

The reports agree that the professional staff of the Museum is able, energetic, enthusiastic and well-known to professional colleagues across the country. The external team did find that "because of the poor conditions [space and inadequate scientific equipment] faculty research productivity is seriously affected and collections management suffers in turn."

In general, the institution is a good regional natural history museum with collections valued in excess of \$40,000,000. The staff is well trained, competent and dedicated. There is much potential for improvement into an excellent regional natural history museum.

B. Size and Significance of the Collections

The high quality and significance of the current collections of the Museum make it the major natural history museum of the high plains and Rocky Mountain regions. The collections are growing so fast that they exceed the capacity of the Museum to adequately store and catalogue them. The curatorial staff has a good general understanding of the proper collections policy for the CU Museum, but the internal and external review teams both strongly urged that the collections policy be made more formal. Written guidelines stating exactly what the Museum looks for and what sort of gifts it will accept under what conditions will help the Museum better manage the growth of its holdings.

C. Care of Collections

The condition of the Museum's holdings varies from excellent to below standard. The external team found the Anthropology collection and the Herbarium in very good condition. The Entomology and Zoology collections are in good shape. The Geology and Paleontology collections are now inadequate and need attention. Museum curators appear to be coping as best they can, given the poor quality of the space available and the inadequate scientific and storage equipment. The external review team concluded that "the task of accessioning, cataloguing and storing the collections is about to overwhelm the existing curatorial staff." In the long term, each curatorial section needs professionally-trained assistants.

D. Space

The current housing of the Museum simply is not adequate. It occupies a building like Henderson which, while structurally sound, needs improvement, and Hunter, which is in disgraceful disrepair. Henderson needs access for the handicapped, an elevator, and climate control. More parking for visitors may also be needed. Hunter needs extensive renovation. All reports agree that it is unsafe, unsound, and a depressing place in which to work. The internal and external reports also agree that should a renovation of the Museum's buildings take place, all of the public exhibitions will occur in Henderson. Hunter should have offices, laboratories and storage facilities.

E. Research

Some of the sharpest disagreements between the Museum and the internal review team on the one hand and the external review team on the other arose over the question of research by the professional staff. The Museum and external team believe that scientific research presented in refereed journals (the kind expected of faculty members in academic departments) cannot come at the expense of collections' care. The internal review team, however, believes that curators occupy a position similar to teaching faculty who are expected to contribute to the journals and meet classes. The teaching duties of the academic faculty are the equivalent of the curatorial demands of the Museum professionals. According to this view, the latter have an obligation to produce journal articles based on the collections.

In the opinion of the Program Review Panel the present research productivity of the professional staff of the Museum is too low.

The Museum administration should provide greater guidance to the professional staff about their obligations for balancing the duties of collecting, preserving and research. It should encourage curators more aggressively to seek outside funding for scholarly research.

F. Teaching

The Museum provides numerous opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students in cognate departments to make use of its collections and facilities. The Museum, in turn, uses graduate students as part of its own staff to enlarge and care for its collections and prepare its exhibits.

The teaching activities of the Museum appear to be somewhat haphazard. The Museum administration does not carefully monitor the teaching of its staff who offer courses on a voluntary basis. Nor does the Museum insist that departments which send students to it pass along adequate scientific equipment necessary for their training. As a result, additional strain is put upon the inadequate resources of the Museum. Moreover, the Museum is in danger of relying too heavily upon graduate students for work which clearly should be done by trained professionals. All agree that the graduate student assistants are dedicated and in most cases able. Excessive reliance upon them, however, may demean them or delay their careers. Using graduate students to perform professional duties has also caused loss of time when the students have left Boulder. The permanent staff often has to start fresh with new assistants, a problem that would diminish with additional curatorial assistants for each section.

The Museography/Museology program provides specialized training for students interested in museum careers. At present it appears that this program is remote from the other work of the Museum, and the several parts of it are isolated from one another. Professor Rohner, who supervises the work in exhibition preparation, will retire soon. The external review team strongly urged the Museum administration to work with him before his retirement to assure an orderly transition in the Museology program. It should be integrated into the other parts of the Museum so students gain greater experience throughout the range of museum operations.

G. Public Programs and Exhibitions

The Museum presents its face to the public through its exhibitions. The public's impression of the University as a whole often first comes from a visit to the galleries.

All three reports agree that the permanent exhibits need improvement. They are outdated, dark and drab. The exhibits' staff is capable of maintaining modern, attractive displays, as shown by their skill at producing temporary shows. They do not, however, now have the time, personnel or resources to make the necessary changes on the permanent exhibits. The staff and the Anthropology Department have prepared a proposal to the NEH to refurbish the exhibit halls dealing with American Indians. The same synthetic approach should guide efforts at fundraising to refurbish the natural history exhibit halls.

The temporary exhibit hall is the showpiece of the Museum. It demonstrates what the staff can do when they have adequate resources. The external review team suggests that the Museum use this attractive, well-equipped gallery to expand the exhibit program beyond the regional focus of the permanent exhibits.

The programs for school children currently limp along under the supervision of two graduate students, one from Education and one from Anthropology. The curatorial sections now operate other educational sections on a voluntary basis. The Museum is now searching for an associate director, one of whose functions will be to supervise the outreach programs. When the associate director is hired, he or she must make certain that the public programs are a coordinated function of the entire Museum, not the independent activities of the curatorial sections.

H. Relations with other University Departments

The Museum functions as an autonomous unit of the University reporting directly to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

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The internal and external review teams noted that relations between the Museum and the academic departments of the University are informal, remote and sometimes strained. Consequently, other departments sometimes are not aware of the riches of the Museum and do not make proper use of its resources. For the Museum to fulfill its promise, it must work more closely with the academic units of the University.

