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DEACCESSIONING RELATIONSHIPS: THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC MUSEUMS IN MODERN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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DEACCESSIONING RELATIONSHIPS: THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC MUSEUMS IN MODERN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Samantha. You have never given up on me. Your patience and love are everything to me, and I cannot imagine anything better than finishing this degree and figuring out together what we’re going to do next. I love you more equally.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to examine the role of academic museums in modern American postsecondary education. This research examined the relationships developed by academic museums in support of the mission of their parent institutions with special attention to the impact of the sale of donated objects from the museum collection for the purpose of relief from financial exigency. The study included document review, interviews, and reflexive notes.

The four thematic findings of this exploratory study depict an academic museum as a complex entity within its parent institution that has inward-facing and outward-facing components which support the institutional mission. The inward role includes direct contact with students, support of faculty instruction, service learning, and incorporation of object-based learning on an interdisciplinary level. The outward role of the academic museum provides community education programs, cultural events, and connection opportunities for donors, as well as access to diverse communities. A third theme, governance, suggests that reporting lines can be complex depending on the parent institution and may have a major impact on the museum's survival. A final theme that intersected the three previous themes is the ongoing need in every relationship to define the purpose of the museum and the reason why a museum maintains a collection. This study determined that the museum's standing as an academic unit should be considered more carefully.

This study was contextualized by two major global events: the Covid-19 pandemic that forced closures of museums and campuses starting in March of 2020 and the racial justice and equity protests that began in the summer of 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic forced a reconsideration of how museums connect with people. The diversity and equity issues that occurred en masse at universities across the United States are universally supported by museum leadership while also resulting in the admission of a need for decolonization of the academic museum and more intense equity measures in museum management. The implications of these events on the findings, as well as recommendations for future research are also discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Deaccession, academic museum, financial exigency, donor relations, museum governance, unrestricted gifts, fiduciary duty, public trust

Preface

This is a study of relationships. It is also an examination of the education that takes place in higher education outside of the classroom. I have over twenty years of experience in higher education academic support, primarily in tutoring and academic advising, and these fields have more in common with an academic museum than one might initially think. They are all services that exist for the sake of the students and faculty, supporting the institutional mission, and experiencing the same existential problems: how does a unit justify its place within postsecondary education if it doesn't assign grades or exist on a student's transcript? They also represent educational professions that have established standards and practices, and they are all predicated on developing relationships with those they teach.

Teaching takes place in all these areas. In academic advising, the final product is a schedule for the following semester, but that product has a minimal impact on students when compared to the incredible value of engaging students in a conversation that forces them to evaluate their beliefs and commit to the practice of self-exploration. In tutoring, the centerpiece may be a paper for an English class, but the value of the experience is teaching students to accept criticism and use it to better themselves.

In an academic museum, the collection is the very reason for the existence of the museum, but the value of those objects means as little as the dollar values assigned to them until they are connected to professionals who engage students, faculty, and communities, using the collection to provide fundamentally important learning experiences. By examining the roles assumed by academic museums, this study seeks to illustrate the incredible network of relationships that situate them within their parent institutions.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

A case of financial crisis 2

Unpacking the dilemma 3

Statement of the problem 4

Purpose of the study and research questions 5

Conceptual framework 5

Significance of the study 7

Limitations of the study 7

Delimitations of the study 8

Organization of the study 9

Definition of terms 9

Chapter 2: Review of the literature 11

Organization of the review 11

Historical context 12

Academic museums 14

Definition of museum collection 15

Definition of deaccession 16

Rationales for deaccession 17

Timeline of deaccession practice 18

Direct care of collections 20

Philanthropy and higher education 22
Museums as a public trust 23
Case law involving deaccession 24
Chapter 3: Methodology 25
Overview of the study 25
Research design 25
Covid-19 impact on the study 26
Sources of data 27
Documents 27
Selection of interview participants 28
Recruitment of participants 29
Interview methods 30
Interview format and location 31
Interview protocol 32
Member checking 33
Reflexive notes 34
Data storage 34
Analysis of data 35
Triangulation of data 37
Ethical considerations 38
Chapter 4: Findings 39

Overview of the study 39

Document review summary 39

Overview of interviews 44

Theme: inward-facing role 47

Inward-facing role: student support 47

Inward-facing role: faculty collaborations 52

Inward-facing role: museum space 56

Theme: outward-facing role 57

Outward-facing role: school educational programs 58

Outward-facing role: community programs 60

Outward-facing role: diversity and equity issues 62

Theme: governance 64

Governance: museums within the parent organization 65

Governance: staffing 67

Governance: advisory boards 69

Theme: communicating the purpose of the museum 70

Organizational structure of the museum 73

Summary 76

Chapter 5: Discussion and recommendations 78

Overview of the study 78

Discussion of the findings 79

The inward-facing role 80

The outward-facing role 81

Governance and the purpose of the museum 82

Implications of Covid-19 83

Implications of diversity and equity issues 84

The problem of direct care 85

Recommendations for future research 85

References 87

Appendices 97

Appendix A: Interview participants 98

Appendix B: Document review sources 99

Appendix C: Organizational structure of the museum 100

Appendix D: Direct care decision matrix 101

Appendix E: Interview protocol 102

Appendix F: Recruitment email 104

Appendix G: Informed consent agreement 105

Vita 111

Chapter 1: Introduction

Most universities in the United States have a museum on their campuses. Aside from the circular definition that a university museum is a museum owned by a university, however, there is little research that differentiates them from their municipal and private counterparts. The International Committee for University Museum Collections (UMAC) is a committee within the International Council of Museums (ICOM). The committee chair recently stated in a speech to its members that there is no definition for university museum outside of the general ICOM definition of a museum (Lourenço, 2019). The rationale for that statement is that separating university museums from their counterparts might isolate academic museums from protections enjoyed by municipal museums (Lourenço, 2019). Those protections include the existence of professional standards and codes of conduct that lend credibility and authority to the practice of museum management.

Organizational titles and definitions demonstrate that this categorization is still up for some debate. While UMAC represents “university museums,” that title does not acknowledge museums associated with different institution types. The Association of Academic Museums and Galleries (AAMG) states that support of a parent institution is the identifying element of an academic museum (AAMG, 2017). This study will use the AAMG definition and refer to all museums at postsecondary institutions as “academic museums.” Museums not associated with a parent institution in postsecondary education will be summarized as “public museums.” That definition is problematic, but for the purposes of this research, the terminology served to specify the museum type that was studied.

Academic museums are more than their collections. This research examined the academic museum as a contributor to its parent institution through the development of multiple types of relationships. The relationships an academic museum creates include connections to students, faculty, administrators, donors, alumni, legislators, and community partnerships. Although public museums also develop similar ranges of relationships, the purpose and meaning of those relationships for an academic museum are worth closer consideration. These relationships involve more than museum operations and provide direct support to the institutional mission. This study sought to explore these critical roles and examine the implications of attempts to sell objects from the museum to resolve an institutional financial exigency.

A case of financial crisis

Consider the following scenario: A natural disaster strikes the campus of a large public university, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. Unless other means are secured, the repair costs will be paid by students, taxpayers, and others who support the university financially. This university owns a painting by a very well-known artist that was donated to the university by a wealthy collector almost 70 years ago. The estimated value of this painting is $150 million. Were the university to sell this painting, the cost of campus repairs that are paid by students and taxpayers will be greatly reduced. In addition to the offset in restoration costs, the university would enjoy annual relief from insurance and maintenance fees. The painting provides a good deal of recognition for the university, but if sold the university name would still be associated with the history of the painting.

The arguments to keep the painting are compelling, however. The painting is a critical piece in the development of modern American art. Students and faculty (as well as the community at large) have unique access to this artist's work. The painting is a gift, and although the donor has long since passed away, she was explicit that the university retain ownership of the painting. Selling the painting, then, would represent a breach of trust. Additionally, professional standards in museum management are clear that objects in a museum collection should never be sold for operations or other financial needs.

Counterarguments to support selling the work complicate the matter further. What if the funding obtained from the sale was not applied to a one-time use? Perhaps the university could sell the painting and establish an endowment that would provide tuition relief for low income students. Buildings could be repaired (or new ones constructed). Critical laboratory needs could be addressed. New professorships could be established. One hundred and fifty million dollars could solve a lot of university problems.

Unpacking the dilemma

It might appear that there is no “correct” answer, and that may be true if ethical behavior and financial responsibility are considered dichotomous. Prioritizing an institution’s financial health over academic programs can potentially create the perception that money is valued over teaching. In museum management, professional organizations such as the Alliance of American Museums (AAM) state that funds from the sale of art objects may only be used for direct care of collections (2019). “Direct care” is a specific term used to define the limitations on use of funds and is discussed at length later in this study. Declaring sale for any other purpose is considered unethical.

That dichotomy makes the scenario above complex without a clear positive outcome. Some might say the decision is an impossible one, especially when considering the varying interests of institution stakeholders. While the Voluntary Support of Education surveys for 2016, 2017, and 2018 find continual increases in giving every year (Council for Support and Advancement of Education, 2019), the reasons for giving have changed. Strickland (2007) explains that donors in the past helped build universities, but today's donors are taking an active role in their donations, using gifts to transform the institution. Selling a painting, then, may damage relationships with donors and stakeholders if those donors actively measure the institution's stewardship of gifts. Donors might also question the reasoning behind keeping an object that could resolve financial problems. By simply entertaining the question of selling the work, university leadership is involved in a scenario in which every choice has a potential negative outcome.

Statement of the problem

Selling physical assets with a high monetary value can be a tempting proposal for an institution of higher education that is facing a financial crisis, especially if those objects have annual maintenance and insurance costs. One proposal of this type is the deaccession and sale of gifted objects of art from an academic museum's collection. It is important to understand how the decision to sell an object that has been gifted to an academic museum may be a violation of public trust (Fincham, 2012) and what that trust entails. The decision may also put the institution at odds with professional standards of practice (AAM Code of ethics, 2000) and even risk accreditation (Hart, 2007). The decision to sell a gifted object may negatively affect future donations (Di Gaetano & Mazza, 2017).

To understand the implications of those decisions, this study began with a very basic question: Why do postsecondary institutions have museums? The study examined the role of museums at higher education institutions to better understand the implications of decisions to sell objects from the museum collection. It is important to understand what and how museums contribute to their parent institutions and support the institutional mission, as well as the impact of unethical sales of museum objects on the relationships that museums maintain.

Purpose of the study and research questions

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to examine the role of academic museums in relation to their parent institutions and how the development of relationships contributes to this role. This study was framed by recurring suggestions to monetize museum objects in cases of financial exigency and focused on the relationships that might have been affected by such decisions. The study was guided by the following research question:

R1: What role does an academic museum play in an institution of higher education?

R2: How might the sale of a donated object to relieve a financial exigency affect the museum's ability to contribute in that role?

Conceptual framework

This research involved the role of the academic museum within its parent institution and the effect of deaccession during an institutional financial crisis on that role. The study was framed by a museum practice known as deaccession, the act of removing an object from a museum collection (Malaro, 1991). As a routine practice, deaccession is the way that museums keep their collection sizes manageable and improve the quality of those collections (Malaro, 2012; Weil, 1997). Deaccession in the United States is standardized by professional organizations such as the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). In general, organizations leave deaccession decisions in the hands of each museum's leadership, but two standards are explicit. The decision to deaccess must be made solely to improve the collection and support the museum mission; proceeds from a deaccessioned work are never used for operating funds or other expenses (Association of Art Museum Directors, 2011).

The scenario in the introduction of this chapter meets neither of these expectations. As far back as the 1980s, however, some postsecondary institutions have entertained the idea of rejecting those standards and selling an object for the purpose of raising funds. Harvard University's leadership began a deaccession proposal in 1982 to upgrade the facilities of the Fogg Museum (Ashbery, et al., 1982). The result was public outrage, bad press, and an ultimate decision to walk back the proposal. Similar proposals have been introduced since then in some variation by different universities, and the results are remarkably consistent: controversy, outrage, and dismissal of the proposal. AAMD specifically addressed the unique needs of academic museums in a 2010 statement on deaccession practice (amended in 2015). The statement appears to be a rewording of the original guidelines, with universities and their foundations addressed directly:

> Deaccessioning and disposal from the art museum's collection must never be for the purpose of providing financial support or benefit for other goals of the university or college or its foundation. In no event should the funds received from disposal of a deaccessioned work be used for operations or capital expenditures (AAMD, 2010, p. 10)

Despite the history of similar proposals with similar outcomes, it appears that institutions continue to consider deaccession sales as a financial relief method. In a recent case from 2018, a proposal by a private university to sell more than 50 works from its museum has left its alumni shocked and disillusioned with the institution (Kinsella, 2018). The actions also earned a sanction from AAMD and a public rebuke in the form of a joint statement from AAM and AAMD, opposing the sale and making clear that this action took place in stark contrast to the ethical standards for the field.

Significance of the study

Museum collections are a primary mechanism for teaching and sharing knowledge (Miller, 2018), but universities do far more than provide education, and their museums are not an exception. There are many additional ways in which the academic museum supports the institutional mission, all of which involve the development of relationships. Deaccession and sale of museum objects as a financial remedy may either damage existing relationships or make difficult the establishment of new ones. When these decisions become public knowledge, the perception is that of reckless leadership looking to the “deaccession cookie jar” (Weil, 1997, p.87) as a solution to poor financial management. This approach may appear to be stripping departmental resources, liquidating assets that are vital to both the department and institutional mission, as if removing a departmental teaching line to save money or selling off lab equipment to pay the electric bill.

The university brand may also be at risk. The language of art blogs and newspapers is strong. It is considered to be a dismissal of the value of the object as nothing more than a monetary gain (Rosenbaum, 2011). Authors cite faculty who explain that the institutional reputation is jeopardized and characterize the decision as a trust issue among donors and supporters, while referencing alumni who take legal action (Strout, 2007). Some articles highlight the reactions by professional organizations, illustrating concern that universities do not value the arts (Jaschik, 2009).

Limitations of the study

This study employed data gathered from documents and interviews from both private and public institutions. The most immediate limitation involved the social distancing guidelines, travel restrictions, and museum closures at virtually every institution in the United States. The inability to travel and meet with people hindered data collection, as did the fact that working remotely put additional demands on the time of the individuals I sought to interview. Radical changes in funding, access, and priorities made interviews difficult to arrange.

Another limitation was access to records. Professional standards were immediately available, and those standards also dictate that individual museum policies be transparent (AAMD, 2011). Therefore, many institutional mission statements and some policies were accessible, but in many cases, collection management policies were not accessible from the museum site, and remote work made contact with individuals to retrieve them more challenging. The decision was ultimately made to be as representative as possible of institution types and consider those policies as examples but not comprehensive review.

Gift agreements were excluded as an additional document resource for a few reasons. The first was the same access issue during the pandemic, but the more salient reason was that donation records and gift agreements are usually not shared or, when they are, they may be redacted in a way that makes review unproductive.

Delimitations of the study

This study examined the purpose of the academic museum and was framed by a very specific scenario. The study acknowledged that only a small percentage of institutions have faced deaccession for reasons other than direct care of the museum collection. Therefore, the study was bounded by three constraints:

1. Museums considered for the study were all embedded within the organizational structure of a parent institution of postsecondary education.

