

Approaching the Limitless:
The Sustainability of Art-Collecting Institutions of the Pacific Northwest

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Abstract

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This paper focused on growth and sustainability within art collections at seven art-collecting institutions of the Pacific Northwest. This topic is crucial to the future collecting plans of art-collecting institutions. The goals of this study were to identify how art-collecting institutions addressed collections growth and how sustainability was considered and managed by professionals from art-collecting institutions of the Pacific Northwest.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with curatorial and/or collections staff at seven art-collecting institutions. Institutions were selected based on their proximity to Seattle, WA, and interviewees were selected based on their direct involvement with collections. Data demonstrated that museums are almost full, and that contemporary work is particularly challenging to collect. It also illustrated that permanent solutions do not exist at present, and that there has been an increased focus placed on institutional planning. Limitations to this study included the sample size and size differentials among the institutions analyzed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The path towards sustainability has to begin with a fully strategic approach to collections management, which includes programmes of community engagement, documentation, storage improvement, acquisition, and disposal.¹

- Nick Merriman, Clore Leadership Programme Fellow, 2004/05.

The Problem

In 2005, Wendy Bustard, a curator at the Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico, discussed a story in Jerald T. Milanich's article, "Homeless Collections: What happens to artifacts when they have no place to go?" Milanich described Bustard's account, saying, "She recalls the woeful tale of one museum's archaeological collection, which had been stored in an abandoned car wash for two years." He went on to say, "It seems a university museum had run out of storage room, and was given an abandoned two-bay car wash as a temporary solution to the space crunch. It got worse: A storm... [left] the collections exposed to the elements. Only a rich donor saved this collection, funding a research and curation center."²

Museum collections growth has become increasingly problematic.³ According to a 1989 American Alliance of Museums (AAM) survey, the rate of collections growth in American museums is approximately 4.5-5.4% per year. Collections seem to be growing faster than museums can sustain them, creating a host of potential issues about where to put them and how to care for them. Nick Merriman, current director of the Manchester Museum in Manchester,

¹ Merriman, Nick. *Museum Collections and Sustainability*. Report. Clore Leadership Program, 2006. <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=16720>. Page 30.

² Milanich, Jerald T. "Homeless Collections: What Happens to Artifacts When They Have No Place to Go?" *Archaeology*, November/December 2005. Page 57.

³ Merriman, *Museum Collections and Sustainability*, 3.

England, conducted research as a 2004/2005 Fellow of the Clore Leadership Programme titled “Museum Collections and Sustainability.” The implications of collections growth were his primary focus, as well as discerning what a sustainable museum may look like in the future. Merriman concluded that, “...museums are in a continuing state of denial. ...Museums seem [like] inherently unsustainable institutions.”⁴

Research Purpose

The goal of this research study was to identify how art-collecting institutions address collections growth, and if that growth is sustainable. Four research issues guided the study:

- 1) Description of collections and collecting practices;
- 2) Description of factors relating to collections growth;
- 3) Description of the perceived impact of collections growth; and
- 4) Description of sustainability and how it applies to museum collections.

Significance

Museums operate in a cultural realm, and are understood to be part of the larger leisure/tourism industry of North America.⁵ This increases their public image, and with that comes the additional pressure to increase the amount of people walking through their doors.⁶ In the United States (U.S.), there are over 3,500 art museums with over 68 million adults passing through their doors annually.⁷ According to AAM, society changes

⁴ Merriman, *Museum Collections and Sustainability*, 26.

⁵ Gorman, G. E., and Sydney J. Shep. *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*. London, UK: Facet Pub., 2007. Page 1.

⁶ Harris, Neil. *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience*. 1st ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Page 53.

⁷ Cuno, James B., and Neil MacGregor. *Whose Muse?: Art Museums and the Public Trust*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton

and museum standards evolved within this larger cultural environment.⁸ A component of this research addressed other factors, such as this environment, and the potential impact this had on collections growth within art-collecting institutions. Neil Harris, professor of history emeritus at the University of Chicago, in his book *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience*, spoke of this: “The world of the art museum in the U.S. continues to reflect the blended influences of personal leadership, economic circumstances, and political reality.”⁹

According to Russell Belk in his book *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, “The dramatic growth of mass production, distribution, and communication, is found to parallel the similarly dramatic growth of mass consumption, mass individual collecting, and massive museum collecting.”¹⁰ On the other hand, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill in her book *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* postulated, “The great collecting phase of museums is over. The post-museum will hold and care for objects, but will concentrate more on their use rather than on further accumulation...”¹¹ This research will focus on how art-collecting institutions address their collections growth within the larger sustainability paradigm. Collections growth and their sustainability within the museum field will be themes explored in their larger contexts, both as they stand today and how they look ahead for the future.

University Press, 2004. Page 131.

⁸ Merritt, Elizabeth E. *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2008. Page 5.