I. The Sarkisian Collection

A special problem for the Museum over the past several years has been the status and future of the Sarkisian collection of Asian art. Currently the negotiations over the future of the collection are taking place at higher levels of the University administration. The Museum believes that the collection is valuable in its own right and would make a worthwhile addition to the University's holdings. The Museum and University do not, however, want to have to divert scarce resources badly needed for other collections to maintain the Sarkisian bequest.

As a general rule, the external review team held that the Museum should develop an acquisitions policy that would refuse gifts unless the benefactor provided the resources to maintain the articles donated. Moreover, the internal and external teams agreed that the Museum's strengths were in natural history, not fine arts, and it should concentrate its acquisitions in the area of natural history.

J. Personnel and Administration

The Museum currently allows wide independence for its several curatorial sections. This autonomy is largely a product of the historical development of the Museum. It has led to strengths in individual units, but it has occasionally caused friction and a tendency toward territoriality. As the Museum continues to expand its holdings and probably its staff, it will need greater coordination of its functions. The new associate director, in conjunction with the director, should provide more vigorous guidance.

The Museum is chronically short of trained professional curators in all divisions. Curators can no longer be expected to provide adequate technical expertise for all areas of their curatorial responsibilities. The Museum should combine its many part-time positions to provide a professional curatorial assistant for each curatorial department. In seeking new professional staff, the Museum should cooperate with cognate departments. In the words of the external reviewers, "this consultation must take place in a fully collegiate atmosphere." As the staff grows, the Museum probably will need to develop a clear sequence of ranked positions and titles.

K. Budget

The reviewers find that the University support of the Museum is reasonable for the size of its staff. The one shortfall is the currently inadequate capital budget. The Museum needs at least \$10,000 yearly to upgrade regularly its scientific equipment, add new curatorial furniture, and provide new storage units.

L. Leadership

The Museum has built large and important collections through the enterprise of individual curators. The task of the Museum administration now is to weld the independent departments together into a unitary institution. Dr. Hay, the director, should have a mandate, according to the external reviewers, "to complete the process of making a modern natural history museum out of the largely independent curatorial sections. This is not something the director can do entirely on his own. He needs not only a mandate from above, but also some new resources to carry out that mandate."

RecommendationsA. Advisory Committee

The Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, in consultation with the Museum director, should create an advisory committee made up of interested faculty from cognate departments to assist the Museum in developing its programs and enhancing its relations with other University departments. This committee should meet with the Museum director at least once a semester and prepare a written report to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs each year on the progress made by the Museum.

B. Interaction with other Departments

The Museum director and staff, in conjunction with the advisory committee, should establish a set of guidelines to substantially enhance the interaction of the Museum with cognate departments (EPOB, Anthropology, Fine Arts, Geography and Geology) and to promote interaction with the University at large. This plan should be jointly reviewed by the affected departments with a report made to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs by May 1, 1986. The plan will include discussion of teaching, research, graduate education, exhibitions, and other matters.

C. Collections Policy

The Museum should develop a formal written collections policy, understood by all curators, specifying the type and quantity of specimens to be collected and curated. The advisory committee should participate in developing this policy. The Museum should specify a long-term plan and budget for carrying out this policy. The new policy should be designed to acquire those items which will enhance the Museum's standing as a regional natural history museum.

D. Care of Collections

1. The Museum should make certain that it adequately preserves and curates the existing backlog of acquisitions.
2. Through consolidation of existing part-time positions and aggressive outside fundraising, the Museum should work toward providing each curatorial section with a professional assistant curator.
3. Museum officials should work with the University's Department of Environmental Health and Safety to create guidelines for safety standards for workers. It should also provide regular inspections to make certain that safety standards are met.

E. Space

1. Henderson building should be developed as the administrative and exhibit center of the Museum. All public programming should take place there. It should have access for the handicapped, an elevator, and climate control.
2. Hunter needs extensive renovation. The roof needs to be repaired and climate control installed.
3. In a renovated Hunter there should be separate storage areas and laboratory and offices.

F. Research

1. The scientific research productivity of the Museum staff should be improved.
2. The Museum director should develop a set of formal guidelines outlining the balance that tenured and tenurable curators should maintain between acquisitions, maintenance of the collections, instruction and refereed research. The director should make it

clear to each curator that he or she is expected to participate in the preparation of proposals for external support of research, creative work, and the general operations of the Museum.

A curator's record in generating research grants should be incorporated into his or her yearly evaluations. These guidelines should be clearly understood by the professional staff.

G. Teaching

1. The Museum directors should establish formal rules for relations between the Museum and departments whose students study with Museum staff.
2. Departments should be required to negotiate with the Museum administration to share the costs of educational expenses incurred by students taught by Museum staff.
3. The Museology section should be better coordinated with other Museum functions.

H. Public Programs and Exhibitions

1. The Museum should prepare more grant proposals to modernize the permanent collection.
2. The new associate director should require more formal coordination of the public functions to avoid duplications by the curatorial sections.

I. The Sarkisian Collection

The University should accept the collection only if it can obtain funds for its continued care and its acceptance is consistent with the new collections policy.

J. Administration and Leadership

1. The director should move toward welding the independent curatorial sections into a single unit. Regular faculty meetings of the curatorial staff should take place.
2. The Museum director should meet regularly and at least once a semester with the advisory committee.

3. The Museum should develop a career ladder for curatorial staff. In it the duties of tenured and tenure-track curators in the areas of acquisition, curation, instruction, and scholarly research should be clearly spelled out.