2. All professionals interviewed were involved in some way with professional organizations that set standards and best practices.

3. Any specific objects or donations discussed were unrestricted gifts. Restricted gifts come with predetermined guidelines and present a separate set of legal issues regarding deaccession. Gifts purchased by a university / museum acquisition fund did not involve the same considerations regarding impact on donor satisfaction.

Organization of the study

The first chapter of this study establishes the problem, provides the context of the problem, and proposes the research questions. The second chapter reviews the literature of the study. The third chapter explains the research design and rationale for that design. The fourth chapter reviews the findings. The fifth chapter makes recommendations from the findings. Appendices follow that provide illustrations of data collected and documents used to conduct the study such as the interview protocol, request for participation, and consent form.

Definition of terms

Academic museum: A museum that belongs to a parent educational institution and supports the mission of that institution (AAMG, 2017). For the purposes of this study, that field is limited to museums in the United States and postsecondary institutions.

Accession: The process of transferring title or ownership from the providing source (fieldwork, purchase, gift, transfer, etc.) to the museum (Edson & Dean, 2013)

Acquisition: Acquisition is the process of transferring title or ownership. Accession is the act of adding the object to the university records (Edson & Dean, 2013)

Collection: An identifiable selection of objects having some significant commonality (Edson & Dean, 2013)

Deaccession: The process for removing objects from a museum's collection (Edson & Dean, 2013)

Deed of gift: A document with the signature of the donor transferring title of an object to a museum (Edson & Dean, 2013).

Droit moral: Legislation that permits the artist or the artist's estate to assert some control over the subsequent use of his or her work (only exists in some states). Droit moral and copyright are two elements that restrict a gift outside of the terms agreed to by the donor and museum. (Malaro, 2012).

Fair market value: Used to describe the monetary value of an object based on commercial demand rather than the perceived value established by the owner or producer (Edson & Dean, 2013)

Foundation: Non-profit entities that receive donations from private citizens and corporations to benefit the public, taxpayer-funded schools with which they are associated (SPLC, 2010)

Restricted gift: An object offered to and accepted by a museum with legally binding conditions that materially affect the object's use or disposition (Malaro, 2012)

Parent institution: The institution to which a specific university museum belongs (AAMG, 2017).

Chapter 2: Review of the literature

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to examine the role of the academic museum in relation to its parent institution and how the development of relationships contributes to this role. This study was framed by recurring suggestions to monetize museum objects in cases of financial exigency and focused on the relationships that are affected by such decisions.

This research was prompted by stories of public backlash when American postsecondary institutions entertained the possibility of selling art objects (or in some cases, entire collections of art) as a solution to a financial exigency. In the field of museum management, the act of removing an object from a museum's collection is known as *deaccession*. This practice is quite common and is a routine element of museum management, but when deaccession at a museum is either misunderstood as careless disposal or proposed as a fundraising solution, the public reaction can prompt lawsuits, enrage alumni, and frighten donors. If the museum is an academic museum, an unpopular decision can cost institutions millions of dollars or damage the institution's reputation, but little is known of any effect on the academic museum and its role within its parent institution.

Organization of the review

This chapter sets the historical context of museums at postsecondary institutions and provides a review of literature involving the academic museum. The museum collection is defined, and collection management practice is reviewed, including the practice of deaccession and unacceptable practice. Organizations that govern museum practice are reviewed, and a timeline of deaccession is established in the context of its controversy in the United States. The chapter ends with a review of fiduciary duty, ethics, and the law as they involve collections management practice.

Historical context

The history of the museum depends somewhat on the way in which it is defined. In its simplest sense, a museum is a physical location for the storage of objects that will be accessed for appreciation and education. A key element in the purpose of the museum is that it serves to preserve and care for these objects (Miller, 2018). The first known organized museum was in Alexandria in the third century BCE, and the next step in the evolution of museums occurred in Renaissance Florence with the use of the word “museum” to describe the collection practices of the Medici (Dean & Edson, 2013). The mission at every step in the development of the idea of the museum involves providing access to tangible items with some cultural relevance for the support of research and education.

The modern idea of a museum is a relatively recent invention (Miller, 2018). Although modern versions of museums are only a few hundred years old, established through precedents such as the Louvre in Paris (1793), the Kuntskamera in St. Petersburg (1727), and the British Museum in London (1753), every variation of a museum demonstrates the natural human reverence for the care of objects (Miller, 2018). One predecessor to modern academic museums serves as the standard for the museum as a department of a university: the Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford.

The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology is widely considered the first university owned museum, opening in 1683 to display the cabinet of curiosities donated to the University of Oxford by Elias Ashmole, a wealthy collector of antiquities (Ovenell, 1986). Ashmole studied judicial astrology, natural philosophy, astronomy, and mathematics at Oxford while serving in the garrison there (Ovenell, 1986). A traveler and collector, he came into possession of the Tradescant collection of paintings, carvings, letters, and various other pieces, the variety of which were summed up as “curiosities” and “rarities” (Ovenell, 1986).

The story of the birth of the Ashmolean predicts much of the operation of academic museums to this day. First, the museum was established to house a gift from someone associated with the university. Second, the gift was acknowledged by naming the museum after the donor. Third, the gift and subsequent museum were intended to support education for students and research for faculty, and finally, the responsibility of museum management was assigned to a member of the faculty in order to maintain the integrity of the academic purpose of the museum (Ovenell, 1986).

The history of academic museums in the United States is as individual in nature as the institutions. Yale University claims the oldest US university art museum, established in 1832 to house a donation of paintings from American artist John Trumbull (Oedel, 1986). Princeton University’s role as a research-based home for art and artifacts is significant enough that the university’s founding in 1746 is listed in appendices of historical developments in museum practice (Lourenço, 2019). William and Mary received its first gift of art in 1732, but the university did not establish a formal museum until 1983 with the gifts of a group of alumni and supporters. The university’s Muscarelle Museum was named after the primary donor, Joseph L. Muscarelle (About the Muscarelle, n.d.).

Harvard first formally established a museum with the Fogg Museum in 1895, the first of multiple museums for the institution (Harvard Art Museums, n.d.). Multiple museums were later established for Harvard, all based on gifts from various donors. A significant number of academic museums in the United States are named after the donor, following suit with museums such as the Fogg, named after William Hayes Fogg, an alumnus whose gift likely originated with the art history education he received while at Harvard (Curti & Nash, 1965). The fact that so many museums are named after their donors likely implies some rationale for the donors' decisions to give, or the practice of naming is a standard gesture of appreciation to significant donors.

Academic museums do not follow any timeline associated with the charter or growth of the institution. Many are relatively recent, having been established within the past 60 years, often due to a growing need to house owned objects. As with their private university predecessors, many of these museums are founded through the support of a gift from a donor or foundation and are often named after those individuals.

Academic museums

There are distinctions in the museums that belong to institutions of higher education. One distinction between public and academic museums is the emphasis on active research. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) considers academic museums to be important support mechanisms for teaching and research at their parent institutions (Kelly, 2001).

Academic museums' missions are tied closely to the support of the institutional mission. The Association of Academic Museums and Galleries (AAMG) states that their "primary purpose is to support the mission of their parent institutions" (AAMG, 2017, p. 3). In this way, academic museums should be considered an extension of the educational mission of the parent institution.

Academic museums emphasize the ideals of the community and the administration of their parent institutions (Guthe, 1997). Academic museums are laboratories that support the institutional curriculum (Hammond et al., 2014). They may also support the university by offering a dynamic opportunity to develop and promote new approaches to teaching and learning (Guthe, 1997). By housing the physical evidence used in research, academic museums allow students to actively experience research (Hammond et al., 2014).

Definition of museum collection

The term “collection” has a specific meaning. The objects in a museum collection are the result of an intentional effort, guided by policy that outlines the collection as it supports the museum’s mission (Malaro, 1994). The academic museum collection is cultivated through an intentional process and is evaluated regularly (Malaro, 2012). Objects come to academic museums in a variety of ways, but when they are chosen to be added to the museum record as a part of the collection, the object takes on a new meaning as a contributor to the museum mission (Edson & Dean, 2013).

Ownership of an object does not make that object a part of the museum collection. Objects that have been donated to the institution but not to the museum are not considered a part of the museum collection (Malaro, 2012). The parent institution may even be stewards of objects that are well-suited and relevant to the academic museum collection but are not within the museum’s ownership. When considering museums and what they do with the objects they own, it is important to note that museums are not simply storage and display facilities.

Definition of deaccession

The actions involved in obtaining, recording, preserving, and occasionally disposing of objects are the practice of collections management, which exists in four distinct parts: acquisition, accession, deaccession, and disposition (disposal). Acquisition and accession make up the two-part process of bringing new objects to the museum and adding them to the collection, while deaccession and disposition are the antonym practices that remove the object.

Acquisition is the act of obtaining an object, but it does not immediately imply accession unless it is defined in the terms of acquisition (Edson & Dean, 2013). As mentioned previously, a museum or university may obtain title to an object and retain all rights to that object without accessioning it. This occurs most frequently when a university accepts a gift that is donated for the explicit purpose of sale to raise money (Malaro, 2012).

Accession is the practice of adding the object to the museum’s record as a part of a collection, and it serves two purposes. Accession has a practical role in documenting the object and the means of acquisition. In earlier literature, accession is occasionally referred to as a *permanent acquisition* (Dudley & Bezold, 1979). Formal acquisition is an important step. From an ethical and legal standpoint, the museum is responsible for confirming that the provenance and title of the object are legitimate.

Formal accession is also a symbolic gesture, as it indicates that the object is a meaningful addition to the museum collection. A transformation occurs when objects undergo this process (Edson & Dean, 2013), as they become a part of the museum collection and contribute to the mission of the institution.

Deaccession, then, is the reverse process. Malaro (2012) refers to deaccession as the *entire process of removal*, and the College Art Association (CAA) adds that deaccession involves the *relinquishment of ownership* and outlines that the deaccession can result in sale, exchange or other disposal means (CAA, 2013). The International Council of Museums adds that there is a significant expectation that deaccession ultimately be completed by transfer to another museum (ICOM, 2013).

Rationales for deaccession

Malaro (2012) stated that within the deaccession decision process are two questions: "Should deaccession occur," and if so, "How." There are a variety of reasons that an object might be deaccessioned from a collection. In 1997, Gilboe supervised a study of deaccession policies of 79 institutions that was commissioned by the Registrars Committee Deaccessioning Task Force formed by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). The study found that museums most often deaccessioned objects that were redundant, such as duplicates or multiple works with a similar theme; objects in poor physical condition due to age or lack of care; objects that were found to be forgeries; objects that required more care than the institution could provide; objects that were stolen or had been missing for an extended period of time; objects that were stolen or illegally obtained and imported; objects that required return due to state, federal, or international law; objects that were subjected to destructive analysis; and occasional considerations related to artists who were still alive (such as replacement of one work with a superior). None of the usual criteria involve sale to assist in financial security for the museum.

Very rarely will these rationales be subjects of debate. An object that is proven to be a forgery has little to no value except in education regarding art forgeries. An object that has deteriorated beyond usefulness only takes up space. Some objects serve a greater good in their destruction for research purposes. There are, however, some rationales that require more flexible judgment by museum management and deserve careful consideration. These include deaccession of an object considered no longer relevant and deaccession to support *direct care of the collection*. According to AAM (2019), direct care does not extend to operations costs but rather to improve the collection and keep the collection relevant to the museum mission.

Timeline of deaccession practice

The term *deaccession* was used by museum registrars as far back as 1958. The Dorothy Dudley and Irma Bezold manual *Museum Registration Methods* was initially created after a 6 year process of survey and collection from members of the American Association of Art Museums. In that book, the authors refer to “de-accession” as the practice of removing an object from the museum registry.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, events unfolded that contributed to the first controversies involving deaccession. The Tax Reform Act in 1969 made dramatic alterations to the amounts that artist-donors could claim for charitable contribution from fair market value to the cost of the materials (Regnier, 2016). The result was an immediate and noticeable decrease in charitable giving. From 1970 to 1972, artist donations to charitable institutions dropped by 91% (Regnier, 2016). This outcome was a dramatic financial loss for museums and fundamentally altered how universities came into ownership of objects of art.

Later, in February of 1972, John Canaday wrote an article for the New York Times titled “Very Quiet and Very Dangerous,” in which he expressed concern about news that the Metropolitan Museum of Art privately sold objects from its collection. The validity of this claim is still unclear, but his point was that, as a public museum, the public owned the Metropolitan collection, and any sales of those works were a violation of a fiduciary trust (Canaday, 1972).

A few weeks later, the museum director, Thomas Hoving, wrote a response titled "Very Inaccurate and Very Dangerous," addressing Canaday's claims and stating that the practice was not only innocuous but was also quite common. Hoving's response included the declaration that more than 15,000 works had been deaccessioned and sold in the previous 20 years (Hoving, 1972). It was this contentious exchange on a public forum that made deaccession a topic of many discussions.

If the 1970s were the birth of the controversy as a public topic, then the decade of implementation followed in the 1980s. In the early 1980s, the Smithsonian Institute required that its museums have written collections policies, and in 1984, the AAM included written collection management policies as a requirement for accreditation (Weil, 2004). Also in 1984, Malaro published *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*.

This series of changes clearly influenced the development of policy, and from the late 1980s through the 1990s, there was a proliferation of scholarship on the practice. Stephen Weil published *Rethinking the Museum* (1990), a collection of written observations about the nature of the modern museum. Borg (1991), Babbidge (1991), Lewis (1992), and Besterman (1992) contributed discussions about disposal as a practice. Malaro published *Museum Governance: Mission, Ethics, Policy* in 1994. Weil published a collection of articles from the 1990s about deaccession in *A Deaccession Reader* in 1997. At the same time, Edson published *Museum Ethics* (1997). Malaro continued her work with a 1998 update to the legal primer.

By the time collections management (and specifically, disposal practice) had become established topics in museum literature through the early 2000s, the stage was set for the most explosive controversies that came about as result of the combination of a few factors. The accountability movement in higher education virtually reversed the funding model for public institutions from a majority funded by the state to a dependence on tuition as its primary source of income. Institutional endowments suffered from events such as the Madoff scheme and the Great Recession from 2007-2009. These financial exigencies were the cited rationales for attempts to sell valuable works of art in violation of the professional standards that state disposal of objects should only be for direct care of the collection.

Direct care of collections

The AAM report involving use of proceeds from deaccession stresses that deaccession is done exclusively to support the mission of the museum. Direct care of the collection is outlined as the only acceptable use of deaccession funds. The AAMD guidelines also assert that same point, outlining the deaccession proceeds as funds solely to be used for care of the museum collection (AAMD, 2011).

The AAM code of ethics was adopted in 1993 and was initiated in large part due to the ongoing conversation about deaccession practice, specifically the use of funds obtained through the practice. A version of this code adopted in 1991 did not contain this phrase and restricted use of deaccession funds solely for the purpose of new acquisitions. This phrasing created a significant disagreement among members of the organization, including those in natural history museums who believed that the ability to preserve and maintain a collection was of equal importance to future acquisitions. The 1991 code was suspended for deliberation, and in 1993 a new version was released to include the phrase "direct care of collections" as an acceptable use of deaccession funds.