⁹ Harris, Neil. *Capital Culture*, 503.

¹⁰ Belk, Russell W. *Collecting in a Consumer Society*. London: Routledge, 1995. Page 1.

¹¹ Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*. London: Routledge, 2000. Page 152.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review sought to explore the existing resources that were available concerning how art-collecting institutions address collections growth, and if that growth is sustainable. Five areas of literature were reviewed: collecting, sustainability, society, art, and best practices. The first section of this literature review described the history of collecting as it related to the concept of collection and museums. The second section synthesized the concept of sustainability and its applicability to museum collecting. The third section addressed society and how societal values have shifted over time. The fourth section synthesized literature surrounding art collection. The fifth section demonstrated what is known and unknown about the use of standards and best practices for museums, as put forth by professional organizations in North America and Europe.

History of Collecting

Collection

According to researchers at the University of Cambridge, “There is something innately human about our desire to gather, sort, and display things. Museums are evidence of our deep preoccupation with the things that surround us.”¹² The origins of collecting trace back 80,000 years to a French cave, where a collection of “interesting” pebbles were found.¹³ Suzanne Keene, in her book *Fragments of the World: Uses of Museum Collections*, defines collection as an “assemblage of valued things.”¹⁴ Russell Belk, in his book *Collecting in a Consumer Society*,

¹² "We Ask the Experts: Why Do We Put Things into Museums?" University of Cambridge. November 26, 2013. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/we-ask-the-experts-why-do-we-put-things-into-museums>.

¹³ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 2.

¹⁴ Keene, Suzanne. *Fragments of the World: Uses of Museum Collections*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005. Page 2.

suggests that society has sanctioned widespread collecting up to present day.¹⁵ Belk similarly defines collection as “the process of actively, selectively, and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences.”¹⁶ William Davies King, professor of theater at the University of California Santa Barbara, discusses the purpose of collecting in his book *Collections of Nothing*, as “...a way of linking the past, present, and future.”¹⁷

Archaeological findings dating to 27 BCE in the Roman Empire show that people were collecting everything imaginable.¹⁸ By the 16th century, people and goods traveled further and further worldwide.¹⁹ According to Steven Conn, professor of history and director of the Public History Program at Ohio State University, in his book *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, “The museums of today trace their origins back to the princely collections and cabinets of curiosities assembled in early modern Europe.”²⁰ Philosopher Michel Foucault, cited in Belk’s book *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, said in the 1970’s that there had been a shift from viewing the world as an integrated whole, to attempting to view it in terms of classification and discriminations.²¹ In contrast, the Encyclopedia of Britannica discusses today’s view in the context of the history of museums, “The archaeological and historical records do not provide evidence that the museum as it is known today developed in such early times.”²²

¹⁵ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 55.

¹⁶ Ibid, 67.

¹⁷ King, W. D. *Collections of Nothing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Page 27.

¹⁸ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 23.

¹⁹ Muensterberger, Werner. *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994. Page 196.

²⁰ Conn, Steven. *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. Page 20.

²¹ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 32.

²² Lewis, Geoffrey D. "History of Museums." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/398827/history-of-museums/76504/Classical-collecting>.

Steven Conn, in his book *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, discussed how private royal collections of Europe and Asia housed and displayed collections of importance.²³ Similarly, in the East in the 8th century A.D. in Nara, Japan, Shoso-in was created as a storehouse for imperial treasures.²⁴ Private collection strategies became increasingly focused on their public importance with The Louvre Museum in Paris, France being one of the first to make this transition in the 18th century.²⁵ According to Eugene Dillenburg, in his article “What, If Anything, Is a Museum?,” a public collection is defined as “an institution providing public access for the benefit of the public.”²⁶ According to James Cuno, President of the J. Paul Getty Trust, in his book *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, art museums in America are predominantly private with a commitment to public service.²⁷ According to Neil, Phillip, and Wendy Kotler, in their book *Museum Marketing and Strategy: Designing Missions, Building Audiences, Generating Revenue and Resources*, 59% of all museums are privately run.²⁸

Museums

According to Keene, “[a] collection itself can be experienced as a place.”²⁹ The literature surrounding museums presented numerous definitions for “museum.” The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines a museum as “a nonprofit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves,

²³ Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 20.

²⁴ Keene, *Fragments of the World*, 113.

²⁵ Dillenburg, “What, If Anything, Is a Museum?” *Exhibitionist*, Spring 2011. http://name-aam.org/uploads/downloadables/EXH.spg_11/5%20EXH_spg11_What.%20if%20Anything.%20Is%20a%20Museum_Dillenburg.pdf.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Cuno and MacGregor, *Whose Muse?*, 108.

²⁸ Kotler, Neil G., Philip Kotler, and Wendy I. Kotler, *Museum Marketing and Strategy: Designing Missions, Building Audiences, Generating Revenue and Resources*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008. Page 8.

