We have a new program! This week, our proposed changes to KU’s Museum Studies Master’s Degree program were approved by the College Academic Council, so they can go into effect in the Fall semester (2013). I want to thank everyone who helped craft these changes with their good advice, strong opinions, and clear thinking.

So how has the program changed? In lots of ways, both large and small, from course requirements to credit hours. Here’s a summary:

- Total Credit Hours: The required credits have dropped from 42 to 36;
- Museum Experience: Internships are now 3 credits and 250 hours—down from 500 hours and 6 credits—while keeping the requirement that students will have gained at least 500 hours of museum experience by the time they graduate;
- Advising: Each student will work with a committee with whom they will develop their program of study and final product;
- Required Courses: There are now only three required courses—beyond that, each student will develop their own individualized program of study that focuses on topics relevant to their interests while addressing current museum standards, issues, and theories;
- Final Product: Each student will develop—and defend—a final product that is based on research or other creative activity and that contributes to museum studies in a substantive way.

These changes are intended to align the program with current and future needs of the museum profession. Graduates will have mastered the conceptual dimensions of museums in the broadest sense, while also acquiring the specialized skills necessary to develop new and innovative approaches in the field. They will have gained a thorough understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of museums while being challenged to conduct innovative research. We fully expect that KU Museum Studies graduates will be prepared to assume, in short order, key leadership responsibilities in museums, historical agencies, and related institutions.

Want to know more? You can find an extended program description posted on the Resources for Students page of the KU Museum Studies web site, museumstudies.ku.edu.
Steve Nowak and Brittany Keegan are the new professors of Muse 704 - informally known as Collections Management. Steve is the Director of the Watkins Community Museum of History in downtown Lawrence. He has previously worked in the Toledo Museum of Art as a Director of Education and also has worked extensively in registrar and collections positions previously. Brittany is the Curator/Collections Manager at the Watkins and is a graduate of the KU Museum Studies program. Even though the duo was given the class with little time to prepare, they came armed with years of practical museum experience and an enthusiasm that has been appreciated by all. I sat down with them to discuss their motivation to teach, how the semester turned out, and their plans for the future.

First of all, what made you guys decide to teach Collections Management?
Steve: I used to teach at the University of Toledo, and I like to work with students. I was looking forward to doing it again.
Brittany: I just got out of the Museum Studies Program not too long ago, and I wanted to provide a more practical experience. Collections Management is very idealized…
Steve: But it’s not really ideal!

How has the semester been?
Steve: I learned a lot about what to improve! The students have been great, very forgiving.
Brittany: Good. I felt like we were making things up a little bit, but the field trips and work days went really well. We wanted to make the class a more practical experience.

Do you enjoy being a professor?
Steve: Yeah! And the other faculty members were very willing to help. They’re great.
Brittany: I really have! It’s nice to get to know students, and I agree about the field trips. Everyone we contacted was open to hosting the class and they were very candid about their collection practices and problems.
Steve: It really showed a lot about the KU community. It’s really tight-knit and supportive.

What were some of the challenges of teaching?
Brittany: In-class discussions take a lot to get started. I felt like students have been taught to act a certain way in class, and we were trying for a more relaxed environment. I also felt there was a lot of overlap between classes. You want to present from a collections point of view, but there’s inherent overlap in museums and in the coursework.
Steve: Exactly, we wanted to reinforce good ideas instead of being redundant. It was also challenging to figure out material to present. Collections can have very specific and big problems, so we wanted to broaden perspectives and see other collections.

Have you noticed a change in the relationship between the Watkins and the Museum Studies program since you started teaching Collections Management?
Brittany: In the long term, yes. There’s been a significant change since I started. Museum Studies students are actively seeking internships here, and we’ve had some great exhibits.
Steve: Museum students are definitely more familiar with the Watkins. Alexis [Fekete, ’13] was able to give a tour to an incoming student! It was pretty cool.

Any last comments?
Steve: After seeing the assignments for our class and working with exhibit groups, it’s clear that there is a lot of talent in the KU Museum Studies program. The program offers a good blend of practical and theoretical knowledge.

Staff photos from watkinsmuseum.org
Muse 703 Exhibit Projects

Students in Introduction to Museum Exhibits discuss their final assignments

Brittany Thurman (‘14)—Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics

Kelsey Jistel, Landyn Harris, Ali Herdina, and I worked with staff at the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics on West Campus to design a permanent exhibit, titled Continued Dedication, chronicling the past ten years of Senator Bob Dole’s life. The exhibit is in the main gallery space of the Dole in the last case on the right. Currently, a temporary exhibit is installed. Due to poor color quality from a local printer, the graphic panels in the exhibit will have to be reprinted through a different vendor. This means the current temporary exhibit will have to be taken down completely in order to install the new panels once they are ready. The layout of the exhibit will be identical to the temporary one in place right now, just with higher quality graphic panels. Once completed, Continued Dedication will take its place as the newest permanent exhibit at the Dole. Although this project had many obstacles, it was still a rewarding experience. All members of our group learned valuable skills that they will one day be able to apply to a future career as a museum professional.