Even then, the phrase contained no clear definition, although the members of the Ethics Commission meeting minutes covered the topic of deaccession funds used for operating costs. The phrase then went unclarified for more than 20 years. In 2015, a survey was commissioned and received more than 1,200 responses. The results of this survey were used to generate a white paper to clarify the meaning of the phrase "direct care of collections." The paper, published in 2016, states that deaccession funds should never be used in lieu of a comprehensive approach to financial stewardship and that any museum facing financial hardship should make decisions that are in direct support of the museum mission and help reinforce the museum role as a public steward of the collection (AAM Direct Care White Paper, 2016). As for use of the funds for operations costs, the AAM paper makes another important distinction that the value of an object should never be included as a part of the criteria for determining a deaccession.

The paper also defines objects that may be considered for deaccession to be those that are no longer relevant to the overall purpose of the collection and insists upon a clear collection management policy. The expectation is that the policy will clearly outline the process for making deaccession decisions. It is worth noting that the process of deaccession in this paper (and its 2019 update) wind decision making inextricably within the process of deaccession. Decision-making is mentioned 13 times in the 12-page white paper published in 2016 and 14 times in the 2019 update. The AAM also includes a decision-making tool kit that includes a decision matrix worth examining. That decision matrix can be found in Appendix D.

Quadrant two is where most of the decisions involving academic museums fall. In some cases the proposed sales are intended to fill budgetary gaps, and in virtually every case, the deaccession sale is intended to make institution-wide impacts. The AAM paper states that museums should have clearly defined policies for deaccession and for use of funds, but at this time, I am unable to determine if any of the universities had such policies published at the time of their respective controversies. One exception is a small private university museum director who asked to remain anonymous and shared that the acquisition and deaccession policies for their institution were not written until after the deaccession dispute was settled.

Philanthropy and higher education

Philanthropy is voluntary giving and service intended to improve the quality of the community and the lives of its members (Gurin & Van Til, 1990). Philanthropy is a critical support system in higher education funding and has been a primary mechanism for the development of higher education in the United States (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). In the years following the Great Recession of 2008, the demand for higher education has continued to increase while grants and governmental funding continues to decrease, leaving philanthropic support as a critical need (Bernstein, 2013).

An important distinction in the types of giving is that of restricted vs. unrestricted gifts. Unrestricted gifts provide the institution with the ability to determine the use of funds and generally help avoid legal interference (Conti-Brown, 2011). Universities and their museums typically seek to avoid restricted gifts. Philanthropy for higher education generally comes from foundations that focus support on a specific need or program (Thelin, 2011), however. For example, the Ford Foundation’s gift of $560 million in 1955 was designated to raise teacher salaries, strengthen medical schools, and improve overall university and college services (Thelin, 2011). Foundation support for postsecondary institutions often includes an expectation of oversight (Caulkins, et al., 2002) and is often focused on transformational giving (Grace & Wendroff, 2001).

Museums as a public trust

A trust is a fiduciary relationship in which one party assumes responsibility for property and becomes a trustee of that property for the good of others (Malaro, 2012). A museum is a trust in which the museum acts as caretaker and steward of objects for the good of the public (Malaro, 2012). One of the most important actions required of an institution that serves as a public trust is to instill confidence in the institution's stakeholders that it is making informed, ethical, and legally acceptable decisions (Edson & Dean, 2013).

Academic museums hold additional responsibilities, however. As auxiliaries of postsecondary institutions, they serve as a resource for research and do so in some ways that exclude public access (Gaskell, 2016). This element of their mission may be problematic to the public trust.

Many of the fiduciary responsibilities involve ethical considerations. A museum deciding to sell a donated object may not be legally obligated to notify the heirs of a donor, but is it the right thing to do? As Malaro explained, professional codes of ethics exist to "encourage conduct that warrants the confidence of the public" (2012, p. 43).

This confidence is critical to higher education given its dependence on philanthropy and donor support. Thelin and Trollinger (2014) pointed to a study that found universities are more likely to receive multi-million dollar gifts if the university fostered a sense of connection to the institution, as well as a sense of commitment or loyalty (Thelin & Trollinger, 2014). Of note in this text is the complete absence of a discussion about the usefulness or purpose of museums to higher education in the United States.

Case law involving deaccession

There is relatively little case law directly involving deaccession of objects from museum collections because state courts rarely involve themselves in decisions that govern museum collection management. The deaccession process is largely self-determined by museums, which are governed by boards of trustees made up of private citizens. Most courts are hesitant to involve themselves in contradicting museum trustee decisions (Malaro, 2012). State attorneys generally prefer not to intercede in issues involving museum governance, so the state’s role is not one of intrusion (or oversight), except in a few cases specific to certain states. Malaro recommends that museum directors discuss deaccession decisions with the state attorney general, but that serves as a guideline primarily for cases with the potential for controversy.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview of the study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to examine the role of the academic museum in relation to its parent institution and how the development of relationships contributes to this role. This study was framed by recurring suggestions to monetize museum objects in cases of financial exigency and focused on the relationships that are affected by such decisions. The study was guided by the following research questions:

R1: What role does an academic museum play in an institution of higher education?

R2: How might the sale of a donated object to relieve a financial exigency affect the museum's ability to contribute in that role?

This chapter describes the research design and considerations due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations.

Research design

This research consisted of an exploratory qualitative study. Exploratory research is appropriate when little is known about a given subject or phenomenon (Given, 2008) and is done with the intention of contributing to new fields of inquiry (Patton, 2015). Exploratory qualitative study helps guide the possibility of new research and policy (Patton, 2015). This approach was appropriate because little research exists regarding the relationships developed by academic museums.

This study was prompted by the explosions of public controversy when an institution of higher education proposed to sell an object from its academic museum collection. A common response to these proposals is to caution that such sales may damage important relationships. Little research exists, however, that examines what those relationships are, how they are developed, and in what way they contribute to the parent institution. An exploratory qualitative study allowed an examination of the perspectives of those who develop such relationships and provided context involving the purpose of that development (Yin, 2016).

Covid-19 impact on the study

This study was impacted in multiple ways by the Covid-19 pandemic. The study itself was affected by the inability to visit museums due to national closures. In-person interviews were not possible, and several challenges occurred in obtaining interviews with higher-level academic officers at postsecondary institutions due to demands on their time during the pandemic. The study design accounted for these challenges, including the use of Zoom web-based telecommunication software. The interview questions also allowed space for discussion of immediate issues affecting academic museums.

At the time of the study, safety measures forced the closing of every academic museum in the United States. The establishment of museum staff and facilities as non-essential led to a resurgence in the conversation about deaccession for financial reasons, and many members of the AAMG community were engaged in active conversations about that possibility. Interviews of those individuals provided a perspective that was examined in the context of the pandemic, financial exigency, and the ongoing conversation about collection management.

Sources of data

This study used three data collection methods. The data sources were document analysis, interviews, and reflexive notes. Interviews served as the primary source for this exploratory study. Document analysis provided context and a broader understanding of the policies and professional standards involved in university ownership of donated art objects. Reflexive notes were kept in a journal to reveal the researcher's tendencies towards the topic and the research methodologies (Patton, 2015).

Documents

Documents provided context to the research topic and information about the unobservable (Patton, 2015). In this study, documents were examined to provide an understanding of the ethical and legal obligations between the academic museum and the public (and institution) it serves. The documents included institutional policy, museum policy, and the professional standards of museum organizations.

There were two purposes for the document review. The first was to examine the accepted professional standards for museum stewardship of donated objects and to determine how (if at all) professional standards situate the academic museum as a part of its parent institution. The second purpose was to review how those professional standards are represented in institutional and museum policy and to learn how (if at all) those policies situate the museum within the parent institution.

Professional standards were collected from five professional organizations associated with academic museum governance. Those organizations are the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the Association of Academic

Museums and Galleries (AAMG), the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), and the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). The AAMG document was the primary document for this review because the organization is most closely aligned with museums at postsecondary institutions and because the AAMG *Professional Practices for Academic Museums & Galleries* provides a comprehensive overview of preferred governance and policy practice for academic museums.

Institutional and museum policy was obtained through two sources. The first source was sample policy provided in the appendix of the AAMG *Professional Practices for Academic Museums & Galleries.* Additional policies were obtained through web searches for institutions of the same size and type as those of the participants.

Selection of interview participants

Initial participants were selected by using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is deliberate selection in order to collect the richest and most relevant data (Yin, 2016). Purposive sampling allowed the identification of individuals with a professional investment in the problem of deaccession in the case of a financial exigency. The initial participant pool was created by contacting members of a committee formed by a professional organization with strong ties to the museum community. This committee was created to advocate for museums whose collections were at risk due to financial exigency. The committee charge and makeup made it an excellent source for purposive selection.

The committee included individuals in several professional organizations, directors of academic museums, and representatives of non-profit organizations that support the arts. The committee was constructed of two co-chairs, five ex-officio members, and five at-large members.

In addition to purposive recruitment through the task force, snowball sampling was utilized for additional potential participants. Each interview was concluded with a request for referrals to individuals who might provide some additional perspective on the study topic. These snowball requests yielded an interview with a staff member from a professional organization, a member of the faculty on an academic museum board of advisors, and three education directors.

Recruitment of participants

Recruitment (or sourcing) is the act of soliciting participation from individuals identified in the purposive sampling process (Robinson, 2014). Recruitment challenges included difficulties in persuading individuals to participate and inability or disinterest due to a crisis (Weiss, 1994). The Covid-19 pandemic created such challenges, but some of those challenges were anticipated and addressed by the relevance of the study to the current needs of academic museums. Snowball recruitment also allowed individuals to decline participation but recommend another possible participant. Participants were contacted initially by email. Appendix F contains the recruitment email.

Approval was obtained by the Institutional Review Board for verbal consent since exchanging physical copies of consent was not possible for safety reasons. Upon agreeing to participate, an email containing the informed consent agreement listed in Appendix G was sent to each individual. The agreement form was then reviewed before the start of each interview, and the participants then verbally agreed to consent.

Interview methods

The type of interview used for this study was based upon elite interviewing techniques. Participants are considered "elite" when they hold a position of power and have specialized, extensive knowledge on the subject matter (Natow, 2019). Elite interviews focus on individuals who hold positions of power or privilege and have some influence over policy (Huggins, 2014). Elite interviews are usually associated with areas of politics or public policy (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002).

In this research, elite interviews were appropriate because the participants were almost exclusively museum directors or staff and therefore in positions of power and sources of extensive knowledge on the subject. One additional participant was a member of the university faculty associated with one of the museum directors interviewed. Another participant was a member of a professional organization that sets standards for museum practice. Both participants provided an additional level of expertise.

Elite interview participants may expect a certain level of knowledge from the interviewer regarding the subject (Natow, 2019). Preparation for this expectation included attendance at an annual conference for a professional organization associated with museums with special emphasis on topics involving collection management practice. The literature review also included a thorough examination of these practices. This knowledge allowed the interviews to be framed by deaccession practice without the need for participants to define any elements of the practice. This approach also helped provide unique perspective on the document review and provided context to the research topic (Richards, 1996). The elite interview approach was also appropriate for this study due to the sensitive and confidential nature of relationships developed by museum directors.

The interview procedure for this study was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews have required questions for the participant but also provide flexibility in the order of questions and ability to ask follow up questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews account for the unique perspective of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Elite interviewing also requires open-ended questions and adequate space in the interview to allow the participants the ability to share their experience (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002).

Probing was a part of the interview process. Probes are follow-up questions used to obtain more information from a participant's answers to questions (Patton, 2015). Probing questions provided an opportunity to gain additional insight when a participant's response needed additional clarification (Yin, 2016). Probing questions also allowed the exploration of some key contextual topics that immediately emerged from the first two interviews, namely responses to the pandemic and institutional reactions to racial equity movements.

Interview format and location

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, I did not perform in-person interviews. The data were more limited in that I was unable to observe the participants as closely. To account for this, I obtained IRB approval to arrange interviews using Zoom software. Zoom is an online remote conferencing program that has several benefits. The process of joining a conference was not complicated for most participants. The software is used commonly at university campuses and among professionals in the field, so all participants were familiar with the software. I was able to set up all features in the Zoom session up, requiring the participants to simply click a link with a reliable internet connection.

An additional feature of Zoom is the ability to record sessions, which allowed me to record the interview directly without the use of secondary recording devices or software. The interviews were saved in two files. The files saved were one video file with audio and one file that was audio only. Immediately upon receipt of the files, I confirmed that the audio-only file was clear and not corrupted. Upon confirmation, the video file was deleted, using only the audio file for transcription. A transcription service was used to expedite the transcription process.

I assured confidentiality in using this software by providing the subjects with an explanation of security protocols. Password protection was utilized, generating a unique password and meeting ID for each interview. The waiting room function was also enabled, providing me control over entrance into the Zoom meeting. Participants were notified in the recruitment email, in the informed consent, and again at the beginning of the interview that the interview was being recorded. I stressed that the video portion of the interview was immediately deleted and that the interview transcript was retained as data for the study.

I explained to participants that the interview recordings were transcribed, and all identifying information such as the participant’s name and institution was removed. The transcripts were stored in secure encrypted cloud storage through the Google Drive server maintained by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Data storage security is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Interview protocol

An interview protocol (or interview guide) is a detailed list of questions and topics to be explored in the interview (Yin, 2016). The purpose of the interview protocol is to account for all questions to be asked and any topics to be reviewed during the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The guide provided the initial structure of the interview and allowed me to check the progress of the interview topics I planned to explore (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Creswell (2014) recommends several components of an interview protocol, which were adopted. They included an opening explanation of the study and closing request for referrals. During the opening explanation, I reinforced the research questions and established my understanding of collection management policy and past cases involved deaccessions for financial exigency.

The protocol included five questions with prompts to assist with probes. The protocol also included a standardized statement of appreciation to begin and end the interview. The protocol is provided in Appendix E.

Member checking

Member checking is the process of returning the interview transcripts to the participants for validation (Birt, et al., 2016). Member checks, also known as respondent validation, can be an effective way to confirm the validity of findings by sharing those findings with participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I utilized member checking by sharing individual transcriptions of their interviews with each participant to obtain their confirmation that the transcription was valid and accurate. This step allowed participants to identify any areas for additional clarification. Some participants took the opportunity during member checking to provide additional information or follow up. Due to the demands on their time during the pandemic, two participants were unable to respond to my request for member checking. In those cases, I drew upon the knowledge gained from their interviews but refrained from direct quotations. In two other cases, participants requested that I inform them which quotations I planned to use from their interviews. I supplied those quotations but did not use all quotations in the findings chapter of this study.

Reflexive notes

Reflexivity is the acknowledgment of the researcher's interpretation of data based on personal experiences and worldview (Creswell, 2014). Reflexivity is a deconstruction of the researcher's influence on the research and the study (Pillow, 2003). In addition to an understanding of the researcher's role in the study, reflexivity may provide additional data for consideration in the study (Finlay, 2012).

Finlay (2012) suggests five types of reflexivity. *Strategic reflexivity* is a consideration of the methods and approach used in doing the research; *contextual-discursive* reflexivity is the acknowledgement that a narrative of a person's story is structured in a different way than the events occurred; *embodied reflexivity* is an account for the physical interactions between interviewer and participant that may influence the data; *relational reflexivity* recognizes how the intersectionality of the researcher and participant affects meaning and interpretation; and *ethical reflexivity* involves the many professional and ethical guidelines that provide a scaffolding for both the implementation and interpretation of the study (Finlay, 2012).

