The Student Projects Program

2009 in review

In 2009 the Student Projects Program placed 18 students with the University’s cultural collections. Participants had the opportunity to work with a diverse range of collections from the Physics Museum through to the Baillieu Library Print Collection. The projects afforded the students close involvement and access to the collections while they learnt new skills, applied current skills or pursued an interest. The collections also benefited from the association as students and volunteers brought to their projects individual skills, knowledge and enthusiasm.

During the year, four students worked on significance assessments of collections across the campus. Anna Hyland, a Master of Art Curatorship student, completed a significance assessment of the National Gallery School Art Collection of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). A significance assessment was also completed by Masters of Music Studies student Stephanie Browne on the EJ Moeran Collection housed in the Lenton Parr Music, Visual and Performing Arts Library of the VCA. Meanwhile, Peter Di Sciascio, studying for a Graduate Certificate of Arts, drafted a significance assessment for the Artist Books collection, part of Special Collections in the University Library. Lastly, Utako Shindo commenced a significance assessment on the Fine Arts Library’s Slide Collection, with her report to be completed during the first half of 2010. To prepare the students to undertake this significance assessment work, a half-day training session on Significance 2.0, the new methodology released by the Collections Council of Australia, was provided to all students taking part in the Program. Another opportunity for professional development available to students was a training session in object handling and disaster preparedness for collections.

In other projects, Bachelor of Arts student Emily Wubben undertook a placement with the Physics Museum as a cataloguing assistant. This project involved research, photography, documentation and the rehousing of a selection of items in the

Emily Wubben at work with the Physics Museum’s collection
Similarly, Alice Clanachan, a Master of Cultural Heritage student, undertook a cataloguing assistant position with the Baillieu Library Print Collection. The project involved updating the collections database, assisting the Prints Officer with prints retrieval from collection storage areas, and other collection management duties. A project with the School of Chemistry collection was carried out by Trevor McAllister which involved him utilising his skills as a retired Professor of Chemistry to assist in the identification of unknown substances, unlabelled jars and teaching materials, thereby ensuring the correct handling and storage of these chemicals.

During 2009, there were several projects that engaged with the University of Melbourne Archives’ collections including one completed by Information Management student Natalie Johnson which involved the documentation and rehousing of the Century Mine Collection. Another archival project saw Records Management student Sahra Milk, work closely with the Lucy Kerley National Gallery School Collection. For this project she produced a series of reports and item descriptions for unprocessed items and gained hands-on conservation experience through the rehousing of fragile ledgers.

The collections housed within the Ian Potter Museum of Art again benefited this year from student involvement. Elizabeth Forbes and Carmela Lonetti both studying for their Masters in Cultural Material Conservation, had the opportunity to work closely with the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection. After comprehensive training in manual cataloguing and conservation flattening through a humidification process, they proceeded to flatten and catalogue a selection of posters from this large collection of international graphic art.

In addition to the new collection information that was generated through the significance assessment process, two other collections benefited this year from in depth research projects. Master of Public History student Anna Coultas explored the development of the Tiegs Zoology Museum in a piece entitled *A History of the Tiegs Museum 1887-1959*, while Krista Lapointe, enrolled in the same degree used the Henry Forman Atkinson Museum as a starting point for her investigation into the history of the dental technician profession in Victoria.

The University’s library collections also hosted students this year. Museum Studies student Beth Pearson worked on a preservation and rehousing project of the books, publications and pamphlets held within the University of Melbourne Collection while Christian Kuhlmann who had completed a Diploma of Library/Information Services, enjoyed his Special Collections project which saw him catalogue items from the ‘politics’ subject area in the McLaren Collection.

Lastly, Liz Herschell was afforded an insight into the work involved in the relocation of a collection through her placement at the Medical History
Museum. Liz worked closely with the Museum’s curator to assist in packing and securing parts of the collection that would be affected by the refurbishment of the Brownless Library. This project provided Liz with the unique opportunity to see the work involved to protect a vulnerable collection during building renovations.

The projects available through the Student Projects Program in 2009 provided the opportunity for students and volunteers to become more familiar with many of the University’s cultural collections. The excellent results achieved stand as testimony to the enthusiasm and interest of the students and volunteers who worked on the various projects and to the support offered by the collection managers who provided them with the training, expertise and ongoing supervision that enabled them to successfully carry out their projects.

Helen Arnoldi  
Student Projects Coordinator (Cultural Collections)  
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harnoldi@unimelb.edu.au  

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