Lauren Taylor (‘14) - Watkins Community Museum

On May 31, 2013 the Watkins Community Museum of History will host an opening for Occasional Mayhem: Exploring Crime and Punishment in Lawrence. The exhibit was created this spring by a group of students from Muse 703, including Abby Anderson, Déla Breyne, Will Hickox, and myself. It examines ideas of what is criminal and how that changes over time as perceptions of what is “right” and “wrong” are questioned, debated, and re-defined. Featuring artifacts from the museum’s collection and loans from the Lawrence Police Department, the exhibit explores how crime and punishments for those crimes, in Douglas County and the United States, have changed from Lawrence’s founding in the mid-1800s to the present.
Muse 703 Exhibit Projects

Students in Introduction to Museum Exhibits discuss their final assignments

Bre Wasinger (‘14) - Kenneth Spencer Research Library

River City Rebels: Beat Poetry in Lawrence is a new exhibit prepared for the Spencer Research Library by Anna Paradis, Ge Yu, Karrah Whitlock, and myself. The exhibit tells the story of the River City Reunion - the 1987 gathering of Beat poets, artists, and musicians in Lawrence. It also highlights the works of William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Diane Di Prima, three poets central to the Beat movement and the Reunion. Also featured in the exhibit is a listening lounge where visitors can hear Burroughs and Ginsberg reading selections of their work, and a poetry wall where visitors can create their own Beat masterpiece! We chose to create an exhibit on Beat poetry because of the many unique and colorful characters and subjects involved, as well as the surprising ties that some members of the movement had to Lawrence. The exhibit also serves to showcase some of the Spencer Research Library’s unique collections related to counterculture movements, and provides visitors a sample of what they can see if they visit the library’s reading room. Stop by over the summer to experience this great exhibit!

L to R: Elspeth Healey, Special Collections; Whitney Baker, Head Conservator; Ge Yu; Anna Paradis; Bre Wasinger; Karrah Whitlock

Muse 706 Conservation Projects

Bre Wasinger (‘14)

As a way to utilize the knowledge gained in Conservation Principles and Practice, students are taking their skills out of the classroom and into the community for their final projects. Groups from the class are working with staff from the Spencer Museum of Art, the University Archives at the Spencer Research Library, and the Old Castle Museum at Baker University to compile building, storage, and environmental assessments, and are using that information to create a three-year preservation plan for their respective institutions. These plans outline suggested actions to be taken in order to improve or adjust aspects of the museum that may impact the care and lifespan of collections. In this way, MUSE students can apply their knowledge in real-world situations while strengthening ties between the program and the community. This project has been a great way for MUSE students to become familiar with the reality of the challenges facing museums today, and help local institutions identify solutions to some of their problems.
People can rarely say they got their fifteen minutes of fame by talking about goat gland transplants on a cable television show. I’m one of the lucky few. In the spring of 2012, a crew from the Travel Channel interviewed staff at the Kansas Museum of History about artifacts in the collection for their show, Mysteries at the Museum. The producers interviewed me about a yachting jacket and hat that belonged to Dr. John Brinkley of Milford, Kansas. Brinkley was a quack doctor who claimed he could cure infertility by implanting goat testicles into both his male and female patients. People from across the country came to Kansas for the surgery, and Brinkley became an incredibly wealthy man. He was one of the first Kansans to own a yacht, which made him the perfect candidate for Admiral of the Kansas Navy, a position he claimed a governor bestowed upon him. His wife donated the jacket and hat to the museum in 1977.

When you’re a registrar who spends her days with a database and some artifacts, being filmed for a TV show is a new, nerve-wracking experience. I spent several weeks before the taping learning everything I could about Brinkley. On the day of filming, the four-person crew set up their equipment in collection storage. They taped the interview first. Originally, the mystery surrounding these artifacts was meant to be why Kansas had a Navy Admiral, but the unbelievable nature of Brinkley’s procedure couldn’t be ignored. In all, our artifacts have been featured in five segments of the show. It has been great exposure for the museum. We’ve even had visitors who come just to see those objects. The show’s producers have expressed interest in featuring more Kansas artifacts, so look for them in future episodes.