My reflexive notes were included in the data for analysis. I utilized an ethical reflexivity approach due to the emphasis of this research on professional guidelines and ethics in the topic.

Data storage

Data were collected as digital files for all document review. Institutions were identified only by their institution type and size. Individuals were assigned a pseudonym and a participant number based on the order in which they were interviewed. A key for this information was saved to a single Word file and stored on the Google Drive managed by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Data for this drive were encrypted both in storage and in transit. Google Drive is certified for HIPAA/PHI, FERPA, and PII data.

All documentation collected as public information (by website, FOIA, etc.) was saved on the Google Drive. Documents were titled by document type and organization. Because informed consent agreements were not signed, they were emailed to the participants when scheduling Zoom sessions. Any additional exchanged correspondence beyond the initial recruitment email was shared with individuals through the UT Vault, a file transfer service that is encrypted. Any files received by participants were saved directly to the Google Drive.

Interview recordings were transcribed by transcription service. Transcript files were titled by participant number. Once the files were transcribed, the transcription file was uploaded directly to the Google Drive for storage. The recording file was then deleted. The files were then reviewed thoroughly to remove all identifying information, such as participant name, museum name, or institution. Transcripts and documents used in this study may be kept indefinitely because there is no identifying information.

Analysis of data

The first step was to collect all transcribed audio files from the interviews, and then review them to identify any possible remaining identifying information to be cleared from the transcript. The documents and reflexive notes were retained separately from the interview transcripts. Documents were saved in a separate folder in the Google Drive, and reflexive notes were kept in a notebook that remained locked in a university office desk drawer when not in use. Interview transcripts were imported into NVivo for analysis. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software used for text-based research (QSR International, 2020). NVivo was used to code the interviews.

Documents were examined to identify broad themes for initial coding and to establish and understanding of the professional context of the interview participants. This study was not meant to include a textual analysis of professional standards and policies. The professional documents (standards and codes of ethics, etc.) were printed and used for notes when identifying themes. The policies and mission statements were retained in PDF format and were examined to reinforce the themes identified and to determine the length to which the examples adhered to professional standards.

The next step in the study was coding the data. Coding is the process of assigning words or phrases to summarize themes in the data (Yin, 2016). These codes are important to help align the data collected with the research questions (Patton, 2015). The three data types were coded using initial coding, followed by axial coding.

Initial coding was the first stage in analysis in which data were broadly coded according to themes (Saldaña, 2016). Initial codes were established by close examination of the documents. The documents were first read carefully, and notes were taken regarding themes that emerged when considering the professional standards and policies against the research questions.

The next step in coding was to take notes during the first interview and identify themes that emerged from that interview. As subsequent interviews took place, initial codes were reviewed and any new themes that emerged were also noted. Over the course of the interviews, this process helped isolate themes unique to individuals while reinforcing universal themes across the interviews. Interview transcripts were then coded using NVivo, allowing the separation of blocks of content related to each theme.

In the next step, axial coding was used. Axial coding is the process of grouping codes from the initial process to identify dominant themes across the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). Axial coding was developed through visual maps of the codes and themes. These maps were recorded in the notes. Once dominant themes were identified, additional codes and themes were linked to the appropriate dominant theme through tree diagrams.

The final step in coding was a review of reflexive notes and a thorough rereading of the interview transcripts. This process helped identify possible redundancies and helped pair similar themes into larger theme areas while refining the subthemes.

Triangulation of data

Triangulation is the application of multiple data sources, which supports the validity of findings (Creswell, 2014). In this research triangulation of data was accomplished in two ways. Triangulation was accomplished first using multiple data collection methodologies. The use of document review methods was appropriate for elite interviewing to provide a more complete understanding of the topic before engaging the participants (Natow, 2019). The use of researcher interview notes added additional perspective on the interviews as each subsequent interview took place.

The second triangulation method involved the subcategories of interview participants. This method is triangulation of multiple data sources (Patton, 2015). The museum director interviews served as the primary interview source for this research and represented the largest number of participants. The addition of education directors, professional organization staff, and faculty or board members was intentionally compared to the responses of the museum directors. This approach provided context to the research question (Richards, 1996) by addressing the idea of the perception of a museum's role in the parent institution. These multiple data sources and the coding patterns that emerged allowed triangulation to confirm the validity of themes established initially (Patton, 2015).

Ethical considerations

Participation in this study was voluntary. I informed all participants that every effort was made to ensure confidentiality. I informed participants that readers might be able to identify sources based on information gathered from the interviews. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to conducting this study. University of Tennessee IRB ethical guidelines and procedures and data management protocols guided the study.

The data collection, preparation, and analysis, including transcribed interviews, were completed on a university-issued laptop computer. At the conclusion of each of these processes, all data and the analytic products were transferred to password-protected files in university cloud storage on a Google Drive. All data were stored in secure storage on a University of Tennessee approved cloud drive that requires two-factor authorization for access.

Chapter 4: Findings

"You can be the best art museum in your region. But if you're not serving your university's mission, you're done."

Overview of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the academic museum in relation to its parent institution and how the development of relationships contributes to this role. The conceptual framework for this study was the collection management practice of deaccession. The study was framed by recurring suggestions to monetize museum objects in cases of financial exigency and focused on the relationships that are affected by such decisions. The study was guided by the following research questions:

R1: What role does an academic museum play in an institution of higher education?

R2: How might the sale of a donated object to relieve a financial exigency affect the museum's ability to contribute in that role?

This chapter presents the findings in three sections. The first section discusses findings from the document review and explains how this review informed the interviews. The second section summarizes findings from primary data, interviews, and explores the commonalities and themes that emerged from the study. The final section of this chapter presents an organizational structure of the academic museum.

Document review summary

Document review was the first element of data collection and analysis. The professional standards and codes of ethics from relevant professional organizations were reviewed. The professional organization documents are outlined in Figure 4.1 of Appendix B. Review was done by careful reading and initial coding. Themes and common language were identified during the reading and those were recorded in reflexive notes. These notes were used in the establishment of initial themes for the interview data discussed later in this chapter.

The AAM *Code of Ethics for Museums* reinforces Malaro's (2012) statement that the law is the minimum standard for museum practice. The primary theme of this document is the establishment of the purpose of the museum and its collection, as well as the necessity to make clear and accessible the purpose of the museum and its collection to the public. An additional theme is that of the public trust, or the role of the museum as a steward for the objects in its care. Governance is addressed as well by stressing the importance of loyalty to the mission. This document does not differentiate between municipal and academic museums, so there is no mention of loyalty to the parent institution mission.

The AAM *Collections Stewardship Standards* were also reviewed, and the theme of public trust appeared again, as did the necessity for clarity of purpose and accessibility to the public. These standards issued expectations in governance that museums be provided appropriate support in human resources and financial resources. Although an obvious need, the expectation that those elements be provided in adequate amounts is a matter of discussion among the academic museum community.

The AAMD *Policy on Deaccessioning* defines the process and makes the distinction between deaccession and disposal. It includes a clarification of the practice and outlines the rationales that are generally accepted for deaccession. Additional themes from this document include public trust and the importance of clarity and transparency in the process. Governance is discussed again as well, outlining how appropriate decisions are made and enacted in deaccession and disposal. An additional governance theme involves a substantial explanation of the process and reason for sanction, suspension, or expulsion of member institutions from AAMD membership.

The AAM *Direct Care of Collections* document was discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. This document was reviewed again for themes, and the themes present reinforce those of previous AAM documents. In addition to those, the document defines several different museum types (children's museum, natural history, science and technology, etc.) but, interestingly, makes no distinction between academic and municipal museums. The importance of ethical standards is reiterated, as is the purpose of a museum collection. The most significant observation from this document, however, is from the decision matrix found in Appendix D. The matrix is provided to outline a means to determine acceptable and unacceptable practice. This matrix, however, is divided into four decision outcomes, two of which are defined as *gray areas*. Assuming all decisions fall somewhere within this matrix, the implication, then, is that fully 50% of possible rationales for deaccession are gray areas.

The AAMG *Professional Practices for Academic Museums & Galleries,* published by AAMG in June 2017, is a major document used in this study. The AAMG document relies heavily on existing work from AAM, and that collaborative work across organizations appears again in the mission statement review from different institutions, as well as in the review of institutional collections policies. Governance is discussed at length, including upward governance, or the museum's reporting line to those in authority over the museum as a department. The document also discusses various other elements of governance that appear in the interviews, such as development according to staffing needs and the role of the advisory board. Public trust is a common theme across the document.

Appendices to the AAMG document were available on the web page where the document is posted, including sample mission statements and strategic plans, permanence statements, advisory board by-laws, organizational charts, codes of ethics, and collections management policies. Additional appendices include samples of public art policies, exhibition policies, emergency protocols, and contracts or gift agreements.

The AASLH *Statement of Standards and Ethics* followed suit in a few themes, including the role of the museum as a public trust and the expectations regarding museum governance (including allocation of appropriate human and financial resources). Of note also is the presence of a diversity and inclusion statement at the introduction of the document.

The AAMC *Professional Practices for Art Curators in Nonprofits* was only reviewed for its section on deaccession. This section produced similar themes in governance, definition and purpose, clarity and transparency, and procedures for deaccession.

In addition to this review, a selection of collection management policies for nine postsecondary institutions representing a variety of institution types were examined. These documents are outlined in Figure 4.2 in Appendix B. The documents were reviewed to confirm their adherence to standards expected by professional organizations and to reinforce themes or identify new themes. The management policies were extremely consistent, generally using language lifted from one of the professional organization’s standards. This is common practice and one of the reasons that the organizations produce their documents, so this finding was not surprising. Similar themes emerged of public trust, governance, clarity of the deaccession process, and the museum’s support of its parent institution’s mission.

Mission statements from three types of institutions were considered along with the sample statements provided in the AAMG document. These documents are outlined in Figure 4.3 of Appendix B. The mission statements served to reinforce themes from previous documents of support of the institutional mission, public trust, and governance. The statements also introduced the theme of diversity that intersected much of the interviews.

In addition to thematic evidence, the review of these documents helped to prepare for the process of interviewing museum directors and other participants with specialized knowledge of museum management practice. This study required an understanding of the professional foundations upon which museums are built to effectively learn how they support their parent institutions. Of particular importance was a thorough knowledge of the practice and purpose of collection management, including deaccession.

This document review provided a framework for the interviews and helped establish the themes that emerged during the interviews. The interviews were elite interviews, which meant two things. First, the participants in this study were people in positions of unique authority in their institution and, second, that it was critical that I fully understood the professional standards and best practices for collections management. This understanding from the document review led me to conclude that collection management is an intentional process very similar to a university managing its curriculum, and a lack of understanding about that point is a primary reason that administrations misunderstand how museums support their institution.

Documents universally supported the idea of the academic museum as an instructional support, although none directly referred to the collection in this way. The only mention of the word "curriculum" in the professional documents reviewed was a single instance in the AAMG professional practices that refers to the way in which a museum might support an academic curriculum. Direct involvement in instruction was much more explicit, however. According to the AAMG foreword:

> As learning laboratories, they advance research and student achievement. They build cross-cultural understanding; create cross-departmental and interdisciplinary teaching opportunities; strengthen analytical thinking and creativity; offer real-world work experiences; model inclusion and access; and further civic responsibility in their efforts to improve the lives of people in their communities. As object-based centers of research and teaching, they sustain on-campus learning. They often serve as the front doors of their universities, connecting town and gown, the academy and the public. (AAMG, 2017, p. 3).

Overview of interviews

Primary data for this study were collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with professionals who either served in official capacity as director of an academic museum or had some vested professional interest in the academic museum. Initial participants were selected by using purposive sampling. A professional organization committee charged with involvement in the preservation of university collections was selected as the contact pool for the purposive interviews. Snowball sampling supplemented the participant pool. At the end of each interview, initial participants were asked for references to others in the field who were either museum directors or had vested interests in academic museums. Appendix E provides a table of participants, the institution type or organization type they represented, and their role with that institution or organization.

The Covid-19 pandemic created a significant challenge for professionals in the museum industry and, in turn, presented challenges for this study. Aside from increased demands on their time, remote work made contact occasionally difficult or impossible for some members of the initial pool. Additionally, interviews were made more challenging due to the nature of interactions via Zoom. Without the ability to read body language or make use of interpersonal cues, it was often difficult to determine when a point might be pressed for more information. This obstacle was most obvious with questions that involved the second research question, as some participants offered very brief responses without follow up. The qualitative data were also lacking because of the inability to meet the participants in their spaces by visiting the museums themselves.

Of the 12 committee members, one was eliminated initially due to international status. Two were nonresponsive to email contact, and two were nonresponsive to LinkedIn contact. One committee member declined participation, and one member made referral to another member of the professional organization that member represented. Therefore, the initial pool included five participants. Snowball sampling through referrals generated another eight participants, for a total of 13 interviews.

Once each interview was complete, member checking was conducted by sending the interview transcription back to the participant once identifying information was removed. The transcript was sent vie secure electronic courier service maintained by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Most participants responded, usually with some corrections or additional information added to the end of the transcript. In two cases, participants did not respond to request for verification. In those two cases, information gathered from the interview informed these findings, but there are no direct quotations from those participants, and no direct reference is made to specifics from their interviews.

Interview transcripts were reviewed in total along with notes from the interviews. This review produced an initial set of themes. The interview transcripts were then loaded into NVivo 12 software, and each interview was individually coded. The coding process produced additional themes that were then grouped by frequency according to each participant. This process resulted in the identification of four major themes. Three of these themes were considered independently and related primarily to the first research question. The three primary themes were the inward-facing role of the museum, the outward-facing role of the museum, and matters of governance. The final theme intersected all other themes in the interviews and emerged through discussions involving the second research question, although this theme appears continuously in all matters involving the museum’s role. This theme is communicating the purpose of the museum.

Two additional themes that emerged in this study were contextual in nature. The first was the museum response to the pandemic. It was expected that this theme would underpin all conversation topics, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic has created financial exigencies at many institutions. Because that theme occurred during discussions about the other topics, the influence of the pandemic is discussed within the presentation of findings in the four major themes. The museum response to the pandemic is also discussed in greater length in the final chapter.

A second contextual theme emerged that was not anticipated but was a constant reference point for participants in the interviews. That theme was diversity and equity issues. Although this theme was present in discussions about other topics, it was most relevant to the major theme of outward-facing roles of the museum. For this reason, diversity and equity is treated as a sub-theme of the outward-facing role. This theme is also discussed at greater length in the final chapter.

Theme: inward-facing role

One of the more significant findings from this study was the degree to which the academic museum collaborates within the institution by supporting students, helping faculty generate new learning approaches, and providing event space. The summary of museum history in Chapter 2 explained that one original purpose for museums on university campuses was the storage and care of artifacts used by faculty for research purposes. That role still exists, but the space museums occupy with respect to student support and the development of curriculum has changed dramatically. Participant 5, the director of a large public research institution’s museum, explains the changing educational purpose of the museum:

> One [role] is to serve the academic community as a center for research, scholarship, learning, inquiry, object-based learning. In universities this is going to be evermore important with the competition by online and virtual learning, providing the university a reason to actually be on campus, to experience the real works of art and understand them as physical objects as well as simply images. Strategically, this role is going to become more important in the future, given the shifts in higher education online.

Inward-facing role: student support

Participants shared multiple examples of support for enrolled undergraduate and graduate students, most often in cross-campus collaborative efforts. Experiential learning was often mentioned as a meaningful part of museum-based education opportunities. Examples included undergraduate and graduate student exhibitions, collaborations with common reading programs, and object-based learning programs.

Participant 10, assistant director and curator at a land-grant institution's museum, shared that the pandemic had spurred the creation of student-curated exhibits, something that they had been intending to do for some time. Participant 10 mentioned that, while many universities are now in the process of incorporating service learning and experiential learning into the curriculum, the hands-on experiences available through museums were already in existence and immediately available. Participant 7, a faculty member at a flagship university, echoed that statement by explaining that having access to a museum provides students the opportunity to bring objects out to be handled and examined in a way that teaching from behind glass display cases does not allow.

Participant 13, an academic program director at a large public university, shared similar opportunities for graduate students. At her museum, graduate student support was changing into a cohort model and was expanding to include professional development experiences. Students are now coming from programs beyond art history and museum studies, including philosophy, law, and higher education. One student hopes to become an athletic director at a university. Participant 13 shared that this student was learning how to see interdepartmental connections by working within a museum, something that will be valuable to the student in pursuit of that career goal.

Participant 12, a curator at a prominent HBCU, explained that she led a program designed to incorporate undergraduate students into the management of the museum with the express purpose of teaching them professional skills. Participant 12 shared her thoughts on the experience of handling objects:

> [We were] trying to prepare students for professional and life success, by giving them hands-on tasks, allowing them to handle objects…. Especially at that stage of education, we made a point of training and giving students opportunities to see what happens behind the scenes in a cultural institution.

According to Participant 12, tapping into students' strengths and interests in developing programs made them more relevant and gave the students an opportunity for professional development. Participant 12 also shared an experience that allowed a psychology student to use the museum collection for an experiential project that led to pursuit of a PhD in psychology with an emphasis in art therapy. These experiences were opportunities that cemented a student's engagement with the institution and allowed the museum to "double down on retention."

An additional program that Participant 12 shared was an undergraduate student program allowing students to serve as ambassadors for the museum. The program began mostly with students giving tours, but Participant 12 often saw students' experiential learning opportunities develop through unexpected interactions with guests. In some cases, the ambassadors found themselves talking to prominent alumni or donors who had not identified themselves as such. In other cases, students who were giving tours of a museum at an HBCU found themselves answering challenging cultural questions with "diplomacy and equanimity" while navigating difficult conversations.

Participant 5, director of a private research institution, also discussed experiential opportunities and the value of the museum in not only providing a space for instruction and a collection as an instructional platform, but his museum also uses that opportunity for in-person dialogue. Participant 5 shared that when the pandemic forced many institutions to convert their classrooms to online lectures, the question of justifying tuition costs has been highlighted.

Participant 5 believes that the unique nature of the museum and the irreplicable format of dialogues proves a value of academic museums that is very important right now.

Participant 1, an administrator with a professional organization, shared her perspective as an observer of a much larger number of museums. She explained that she has seen the pandemic response illustrate the way in which museums prioritize students and help their parent institutions create engagement. Despite closures, she shared, many institutions were maintaining a small number of open hours exclusively for students. Participant 3, director of a large research university's museum, reinforced that perspective, stating that his university felt an obligation to the students to keep access available.

Collaborations with common reading programs were mentioned three times. One program from 2016 engaged more than 1,300 students in a common reading program in its first year that involved curator-led or instructor-led tours of an exhibit related to the reading. Enrollment in this program increased consistently just prior to the closings due to the pandemic. Participant 2, a retired director of a large public university museum, shared her experience in developing such a program:

> I think maybe 5 years ago, I started the museum's collaboration with that [common reading] when they read Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* and we did an exhibition of contemporary African American art that related to social justice. Since then, we've tied very closely in with that and helped to select the book and have found that that exhibition itself had more class visits than anything we had done previously … there were close to 10,000 students that took courses or a portion of their courses in the museum.

Another example of curricular collaboration came from Participant 9, education director of a private research university's museum. Participant 13's museum provided a platform for a writing assignment that involved the close examination of an object and analysis of that object. Before the students were expected to write, the museum staff provided students a brief lesson in interpretation, introducing them to the practice of writing about symbolism and pattern recognition. This learning experience taught students not only how to engage in interpretive writing but also taught them how to navigate a museum and place meaning on the objects they see. This project then examined corporate logos, showing students how elements of design influence a viewer's perception of the company. One example Participant 9 shared was that students reviewed the FedEx logo, which has a conveniently hidden arrow in the letters that becomes obvious once noticed.

Student employment is another way in which the museum engaged both undergraduate and graduate students. Participant 7, a member of the faculty board for a public flagship university, shared that his institution's museum was able to keep students employed where other auxiliary services had to end their student employment during the pandemic. His institution's museum kept students on and had them create short videos about the objects in the museum collection.

Participant 11, the director of a land grant university's museum, shared that her museum is the largest employer of work study students on campus. Participant 3, the director of a large public university museum, said that his museum has as many as 90 active internships over the course of a year.

Inward-facing role: faculty collaborations

The academic museum has traditionally served as a resource for faculty research, but changes in staffing and shifting priorities by museum directors have placed the academic museum within the reach of faculty as a new type of teaching instrument. The most common way in which faculty collaborate is through site visits for specific classes, but the interviews revealed a much broader set of support experiences for faculty.

Participant 11, director of a museum at a land grant university, believes the ability of instructors to schedule relevant visits to the museum for courses is a direct support of the institutional mission. She shared that they consider their work in providing on-site visits to be the active establishment of curricular and co-curricular relationships.

Participant 2 shared that it was common practice for the staff during her tenure at her museum to review the course curriculum to find ways in which the museum collection connected to courses being taught each term. She realigned her staff to provide the time for them to engage in outreach with faculty to explain their understanding of the curriculum and gauge interest in partnerships that helped enhance instruction. Participant 2 explained that the development of relationships with faculty served two purposes. The most important was the ability to support the institutional mission and faculty instruction. She also shared that building this network of affiliated faculty created an advocacy group that helped defend and protect the museum.

Participant 9, education director at a large public institution’s museum, spends time finding ways to collaborate with faculty. Her primary concern with faculty is to help them enhance their work rather than simply provide a space outside the classroom for meetings.

> I find myself trying to meet faculty halfway because I want to know what their learning objectives are when they partner with me or another colleague within the education department at [Museum], so that we can think creatively, whether it be in this day and age, a Zoom meeting, co-teaching. Or before the pandemic, if it were in person in the galleries, I want to make sure that the visit is not just a field trip. We're not just getting the classroom for the day, but that we've maximized learning potential for while they're at the museum. So it's an educational process to prove to faculty that I'm here as a colleague, I'm here as a partner. And I may not know their students, but I know the collection.

Participant 3 had this to say about the way in which his museum connects with faculty and to the overall mission of the university:

> The museum's mission mirrors that of the University, and that is to teach, to serve, and to conduct research, but we take it a step farther and say we also exist to disseminate that scholarship through publications, classes, tours, etc. To that end, I hold the professional staff here to the same standards as tenured or tenure-track faculty, and that is to follow the University's motto that we exist to inquire into the nature of things.

The humanities were mentioned a few times as the most obvious connection to faculty. Art history courses are the most common, but museum staff and faculty are beginning to branch out. English classes were an example in which faculty collaborated with a museum curator to identify objects that students could view and handle, giving them something concrete to consider before engaging in a writing assignment. In another example, a professor's research in comics studies was transformed into exhibits at the museum that engaged students and members of the community as well. The exhibits were popular enough to have brought hundreds of students into the museum.

The connections are now reaching out into other disciplines, as well. At one institution, a physics professor held a series of talks in the museum on STEAM, a rapidly growing interest area that incorporates the arts into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Participant 5, director at a private research university's museum, likened the academic museum to a campus quad or academic commons, a space where interdisciplinary work thrives because it sits within a neutral space not dedicated to any one discipline. He also shared that they found the previous model of faculty advisory boards to be a slow process, preferring now to reach out to departments and discuss ways in which they can collaborate. He explained that working on an individual level on existing projects created much more effective partnerships.

Participant 7 explained that the growing interdisciplinary nature of scholarly work places the museum in an excellent position to support faculty. He also mentioned changes he sees coming in tenure requirements, something that will require more public outreach for the purpose of grants and more innovation in the scholarly production expected of new faculty. The museum can provide this opportunity.

Many of the participants spoke about the need to reach out and engage with faculty, developing relationships to strengthen the museum's ties to every department possible. This was accomplished in many ways, including the development of academic outreach positions, collaborations mentioned in the previous section about student support, and involving faculty in museum advisor roles such as participation with the museum's board. Participant 7, a faculty member at Participant 2's institution and member of the museum board, is also the chair of a faculty engagement work group whose charge is to develop more relationships and collaborations with faculty and the museum.

The academic museum can serve as support for grant opportunities as well. Participant 10, assistant director and curator at a flagship university's museum, explained that many grants require a public outreach component that is not always an easy element for some faculty, but by partnering with museums, public outreach is immediately available.

Participant 13 shared that her position initially began as a grant-funded position, and she mentioned partnerships through which her museum had developed programs with faculty for arts-based funding that was integrated into a grant proposal. The Mellon Foundation and Samuel H. Kress Foundation were both mentioned several times by participants, and two of the participants were currently holding positions that initially began through grant-funded programs. To secure those programs, museum directors often engage in grant writing, generating experience that can be of great value to faculty seeking similar funding.

It is worth noting that none of the directors with whom I spoke held positions that were tenure-line. Although there is an expectation of academic scholarship and the responsibilities of the position require curricular collaboration, the museum's lack of connection to an individual department and the staff's existence outside of faculty were obvious. As Participant 8, director of a museum at a public research institution that also serves as the state museum, explained, she is extremely aware of her position as one that is not faculty and therefore does not hold the same sway with administration.

Inward-facing role: museum space

Museums are, by their nature, dedicated physical spaces. One sub-theme that emerged from the interviews with museum directors and staff was the impression they all gave of autonomy over the use of that physical space. It makes sense, given that the space itself is primarily used for display purposes, but most participants referenced classrooms or lecture rooms within the museums, which indicated some additional inward-facing support options for their campuses.

Participant 1, an administrator with a professional organization, pointed out that museums on campuses make them unique in that they are part of a small set of university spaces into which people can simply enter and explore. She explained that this feature of a campus museum is what makes it a support for the institution in both inward-facing and outward-facing roles.

When he began working at his current museum, Participant 5, director of a private research institution's museum, arranged a listening session with leaders of student organizations across campus to find out how the museum could support their needs. What he found was that student organizations were struggling to find spaces to gather. He began to allow student organizations to use the museum for meetings and events without a fee, giving them a valuable space opportunity and creating a simple way to draw more students into the museum. The more familiar students became with the museum, he reasoned, the more likely they were to return and tell their friends about it.

Participant 5 also relayed how the sharing of museum space helped create safe spaces for international, racial, and ethnic-based student organizations. He explained that, when possible, exhibits or programs that fit with those student organizations might become a starting point for continual meetings within the museum walls.

Participant 7, a faculty member at a flagship university, shared that their collaborations with faculty included the use of museum classroom space for individual sessions led by a curator. He explained that the experience was so popular that the museum now is unable to accommodate all requests to use those classrooms.

During the pandemic closures, some museums attempted to continue bringing students into the building, if only in limited capacities. The rationale for bringing students in was that one major problem the pandemic created for them was a loss of a sense of belonging and engagement in the campus. Participant 13's museum maintained a 50-person maximum capacity to help with this cause. Participant 3 explained that his museum had been open to the public in limited capacity since August 2020, out of a sense of responsibility to students. Academic museums often have either classrooms or lecture spaces (or some combination), so their ability to host classrooms during the pandemic allowed parent institutions more flexibility to spread out classes across campus.

Theme: outward-facing role

The outward-facing role for museums includes programs and events that help the museum support communities and schools in the area. Some examples of community outreach programs include K-12 programs in collaboration with local school systems, community-themed programs that focus on special demographics unique to the museum location, and connections with the local government and business community. The theme of outward-facing relationships also includes conversation points involving global issues about which participants spoke at length, especially regarding their involvement and concern with social and racial justice issues.

The participants routinely referred to entire regions as their area of service when discussing their museums, often mentioning of the county in which an institution resides and making a broader statement about the museum's role within a region, such as the Northwestern part of the state. It was clear from discussion with every participant that there was active engagement with the community.

The intersectional theme of racial and social justice issues was very common here. The participants talked about these issues because they affect students, and they discussed their role in governance involving these issues. Given the prominence of this topic in the context of the museum's connection to global issues, it is discussed at length under the main theme of outward-facing roles.

Outward-facing role: school educational programs

Most of the museums mentioned working with K-12 programs. The programs were not often explained in detail but were mentioned with such frequency that they appeared to be commonplace. Participant 1, an administrator for a professional organization, first mentioned K-12 programs as a similarity among municipal museums, explaining that these kinds of programs that bring local area students into the museum for educational experiences were a core mission activity. Participant 11, director of a museum for a large public land-grant university, explained that one rationale for providing these programs is that they not only connect the community to the campus, but they also connect students to the community.

Participant 2, the former director of a public research university's museum, mentioned that educational programs are central to the museum's efforts to support the service component of the university's mission. She shared that the communities with whom her museum connects represent the diverse audience of an academic museum. K-12 programming provides the museum with a connection to the community and grants opportunities for students to come onto a university campus when they might not otherwise have a reason.

Despite the common nature of community education programs, they do not appear to be fully supported by the parent institution. Participant 3, director of a public research university's museum, explained that none of his museum's community funding comes from the university and requires fundraising. Despite this concern, community education programs remain a regular practice out of a sense of responsibility, not only to the immediate area but to the county, and effectively an entire region of the state. This programming requires collaboration with local arts centers and community organizations.

During the pandemic, a few participants explained that their ability to make these connections came to an abrupt halt. Some museums attempted to remain connected with community students in new ways. Participant 10, the assistant director and curator of a public flagship university's museum, explained that her museum had aligned a program with an existing free lunch distribution to provide learning kits to local children. The kits were designed to match the state's curriculum. Another participant shared that art kits were assembled for local students and distributed through the local farmer's market, reaching many students.

Some of the programs mentioned supporting Title 1 schools, which are schools that receive federal funding when a specific percentage of that school's student enrollment falls below a specified family income range. For these students, access at an early age to a university campus and museum may be a key factor in their trajectory toward higher education later in life.

Another educational connection that museums are creating involves medical communities. Participant 1, a staff member for a professional organization for museums, mentioned that some academic museums are now developing partnerships with medical schools to teach “bedside manner and empathy, to unconscious bias and ... diagnostic ability.” This kind of programming was confirmed by Participant 7, a faculty member who serves on a faculty board for his institution’s museum. Participant 7’s museum is now actively collaborating with medical communities across the state. He explains that the purpose is two-fold. The experience provides the students with visual education training to assist with diagnosis, and it also teaches medical school students how the experience of interacting with art might help alleviate the stress of such high-stakes roles.