While in the process of applying for jobs, I ran across my dream job on CWAM’s website (Colorado-Wyoming Association of Museums) - an opening for a Registrar at Carbon County Museum in Rawlins, Wyoming. Oddly enough, the first episode of Mysteries at the Museum that I ever watched featured the Carbon County Museum and their famous “skin shoes” so I was already intrigued about the museum. I applied for the job in late June and was offered the job in October after many interviews. I have been at the Museum for four months and I love it. Even though my job title is Registrar, I am also Collections Manager and Archivist. We have over 30,000 objects including the original Wyoming State flag, a 1920 LaFrance fire truck (52 ft. long), a 16 ton safe, and the skin shoes (made from “Big Nose” George Parrot). I have two amazing assistants who have been so helpful to me. Also in my department is our Digital Imaging Specialist. She scans photos and papers from our Archive, as well as taking photographs of our objects. In addition to those mentioned above, our staff consists of an Exhibits Curator, Education and Outreach Coordinator, Office Manager, Visitor Services Assistants, and a Director. It’s been such a great experience and I look forward to what the future holds in store for us here at Carbon County Museum. I’d also like to praise KU’s Museum Studies program and those associated with it for having such a wonderful program that prepared me for this position.

Last month, I started a job in visitor services at Heritage Museums and Gardens, in Sandwich, MA, which is a small town on Cape Cod. Heritage is most known for its lovely gardens, and its museum focus is American heritage. Most of the time I am assisting visitors with questions and facilitating activities in Hidden Hollow, an outdoor children’s discovery area-- I love working outside! I ended up here because I was job searching on the East Coast. Since I had never been this far to the Northeast, I decided to give it a go. Like most museums around this area, it is open seasonally, so I will be looking again for a job before too long.
KU Muse Students Spring Break in Denver

Sarah Adams ('13)

Over Spring Break 2013, students from the Muse program took off on a road trip to Denver, Colorado, accompanied by director Peter Welsh. The Spring Break trip is a tradition in the Muse program; last year, students made their way up to Chicago. The purpose of the trip is to gain background knowledge of museum functionality in different contexts to better prepare for careers in Museology. In Denver, we visited four museums: History Colorado, The Denver Art Museum, The Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and the CELL. The first three are all museums with strong roots in Denver; the fourth is an education lab in concert with governmental counter-terrorism entities – resulting from the terrorist attacks on 9/11. At each museum, we were able to meet with seasoned professionals and tour the museums – including behind-the-scenes! The trip provided much food for thought and it is hoped that this valuable tradition will continue in future years.

Historic Garment District Tour

Jennie Ashton ('14)

On Saturday, April 20, MSO visited the Garment District in Kansas City. Unbeknownst to most of us, the garment district of Kansas City was once second only to New York in the amount of clothing produced. They once boasted that one in every seven women in the US owned a garment manufactured in the Kansas City district. Far from the high fashion culture of New York, Kansas City produced clothing for the working person- mostly appealing to the young women and homemakers of Kansas and the surrounding areas.

The museum itself showcases pictures of the factories and the people who worked there. Old sewing machines line the walls, punctuated by examples of clothing made during the district’s heyday. These garments are changed according to the season. In the back of the museum is a particularly interesting section where visitors are invited to try on hats made in the millineries in the district.

This museum is run by two volunteers, one of whom is a former business owner in the district. Because of its small staff, the museum is only open Fridays 10am-3pm and by appointment all other days.
During the Spring 2013 semester, MSO celebrated Museum Advocacy Day by publicizing local museums. We reserved tables in the Kansas Union for two days. We distributed promotional materials from 16 area museums and raffled free tickets to nine local museums. In addition to encouraging people to take promotional materials and fill out raffle tickets, we created stickers for this event. We also designed an interactive that consisted of a tri-fold board with the title “What is the craziest, coolest, weirdest thing you ever saw in a museum?” We invited people to fill out post-it notes about their museum experiences and post them on the board. Additionally, we received buttons, posters, and other items from the Dole Archive and the Spencer Museum of Art that we gave out at random to people who visited our tables. In total, we had 78 participants over the two days.


Jennie Ashton monitoring the table

Museum Advocacy Day 2013

Sarah Adams (‘13), taken from the report by Alexis Fekete (‘13)

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Muse students, faculty, staff, and alumni enjoying the nice weather at the Graduation Celebration on May 9, 2013
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Whitney Baker, MUSE 706
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About the Museum Studies Program
The Museum Studies Program (MUSE) at the University of Kansas produces well-rounded graduates who are prepared for challenging careers in museums, historical agencies, and similar institutions. Drawing on the expertise of outstanding faculty in participating departments (American Studies, Anthropology, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Geology, and History), the skills of accomplished area museum professionals, and the rich resources of museums at KU and in nearby communities, the Museum Studies Program enables its students to develop advanced mastery of both an academic discipline and the issues and practices central to museums. With the rigorous interdisciplinary training provided by the Museum Studies Program, our graduates can flourish as life-long learners and leaders in the museum field.

Support Museum Studies
Please support the Museum Studies Program! We appreciate the tremendous amount of assistance you have given us in the past, but we still need your help!

By giving to Museum Studies, you will be contributing to the continued success of the program and assisting future graduates by providing them with opportunities to participate in activities that enrich their experience. Visit KUEndowment.org to give your gift today.