Outward-facing role: community programs

Another element of the outward-facing role is programming that connects the museum to the community on some cultural level or provides a community service. Participant 10’s museum, a natural history museum in the Southeastern United States, maintains healthy relationships with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, in part due to their proximity, and in part because of the nature of her museum’s collection. She explains that the relationship helps create an access point for members of that group which in turn exposes them to the university environment.

The business community and local government also represent significant relationships for museums. Most academic museums are open to the public, and in some cases, participants spoke about positive relationships with the Chamber of Commerce or city leadership on those fronts. City leadership or key business leaders may be invited to serve on the museum's advisory board, or the museum space itself may present an attractive space for local community groups to meet. These connections breed familiarity among members of the community that help bridge the entire institution across the town-gown divide.

Wellness programming was also mentioned as community relationship-building efforts. At Participant 3's institution, the gallery had been opening for a morning mindfulness experience. He mentioned that the pandemic had given the museum a chance to grow that program by having a camera installed in the gallery space where the mindfulness sessions were taking place. Now, a program that might have only been able to accommodate 40 people for social distancing reasons has as many as 300 people participating from all over the world. Another mindfulness program mentioned by Participant 8 had expanded to well over 90 people and was now made up of more diverse participants than before, largely due to the shift to digital programming.

Participant 7 spoke at length about the racial and ethnic makeup of the community in which the institution resides and the ways in which the museum helps build relationships with those communities, whether through intentional exhibits or by connecting with community organizations. He shared that community programming was allowing the museum to connect with the LatinX community, the NAACP, Native American community, and other cultural organizations.

In one case, Participant 7's institution partnered with multiple community organizations and other museums across the state to create exhibits centered on the Black Lives Matter movement and help build spaces for conversation about the topic. Every participant spoke to some degree about racial justice issues that were prompted in large part by the summer protests over the death of George Floyd. Two museum directors referred to the Black Lives Matter movement. One explained that the museum issued a public statement in support of the movement, and another explained that a memo was distributed to the members of the museum staff to express the museum's position in support of the movement.

Outward-facing role: diversity and equity issues

One of the more compelling examples of the community connections created by museums involves the racial protests that began in the summer of 2020, following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis[1]. This theme was present in conversations about the museum's responsibility to students, staff, and the institutional commitment to equity and diversity. I discuss the racial justice issues as addressed by the museum by virtue of programming and education in this section and revisit the topic in the discussion about governance themes.

Participants discussed their own focus on equity issues within the museum's staff and approach to education. They also talked about the museum's place in how their parent institution addresses these issues. The subthemes from this topic involved the museum's support of institutional commitments to equity; the museum as a space for discussions on racial justice; diversity within the museum community; and the changing needs of a museum collection.

[1] For additional historical context on the deaths of Rodney King and George Floyd, as well as the background of the Black Lives Matter movement, see Wu, H. H., Gallagher, R. J., Alshaabi, T., Adams, J. L., Minot, J. R., Arnold, M. V., Welles, B. F., Harp, R., Dodds, P. S., & Danforth, C. M. (2021). Say their names: Resurgence in the collective attention toward Black victims of fatal police violence following the death of George Floyd. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2106.10281*

One participant shared a recent exhibit that involved police violence against black people, starting with work focused on Rodney King to the present. Another shared a traveling exhibit that began in Harlem and came to the campus. The arrival of the exhibit spurred the creation of a collaboration with the campus's black cultural center and inspired the museum director to extend an offer of a seat on the museum advisory board for the black cultural center director, a black male staff member at the university.

Museums can be a space for difficult conversations. Some participants mentioned that academic museums have a unique ability to create space for conversations surrounding racial justice by virtue of their connection to artists of color. Through the establishment of exhibits involving the work of artists of color who are addressing racial issues, the museum becomes a space for discussion that is inviting to faculty, students, and community members. One participant shared a program developed with a black artist whose home residence is in the same state as this museum's institution. The program involved the generation of Covid-19 signage and education through partnerships with museums to help encourage testing and vaccination among communities of color.

Despite the inherent inequity issues of the museum (or perhaps because of them), many of the participants acknowledged a need to address systemic racial problems with the academic museum. Institutional racism is a part of museum history. Participants acknowledged that museum collections have been dominated by white male artists, and museum patronage has primarily consisted of educated white people. Participant 1 shared that her organization sees many of the museums with whom they work prioritizing support for their parent institutions on antiracism and racial inequity. She explains:

> (Museum leaders have) a laser-like focus on this issue, and not just what they can do inside their institution, but how they can help parent organizations support those initiatives and structural changes more broadly on campus.

Participant 2 discussed the museum's involvement with diversity and equity initiatives and explained that the nature of the collection, as well as their previous exhibitions involving black artists, gave the museum an opportunity to step forward in support of the institution's commitments to more equitable practice. She also admitted, however, that although museums have become more socially oriented over the past 20 years, they have not made progress.

Participant 3 shared that an important ongoing discussion now in the museum community is whether museums are intended to be safe spaces. While the history of the museum has been one of an elitist space for white colonialist collections and patrons, the modern museum is shifting to a space for open conversations about equity and exhibitions that provide opportunities for not just artists of color but for entire cultural experiences.

Theme: governance

Museum governance is as varied as the museums themselves. Three topics were discussed involving museum governance. Participants discussed the museum's place in the organizational structure of the parent institution and the reporting lines assigned to the director. Participants also discussed matters involving the management of the museum by the director through staff and internships. Participants also talked about influence that is not directly involved in the institutional reporting lines, such as professional organizations, donors, and advisory boards.

Governance: museums within the parent organization

Participant 3, director of a large public university's museum, spoke about the role of the museum and its place in the institutional structure by proposing that museums should be considered academic units.

> We, campus art museums, are most often considered in public universities as ancillary or auxiliary units. I maintain that the museum should be an academic unit or, at least, should have academic standing. I believe that our curators, archivists, and librarians at the University should be held to the high standards that tenured faculty must meet, and that they should be compensated equitably.

Participant 10, assistant director and curator at a large public university's museum, experienced a recent change in the museum reporting line. She explained that the museum director now reports to the provost rather than to the university president. She felt that reorganization was a benefit to the museum, putting them directly into the conversation about the museum's role in education and the intellectual experiences of the students.

Most participants explained that their institution does not provide funding for their programming, and that social and community programs were most often paid either through the museum's own operations budget or by fundraising within the community. That reality is further complicated by the fact that museums belong to their parent institutions, which means the museum collection falls under the administrative jurisdiction of the institutional leadership. This perspective on ownership of the collection is the primary origin of most conversations about selling objects from the collection for financial exigency or operating costs. The difficulty in avoiding those conversations is further complicated by the often-changing leadership at most institutions.

According to Participant 1, an administrator at a professional organization, that can be problematic. She explained that directors do not have complete control over their collections, and academic museum advisory boards have no governing authority over the museum. She explained that this fact represents the reason for most conversations about selling an object from a museum collection for financial purposes. She also pointed out that governance can change rapidly in higher education, and when those changes happen, many institutional changes often come along with it. This fact has the potential to undermine a tremendous amount of work a director may have invested in helping leadership understand the museum's value.

Participant 8, director of a large public university's museum, explained that her institution aligned several similar auxiliary services in the same reporting structure. She shared that when multiple similar services all occupied the same space on the reporting chain, the potential was there for competition for resources made communication directly to the provost a critical need for the museum. In bypassing an academic dean or arts director, Participant 8 was able to clearly articulate her needs for the museum with the person who would ultimately make the decision about distribution of resources.

Participant 12, a former assistant director and curator of a small private HBCU museum, experienced a leadership change about halfway through her tenure at her institution. According to her, the changes in leadership signal a change in priorities, and her experience was that even the news of an incoming change of leadership created a sense of hesitancy and concern among staff at the museum.

Participant 2, retired director of a public university's museum, discussed the idea of "managing up" or devoting time to helping everyone in her reporting line understand the value and contribution of the museum. She explained that very few museum directors hold positions with authority equivalent to an academic dean and are often considered directors of a program, which can isolate and challenge museum leadership.

Participant 5, director of a private research institution's museum, elaborated on the financial issues in running a museum. He explained that the funding a university may decide to allot to the museum depends in large part on the reporting line, as well as the proven ability of the museum to do its own fundraising. In his case, the museum did not raise its own funding through admissions fees and a museum store as much as municipal museums, and there was not adequate financial support from the institution, so the financial stability through the pandemic came from fundraising to develop an operational endowment.

Governance: staffing

Museum staffing was a common discussion topic, appearing in conversations about the previous themes involving the museum's role, both inward and outward facing. Much like most other university services, some participants appeared to feel adequately staffed, while others were concerned about the adequate coverage of all their personnel needs. The pandemic did not help. Every academic museum in the United States closed to some degree at some point during the pandemic. Many were also faced with serious financial questions, as their parent institutions issued requirements to streamline expenses, most often by either furlough or release of employees.

The pandemic produced additional challenges in working with staff. Participant 2, retired director of a public flagship university's museum, explained that the staff usually had a proximity to each other, allowing them to have casual conversations or to drop in on one another to discuss ideas and problems. Closing the museum doors and establishing remote work eliminated that casual connection.

Three of the participants pointed out how that experience with the pandemic demonstrated racial inequity within the museum. Participants shared that lower-paying positions were those that were perceived to require lower skill sets, and those jobs were at risk. The lowest paid staff at most museums were often the maintenance and security staff who were more likely to be employees of color. Considering that the museums were closed, the need for security personnel was virtually non-existent, and the need for maintenance and cleaning staff was severely limited. Those factors put the employees of color at risk of losing their jobs.

This topic exposed a problem with funding among academic museums. Participant 3, director of the museum at a large public university, explained that the limited funding his museum receives from the parent institution is not collection or operating costs but rather employee salaries. That funding may provide a level of security most of the time, but in cases of financial exigency, the power to make decisions about staffing then belongs to the university administration, not the director.

With funding an additional problem, the question about the effect of selling an object for financial exigency weighed heavily on the impact to staff. Participant 8, director of a public research university's museum, explained that, although her institution had never sold, or attempted to sell, and object for this reason, she felt that the only response she could give to such a proposal would be to resign, and she felt strongly that her staff would follow suit.

Museum staff are highly specialized but also required to be adept in many relevant areas. Participant 10, assistant director and curator at a large public university's museum, shared that she needed to be adept at curation and educational work, but she was also heavily involved in decisions about the museum collection as well as human resource work. Several others expressed that their staff were expected to be competent in multiple areas and to be capable of working across job descriptions.

Governance: advisory boards

Advisory boards were mentioned in several different interviews. An advisory board is generally one that is made up of knowledgeable people who have some stake in the museum's wellbeing for the purpose of guiding the decisions of the director. Advisory boards appear to represent a major difference in academic museums and their municipal counterparts in that boards for academic museums do not have governance responsibilities. They may be made up of individuals who wield influence in other ways, however.

A variety of advisory boards were mentioned by participants, including faculty advisory boards, student boards, and community boards. Participant 10 mentioned that she felt the advisory board could be better informed and that the board members might not know all they should about decisions being made by the museum management. Participant 11's museum has a board of trustees with a set of bylaws and several subcommittees. The group does not have direct authority or fiduciary responsibility for the museum, but she still feels they could be much more aware of what it takes to build a collection and manage the facility, staff, and other needs.

Participant 13's institution uses a national advisory board and has a "Friends of the Museum" board which is not an advisory board but rather a way of inviting people interested in the museum into the work behind the scenes. Participant 13's museum also has one student and one faculty board.

One example of an institutional equity issue with academic museums involves their advisory boards. Since most institutions do not fully fund their academic museums, the museums rely on donors for financial support. The donors often have some level of influence on museum operations, either by directly funding certain programs or by participation on the advisory board (extending "membership" rights to those who contribute a minimum amount to the museum is common practice).

One participant explained that museums and their advisory boards are therefore overwhelmingly populated with wealthy white people. Despite their interest in supporting the arts, these supporters and board members may not always agree with (or understand) the direction of racial equity efforts that the museum attempts to address. According to Participant 8, "You'd be hard pushed to find a kind of an organization that's more…predicated on white privilege than an American art museum."

Theme: communicating the purpose of the museum

The final theme that emerged stemmed from the second research question. What would be the effect on these relationships were the institution to sell an object from the museum collection as a relief from financial exigency? This research question did not yield the amount of information that came from the previous research question. One reason for the more minimal data is that the number of cases in which a deaccession for financial exigency was successfully executed is extremely low, making those cases outliers at best. Even when these proposals are suggested, they are usually discussed within the confines of board room discussions and are not a part of any public record. For that reason, the results of this question are treated as intersectional themes related to the first question.

This theme intersected the other three themes in that the roles of the museum in all their capacities were always engaged in some degree of explaining the museum's purpose, the purpose of the collection, and the ways in which the museum was involved in education. Much of what came from the interviews on this topic involved an underlying problem with outsiders not knowing the definition of a museum "collection." The term "collection" means far more than an assembly, although several of the participants admitted that a "more is better" approach to collection had been a standard practice in the past. The collections of academic museums are curricula, and participants often discussed how individual pieces fit into the collection, as well as how the collection was designed to further the mission of the museum and support the parent institutional mission.

Each participant was asked if their institution had ever attempted to sell or discussed selling an object from its museum collection to resolve a financial exigency. Three of them responded in the positive, although one response was simply the word, "Yes," with no offer to elaborate. The participant did stress that the sale did not go through. Another declined to speak due to the public nature of an attempted sale. Participant 3, director of a large public university museum, explained that the conversation came up once during a board meeting.

> It came up once several years ago, when we needed $20 million to do an extension to our building, and someone in the provost's office turned to me and said, 'Well, why don't you sell that Georgia O'Keeffe? That's probably worth $20 million.' And I said, 'Well, because then we wouldn't have a Georgia O'Keeffe.' And that ended the conversation.

Participant 11, director of a public research university's museum, pointed out that selling objects from the collection may mean loss of the item for public viewing indefinitely. Since the AAMD guidelines recommend a sale from a museum collection be public and offered at auction, that process opens the sale up to private buyers, and confidentiality arrangements with the auction organization can allow an object to effectively vanish.

Participants also mentioned that selling objects from the collection for financial purposes might alienate other museums, creating obstacles to borrowing and lending, a common practice among museums. Accreditation was also mentioned as a potential negative outcome, as the AAM accreditation standards include observations of national standards and best practices.

It became clear from the interviews that one reason why deaccession conversations are so tricky is a lack of understanding about the value of the collection. There are two meanings to the statement that the collection has a high value. Of course, there is a monetary value, and that is often what brings the deaccession topic to the table. Participant 5 stressed, though, that this approach is a reversal of the process as it should exist. He explained that the consideration of deaccession should come first, which means that the decision arises through a question about the contribution of each object to the collection and to the museum. Only then should the question of appraisal and sale happen. Unfortunately, this process, when reversed, can lead people to the conclusion that an object's monetary value makes it an attractive sales opportunity.

Deaccession is a routine part of collection management. It is an important tool to keep collections relevant and to help manage space. Misunderstandings about what that process means have arisen in a variety of ways. Participant 5, director of a private research university museum, likened the possibility of selling a collection object to cannibalism. The big cases that make national news are usually the result of an institution attempting to solve a financial issue, but those cases are outliers.

Perhaps the most problematic topic in the interviews was the subject of direct care. As defined in the literature review, direct care is the term used by museum organizations to delineate the appropriate use of funds obtained through the sale of an object in the museum collection. One problem mentioned with respect to direct care is the boundaries of that care. One participant noted that the discussion about appropriate use of funds can create a false equivalence of the collection care and institutional care.

For example, if a museum is unable to afford to keep security personnel, that might be considered a need that qualifies under direct care. The participants who discussed direct care expressed concern that the definition has been under debate within their community for some time, but a satisfactory definition has yet to be determined. This fact is further complicated by the AAMD provision loosening restrictions on direct care in anticipation of financial needs due to the pandemic.

Organizational structure of the museum

The academic museum is a complex entity in all its various forms around the country. The figure in Appendix C represents the organizational structure of a typical academic museum. As is the case throughout this study, it is important to remember that academic museums exist in an incredible variety, so this figure is meant to be representative but not all-inclusive.

The first organizational area is a museum’s makeup itself. There are three general components of a typical museum: the museum staff, the museum collection, and the museum facility itself. Each of these components contributes to the identity of the museum.

The museum staff is important to consider because the presence (or lack) of some roles have a direct impact on the ability to perform the multiple duties of an academic museum. Museum directors are charged with the management of the museum, but their responsibilities almost always include development and relationships with donors as well. If a museum director lacks an exhibit curator or education director and must add those roles to their job responsibilities, the time and emphasis on development is affected.

The education director is a relatively new position within academic museums. In its various forms, this role coordinates the museum's connections to faculty and curricular objectives of the institution, as well as collaborative efforts across other campus services. One of the participants from this study was the director of academic programs for an academic museum in a position funded by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Funding such as this adds an additional responsibility of grant writing to the needs of the museum staff.

The museum collection is the central component of the museum and is the usual reason for the genesis of the institution's museum. In the history of most academic museums, a university collection is amassed, often by regular donations from prominent philanthropists or alumni. At some point, a need is established for more space to house the collection, and donors are often solicited to help build this space. A common practice in this negotiation is the naming of the museum after the donor. The collection serves several purposes that are discussed later in this chapter in the section regarding interview themes.

The museum facility was one of the more unexpected discussion points during interviews for this study. An adequate facility is a necessity, and the museum comes with its own needs, such as climate control and security. Two common discussion points regarding the facility, however, involved the regular need for space among students or student organizations and the ability of museums to provide a unique learning environment. These are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The second organizational area of a museum involves its inward-facing and outward-facing roles that support the institution. Inward-facing roles represent the instructional, cultural, and social programming that museums provide for their faculty, students, and staff. These include curricular collaborations, internships, hosting and/or collaboration of cultural events, and use of the museum as a social space.

Outward-facing roles are those that connect the museum and its parent institution to the local and global community. These roles are also categorized as instructional, cultural, and social. They include K-12 programs, cultural events for members of the community, and social events such as receptions for donors.

The final organizational area is that of governance. This area represents the most obvious variety among academic museums. The governance of an academic museum may be most generally illustrated by considering legal authority, institutional authority, and professional standards.

State, federal, and international law is the minimum standard by which museums manage their collections. International law includes the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that provides guidance and oversight regarding cultural heritage law. Federal law regarding academic museums in the United States is almost exclusively limited to contracts and tax law. States most often prefer not to involve themselves with these kinds of contracts, with exceptions being the state of New York and a few statutes in other states such as Louisiana that require approval from a board of regents or legislative body before deaccession and sale of state-owned cultural property.

Institutional authority is represented through the museum’s reporting lines. The most common is a museum director who reports either to the provost or directly to the institution president. These variations are discussed in the themes later in this chapter. Other governance entities may include the involvement of the board of regents and the level of influence wielded by advisory boards or donors. The role of advisory boards is discussed in-depth later in this chapter and in Chapter 5 of this study. Professional standards include the accreditation standards of the Alliance of American Museums (AAM) and the standards of practice issued by AAMD, AASLH, and AAMG.

Summary

Document review reveals that professional organizations associated with academic museums provide significant guidance regarding governance and ethical stewardship of the museum collection. The ethical guidelines laid out by these organizations are almost exclusively focused on the protection of the collection and the responsibility of the museum staff as stewards of that collection. The organization expectations for museum governance and policy do not always match the reality of every academic museum in the United States.

Regarding the first research question, interviews revealed that the academic museum provides a range of internal support to students and faculty through active engagement with the student body and the curriculum. The museum also serves as a space for community engagement that is unique to the parent institution.

Active cultivation and care of relationships is a priority for museum management. In addition to inward- and outward-facing responsibilities, museum staff must negotiate a complex network of governing authorities. Reporting lines may complicate that ability for some museums, as competition for resources and attention is a factor influenced heavily by the museum's location on an institution's organizational chart.

Museum personnel are extremely aware of and expressed interest in supporting positive change in equity issues at the institution level while also acknowledging the problematic history of museums in the country, as well as their own current shortcomings in staffing.

Regarding the second research question, participants shared that the sale of an object from the museum collection for a financial exigency has the potential to undermine the institution's reputation across all its constituencies, including students.

Chapter 5: Discussion and recommendations

Overview of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the academic museum in relation to its parent institution and how the development of relationships contributes to this role. The conceptual framework for this study was the collection management practice of deaccession. The study was framed by recurring suggestions to monetize museum objects in cases of financial exigency and focused on the relationships that are affected by such decisions. The study was guided by the following research questions:

R1: What role does an academic museum play in an institution of higher education?

R2: How might the sale of a donated object to relieve a financial exigency affect the museum's ability to contribute in that role?

The study evolved from questions about academic museums that originated from a common conversation topic involving museums: the sensational stories of lawsuits and public outrage when a university declares the intention to sell objects from its museum for financial gain. These stories illustrate a challenge faced by academic museums. The public often does not understand why a university would have a museum and more often does not know the degree to which that museum supports the university's mission.

The word "deaccession" represents a practice through which an object is removed from a museum collection, but that practice is often misunderstood. The cases of proposed sales of donated art that rise to the level of national news include statements that reference a possible violation of public trust (AAMG, 2017) and potential damage to donor relations (Kinsella, 2018). Professional organizations set ethical standards that identify the museum as a public service

(AAM, 2000) and emphasize stewardship (AAMD, 2010). Aside from a generalized reference to donors, the public, students, and faculty, however, little research exists that outlines the communities that make up the public whom academic museums serve. This study sought to place the academic museum within its parent institution to help highlight the potential risk when institutions discuss tampering with a museum's collection.

To address the research questions, thematic content analysis was used to analyze documents and interview transcripts. The data were coded and analyzed by initial and selective coding, and four themes emerged. The themes were the inward- and outward-facing roles of the museum, governance of the museum, and an intersecting theme of communicating the purpose of the museum. Two significant contextual themes emerged that influenced much of the interview content and shed significant light on the main themes. The first contextual theme involved responses to the pandemic. The second contextual theme involved the museum's response to matters of diversity and equity, especially those that came from the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020.

Discussion of the findings

An academic museum represents a unique educational opportunity for the parent institution that it serves. The museum also serves as a part of the culture and identity of the parent institution, but the staff of the museum find that much of their work lies in defining their purpose to others and explaining how they serve their parent institution.

Conversations about deaccession of objects from the collection are often grounded in misunderstandings about the purpose of the collection and the reason why a museum would retain objects with large monetary values, even when faced with a financial exigency. In a handful of high-profile cases, institutional leaders looked at an object in a collection and considered the monetary value of that object to be of more importance than its place in the museum and institution. In the past, these decisions were argued against on the grounds that selling an object from a collection in order to solve a financial problem would result in damage to relationships, but those arguments usually did not carry any weight until the voices of those relationships were made clear through protests, editorial letters, and angry calls from donors. At that point, damage had been done, even if the sale never went through.

The relationships museums build should be as prominent a part of its operation as the collection. Students who learned by holding an object and examining it under the tutelage of an educated curator are unlikely to support selling it later. Faculty who realize the immediate ability to engage in service and community connections for grant purposes are more likely to defend the museum in faculty senate. Community members who know the museum as a safe space to visit on campus are unlikely to consider dismantling it. These relationships do not simply serve as security, however, and museum staff understand that. Museum leaders acknowledge a shortcoming in public understanding about the purpose of a collection, and the risk to the collection starts there.

The inward-facing role

The participants in this study demonstrated a variety of engagements in instruction. Given that the museum has the capacity to serve across multiple disciplines and presents a distinctive opportunity for service learning and experience learning, it is worth examining further how, if at all, academic museums should exist as an academic unit. Some level of acknowledgement exists to a degree within institutions whose museums report to the provost. Museums will continue to reinforce their role as educators and that opportunity exists in their need to educate their community about collections management. It will be important to the survival of academic museums that their patrons fully understand why they have a collection in the first place.

Some useful research provides experiences in educational collaboration, although much of the existing research in these areas comes from outside the United States. Cezeaux, et al. (2020) share the experience of an international partnership with Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology. Noy and Hancock (2021) discussed an object-based learning experience with sociology students involving international development. Oberg and Nelson-Mayson (2021) discuss the role of faculty as guest curators to collaborate on exhibitions that support faculty research. Roberts (2014) shared an Australian perspective that museums represent opportunities for collaborative design projects.

An advantage here for academic museums over their municipal counterparts is that they have a learning base already established. Classroom instruction and interaction with students can begin to build a more substantial community that has an awareness of why museums own things. This education has a greater value. It can help students understand cultural value in a broader context.

The outward-facing role

The academic museum helps keep students in local schools engaged and is a similar collaborative opportunity for secondary teachers. Whether the museum staff are interacting with students at a K-12 program or offering a cultural education program, it is clear that the museum represents not only a significant education opportunity, but it is also one that is unique to the institution and region it serves. The museum acts as a means for diverse populations to experience the campus and engage in meaningful dialogue.

In secondary education, Marcus, et al. (2017) discussed the opportunities to enhance K-12 history programming by partnering with local museums. Bobick and Hornby (2013) shared partnerships in a Tennessee high school with a local museum of art. Patterson (2021) discussed history teachers gaining fieldwork experience through museums.

The unique nature of each collection contributes to an institutional sense of identity, and that identity may be closely tied to community engagement as well. Jordaan (2020) explained a project in South Africa that connected students to community development through their local museum. Taylor (2019) shared cooperative experiences with local organizations that brings the museum purpose closer to the daily lives of the community. These experiences can help connect the institution to its community, and they may also contribute to recruitment and retention efforts. Based on these findings, museum leadership may consider actively engaging its parent institution's enrollment management and student success units to enable a richer collaboration and identify means to assess the effectiveness of their support on that front.

Governance and the purpose of the museum

One of the most significant findings from this study involved governance and the importance of "teaching" institutional leadership about the role and significance of the museum. Participants explained this process as a necessity to protect the collection by working to ensure that new administrations understand the purpose of the museum and collection. Participants explained that they often approached this process by explaining the connection that the museum makes to the curricular mission of the institution. Institutions that report to the provost or executive academic officer seem to have an advantage in being closely associated with the academic mission of the institution. Museums embedded within academic departments appear to have difficulty maintaining an identity that connects them with departments outside their own.

Another important element of museum management is the role of the advisory board. In the interviews, some participants admitted to having boards that needed better preparation and involvement. Others mentioned multiple boards made up of different demographics, including student advisory boards, faculty boards, and the donor boards that usually make up the primary advisory group. Unlike the trustees of their municipal counterparts who have some authoritative role (Malaro, 2012), academic museum boards are almost all exclusively advisory in nature. Based on the impressions given by the participants in this study, a revision of the idea of the advisory board might be in order, especially when considering the topic of inclusive practice in museum management.

Implications of Covid-19

The pandemic struck campuses across the United States as this study was in the development stage, so a radical change was required in the research methods. The impact of the pandemic on campuses financially also affected the study design and the direction of the interviews, as participants were focused on their ability to adapt.

The word “pivot” was a common term used by participants in their response to the pandemic, and it represents well the directional change many experienced. The vulnerability of an academic museum collection has been made even more obvious during the Covid-19 pandemic, as universities closed doors and assessed “essential” services, while the AAMD provided a potential justification for selling high-value objects by loosening restrictions on the definition of direct care of collections (AAMD, 2020). Academic museums forced to close their doors and furlough staff found that their efforts to collaborate with faculty and engage students in learning were severely limited.

The pandemic did provide academic museums with opportunities that may benefit them in the future. The transition to digital formats and having a level of control over their own space gave museums a way to stand out on their campuses as examples of remote engagement.

Implications of diversity and equity issues

The protests that erupted after the death of George Floyd and the proliferation through the Black Lives Matter movement of university responses to matters of equity generated a major discussion point. Museum leaders expressed a strong desire to support efforts for antiracism and increased equity at their institutions while also admitting the problematic history of museums and their own inherent inequities in representation. Many collections are still dominated by white male artists. The presence of colonialism in the history of the museum's founding and the ways museums obtained their objects is still pervasive.

The advisory board represents one possible catalyst for immediate change. Although the previous approach to advisory boards was to populate them with friends (i.e., donors), museum leadership now acknowledges that this approach limits the opportunity to diversify museum engagement with diverse communities.

Although recent work addresses the museum as a place for social change and antiracism (Unsal, 2019; Message, 2014; Prescha, 2021), this research focuses in general on museums and does not take into account the unique and vibrant nature of a campus student body. Operating within a subculture such as this, an academic museum may be poised to assist in significant change.

The problem of direct care

One final issue surrounding this topic is the problematic definition of direct care to collections. This phrase was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 and was outlined as the only way in which a museum may spend the funds obtained by the sale of a deaccessioned work. This provision is complicated by the fact that academic museums explicitly state their mission as support for the parent institution, a fact that some have argued supersedes any professional standard.

An important question should be answered. Why shouldn't a financial exigency be considered an acceptable reason for use of proceeds from a deaccessioned object? Participants in this study have made clear their position as members and observers of professional standards in museum practice. They also discussed the problem of the slippery slope were funds to be used in this way. However, there is still a lingering question. AAMG is actively engaged in this discussion, but continued investigation is warranted. At what point does retention of valuable cultural objects override the need to keep the university healthy financially? At what point does keeping the Warhol matter more than keeping the staff?

Recommendations for future research

This study identified some areas for future research in postsecondary education that deserve more attention. To build on this exploratory study, another study to aggregate the inward-facing education programs and cocurricular efforts of academic museums would be of great value. AAMD manages a statistical survey and salary survey that contain information about academic museum leadership and reporting lines. This survey might provide a vehicle to collect information about the number and type of education programs that include more conclusive data such as number of students served per program, range of academic department collaborations, and types of program outcomes. This information might prove useful in establishing the academic museum's connection to student persistence.

Another immediate need is a greater understanding of the ways in which academic museums engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within their parent institution. A more in-depth study is called for to explore the ways in which academic museums can engage students, faculty, and the community in productive action to combat inequity. While research is currently ongoing regarding the decolonization of museums, a study that considers the unique nature of academic museums would be very valuable.

Academic museums are often referred to as learning laboratories. One question worth examining is the way in which the museum defines a laboratory in the ever-changing world of science and technology. As museums can easily demonstrate their ability to collaborate across virtually all disciplines in their parent institutions, it is now appropriate for them to engage in conversations about how to not only teach students in an interdisciplinary way but to teach students the nature of interdisciplinary learning as an educational outcome in itself.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview participants

Participant	Role	Institution type	Institution enrollment (undergraduate)
Participant 1	Organization	NA	NA
Participant 2	Director (retired)	Public research (flagship)	20,000
Participant 3	Director	Public research (flagship)	40,000
Participant 4	Director	Private research	15,000
Participant 5	Director	Private research	20,000
Participant 6	Director	Private liberal arts	2,000
Participant 7	Faculty / board	Public research (flagship)	20,000
Participant 8	Director	Public research	30,000
Participant 9	Education director	Private research	15,000
Participant 10	Assistant Director / Curator	Public research (land-grant)	20,000
Participant 11	Director	Public research (land-grant)	40,000
Participant 12	Assistant Director / Curator	Private HBCU	Under 1,000
Participant 13	Education Director	Public research	20,000

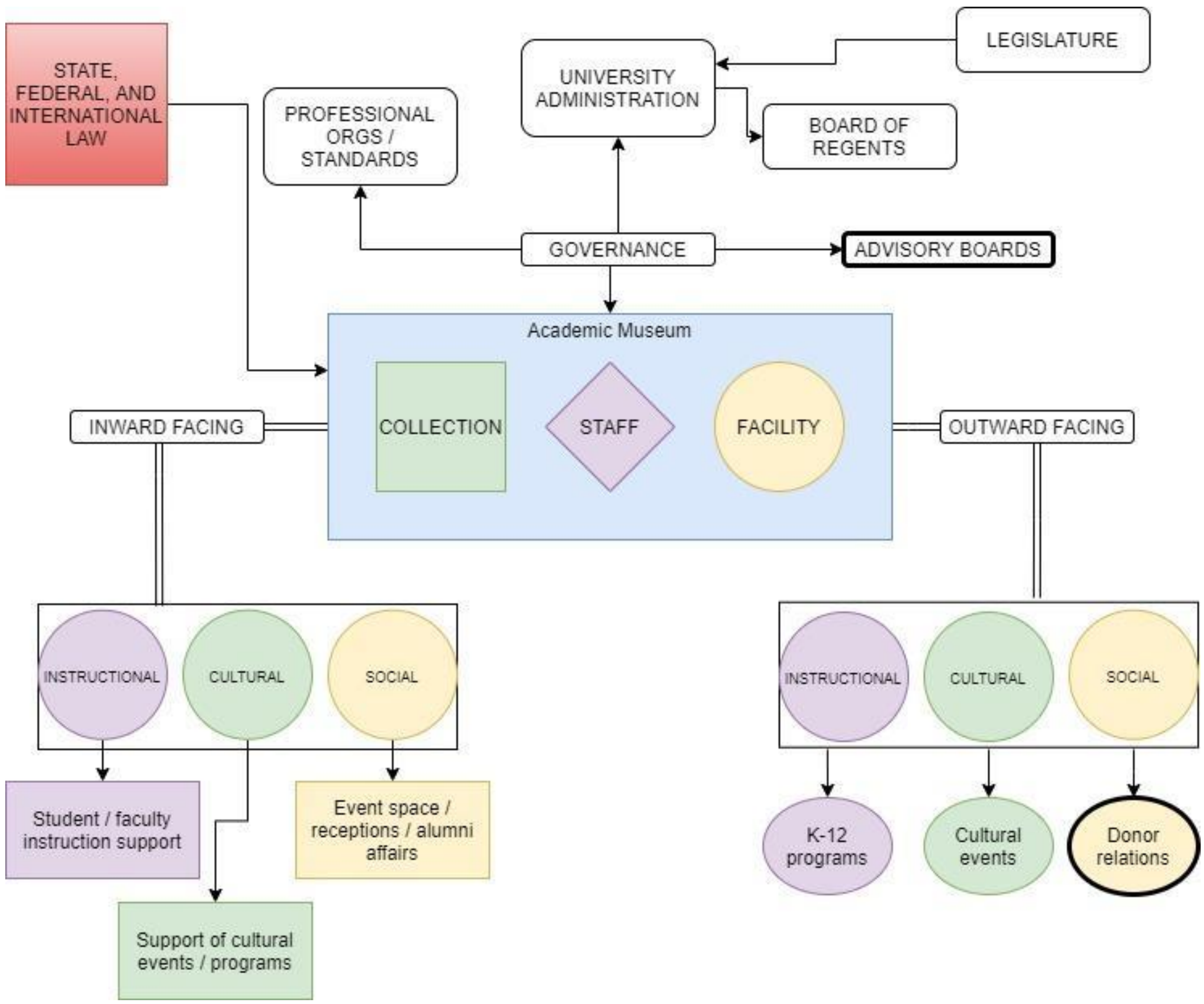
Appendix B: Document review sources

Figure 4.1: Professional standards and best practices	
Organization	**Document**
American Alliance of Museums (AAM)	Code of ethics for museums
American Alliance of Museums (AAM)	Collections stewardship standards
Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD)	Policy on deaccessioning
Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD)	Direct care of collections: Ethics, guidelines, and recommendations
Association of Academic Museums & Galleries (AAMG)	Professional practices for academic museums & galleries
The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)	Statement of standards and ethics
Association of Art Museum Curators Foundation (AAMC)	Professional practices for art curators in nonprofits

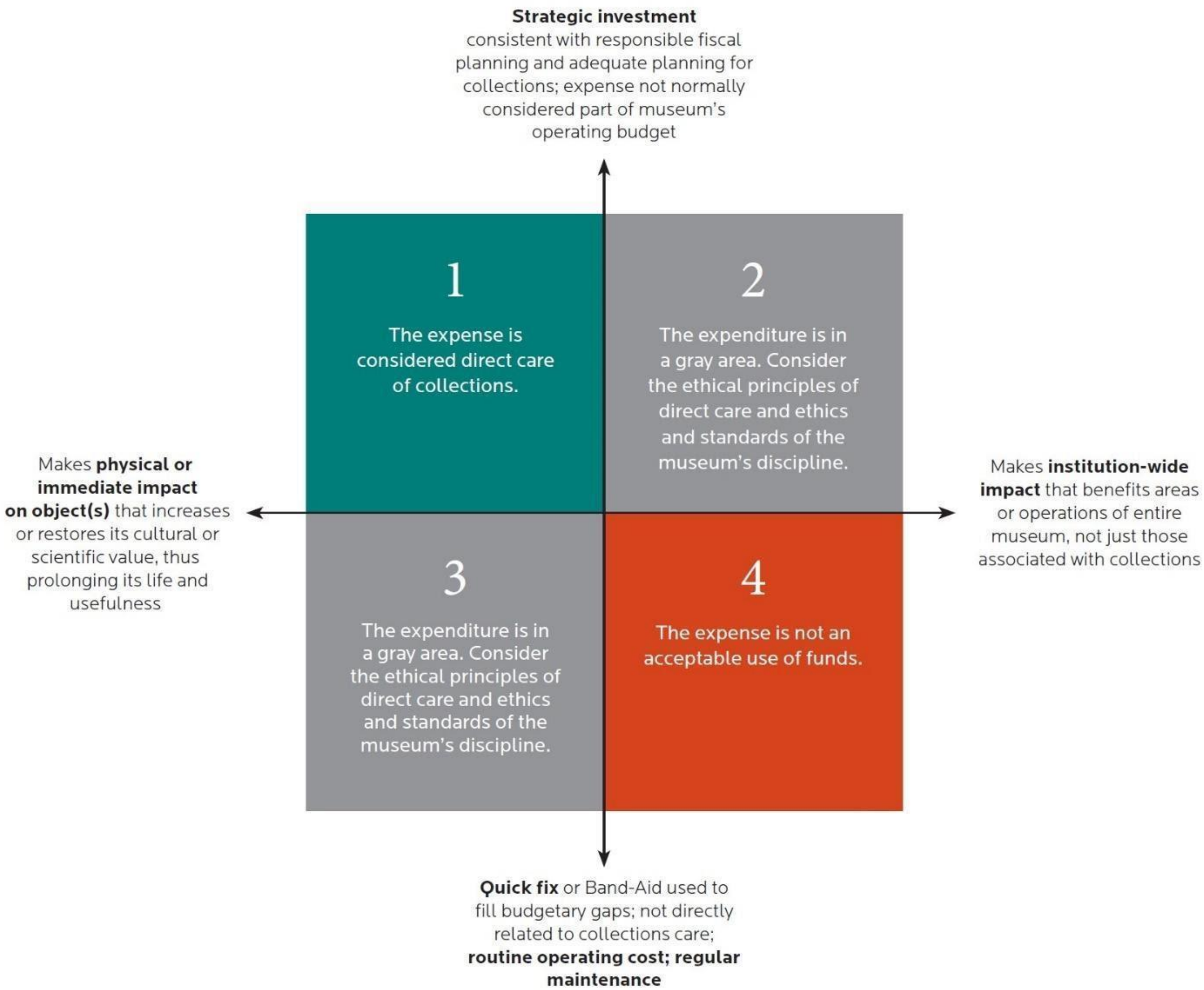
Figure 4.2: Institution and museum policies			
Institution	**Institution type**	**Student body size (est.)**	**Document**
A	Public land grant	30,000	Collections policies
B	Public land grant	10,000	Deaccession policy
C	Small private	2,000	Collections management policy
D	Public research	22,000	Collection policy
E	Public land grant	34,000	Collections management policy
F	Small public	4,000	Code of ethics
G	Public flagship	18,000	Collections policy manual
H	Public land grant	68,000	Process for deaccession
I	Public community college	4,000	Collections management policy

Figure 4.3: Museum mission statements		
Institution	**Institution type**	**Institution size**
J	Public research university	23,000
K	Private research university	5,000
L	Private liberal arts college	2,000

Appendix C: Organizational structure of the museum



Appendix D: Direct care decision matrix



Appendix E: Interview protocol

Date / Time:

Location of interview: (Zoom)

Interview participant:

Job / Position of participant:

Description of the study (to be read aloud to the interview participant):

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of the academic museum within its parent institution and to describe the relationships that academic museums build. This study involves interviews from multiple professionals associated with academic museums. The raw data from this interview will be stored in a locked office on campus at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. To ensure confidentiality, all individual names, institution names, and locations will be changed in the final document. This interview will take approximately one hour.

Topics for follow-up:

Public trust

Duty and / or responsibility to donors and the public

Role of the museum board

Relationship with institution’s community

Fiscal responsibility

Questions:

1. I would like to begin by asking you to describe the responsibilities of your position as it relates to your institution's academic museum.
2. How does your institution's academic museum serve the overall institutional mission?
3. In what ways does the museum build or maintain important relationships that support the institution?
4. How did your museum act to maintain relationships critical to the museum's mission during closure due to the pandemic?
5. To your knowledge, has your institution ever considered the sale of an object owned by the academic museum for the purpose of fulfilling a financial need, and if so, what is your recollection of that consideration?
6. What effect would an attempt to sell donated objects from an academic museum have on the parent institution?
    a. Probe: effect on institutional relationships?
7. What would do you see as the future role of the academic museum in postsecondary education, given recent global and national events that have affected the museum?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your time. I will be in touch when my transcription is complete and will allow you the opportunity to review the transcription for clarification or correction.

Appendix F: Recruitment email

Dear [*insert name*],

My name is Jeff Elliott and I am a doctoral student from the Education Leadership and Policy Studies department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about *the role of academic museums in modern postsecondary education*. You're eligible to be in this study because you [*insert description*]. I obtained your contact information from [*describe source*].

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed regarding your experience with academic museums and the role they play in their parent institutions. I would like to audio record your interview and then use the information to (*describe*). Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, interviews will be held via Zoom teleconference software.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at jeff@utk.edu.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jeff Elliott

Appendix G: Informed consent agreement

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: *Deaccessioning relationships: The role of academic museums in modern postsecondary education*

Researcher(s): *Jeffrey Martin Elliott*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville *Dr. Lisa Driscoll*, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you have a role at a postsecondary institution that involves academic museums.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of the research study is to examine how relationships developed by academic museums contribute to the parent institution.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last for approximately 60 – 75 minutes.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to provide information regarding the academic museum and the relationships developed for the support of the parent institution. Your role in the study will be one interview of approximately one hour.

Note: Due to safety considerations involved in the Covid-19 pandemic, the interview will be provided by Zoom teleconferencing software.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you may with withdraw your participation by contacting the PI. Any information already collected will be deleted and destroyed upon receipt of your request. Data cannot be withdrawn after data are de-identified and code keys are destroyed.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

There is a possibility that you may benefit from being in the study, but there is no guarantee that will happen. Possible benefits include contributions from this research to your work with academic museums. Even if you don't benefit from being in the study, your participation may help us to learn more about the significance of academic museums to their parent institutions. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by using password protection on Zoom software and using unique meeting room IDs for your interview. The meeting will be scheduled using the waiting room function as additional security to prevent anyone from joining the room once you have arrived. The schedule log for your interview will be saved as a physical copy, locked in a drawer in my office at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The interview will be saved directly to a secure cloud server maintained by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Once the interview is completed, the video portion of the interview will be deleted. The audio portion of the video will be transcribed using pseudonyms for you and your institution. Once the transcription is complete, the audio file will be deleted. A key to identify you will be saved as a physical copy in a locked drawer at my office at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The key will be destroyed upon completion of the analysis of your interview.

Neither the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries (AAMG) nor the Task Force for Protection of University Collections will be named in this study. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will not keep your information to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

We will not share your research data with other researchers.

What else do I need to know?

About 36 people will take part in this study. Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you.

If we learn about any new information that may change your mind about being in the study, we will tell you. If that happens, you may be asked to sign a new consent form.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Jeff Elliott at jeff@utk.edu or 615-294-9934 and Dr. Lisa Driscoll at lisa.driscoll@tennessee.edu or 865-974-4985.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

1534 White Avenue

Blount Hall, Room 408

Knoxville, TN 37996-1529

Phone: 865-974-7697

Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the study to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to be in the study.

Name of Research Team Member	Signature of Research Team Member	Date

Vita

Jeff Elliott was born in Union City, Tennessee in the northwest corner of the state. He developed an interest in art at a young age and enrolled as a BFA student at Murray State University in 1988. After several years in and out of school, he eventually changed his major to English and completed his bachelor's degree. He then enrolled at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1998 to pursue a master's degree in English. As a part of his assistantship, he was introduced to professional academic support and made plans to work in tutoring and student success.

Upon graduation, Jeff did what many Volunteers do – he went to help Texans. After a 5-year experience working at Stephen F. Austin State University, he returned to Tennessee and worked at Columbia State Community College, where he made the transition to academic advising as the director of advising. After that, he returned to the University of Tennessee to work with the College of Arts and Sciences as associate director of Advising Services and has been there since 2011. In 2015, Jeff began work on his doctorate.

Jeff loves cooking, poker, and video games, and is a dedicated lifetime learner who has plans to audit courses whenever possible. Jeff lives with his wife, Samantha, and the two enjoy road trips together to food festivals.