²⁹ Keene, *Fragments of the World*, 112.

researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study education and enjoyment, material evidence of humans and their environment."³⁰ Similarly, Cuno defines museums as "where specimens are put together to reveal a progression or pattern." Comparatively, Cuno defines galleries as "[where] individual work is meant to be enjoyed on its own."³¹

The root of "museum" comes from the Greek word "mouseion," or "the temple of the muses."³² This alludes to the nine sisters who were the offspring of Zeus and Mnemosyne, which translates to *memory*.³³ Similarly, Keene says, "Museums, in their storehouse aspect, are seen to be strongly related to memory."³⁴ People go to museums to remind [themselves] who they are.³⁵ Lorne Hughes, University of Wales Chair in Digital Collections at the National Library of Wales, in her book *Evaluating & Measuring the Value, Use and Impact of Digital Collections*, signified this by placing museums under her umbrella term "Memory Institutions," which also included libraries and archives.³⁶

Sustainability

History

According to Terry Link, Director of the University Office of Campus Sustainability at Michigan State University, in her article "Models of Sustainability: Museums, Citizenship, and Common Wealth," "Sustainability is one of those words like *capitalism, democracy,*

³⁰ Smithsonian Institution Office of Policy & Analysis. *Art Museums and the Public*. Report. October 2001. <http://www.si.edu/Content/opanda/docs/Rpts2001/01.10.ArtPublic.Final.pdf>. Page 1.

³¹ Cuno and MacGregor, *Whose Muse?*, 30.

³² *Ibid*, 139.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ Keene, *Fragments of the World*, 87.

³⁵ Kimmelman, Michael. "Museums in a Quandary: Where Are the Ideals?" *New York Times*, August 26, 2001, Sunday ed., sec. 2. Page 5.

³⁶ Hughes, Lorna M. *Evaluating and Measuring the Value, Use and Impact of Digital Collections*. London: Facet Publishing, 2012. Page IX.

communism, or *green* that holds powerful yet different meanings for many folks.”³⁷ The history of the term “sustainability” is rooted in the latter half of the 20th century.³⁸ Yet, it has many applicable meanings to the museum field. Lindsay Martin, a senior consultant at Lord Cultural Resources identified four types of sustainability in the book *Manual of Museum Planning: Sustainable Space, Facilities, and Operations*. These include social, environmental, economic, and cultural.³⁹ The authors focused on the importance of institutional sustainability, saying “Museums must be sustainable in order to achieve their mission.”⁴⁰

Rachel Madan, Sustainability Officer at the International Finance Corporation (a member of the World Bank Group), in her book *Sustainable Museums: Strategies for the 21st Century*, discussed the origins of sustainability resulting from the impacts of industrialization in the 1960’s.⁴¹ Gro Harlem Brundtland, Former Prime Minister of Norway and Chair of the World Commission on Environmental Development, published a report titled *Our Common Future* in 1987 that defined sustainability as “[The] development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁴²

That definition has become universally accepted, and is applicable to sustainability outside of the environmental realm.⁴³ An example of this is the 2003 keynote address at Museums Alberta by Douglas Worts, an associate of The AtKisson Group and formally of the

³⁷ Link, Terry. "Models of Sustainability: Museums, Citizenship, and Common Wealth." *Museums & Social Issues* 1, no. 2 (2006): 173-90. doi:10.1179/msi.2006.1.2.173. Page 176.

³⁸ Pisani, Jacobus A. Du. "Sustainable Development – historical Roots of the Concept." *Environmental Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2006): 83-96. Accessed April 13, 2015. doi:10.1080/15693430600688831.

³⁹ Lord, Barry, Gail Dexter Lord, and Lindsay Martin. *Manual of Museum Planning: Sustainable Space, Facilities, and Operations*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2012. Page 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Madan, Rachel. *Sustainable Museums: Strategies for the 21st Century*. MuseumsEtc., 2011. Page 17.

⁴² Ibid, 20.

⁴³ Lord, Lord, and Martin, *Manual of Museum Planning*, 6.

Art Gallery of Ontario, titled “Museums in Search of a Sustainable Future.”⁴⁴ Worts said that “Either by choice, or by external forces, museums will change, because the world we live in can’t be sustained as we live now, and if we try to hold museums still, using traditional markers of success and performance, we do a disservice both to museums and to the communities they purport to serve.”⁴⁵

Nick Merriman uses Brundtland’s definition of sustainability to suggest that museums are inherently unsustainable institutions.⁴⁶ Merriman said that since the 1980’s, museums have been collecting continuously and that, “This deepening crisis is compounded by an apparent absence of any clear strategy identifying the means by which museums might close the widening gulf between the needs of collections management and the resources required to meet those needs. In short, one is driven to the inescapable conclusion that museums are in a continuing state of denial.”⁴⁷ Merriman’s research in 2005 into museums of the United Kingdom has shown to be in line with the sentiments above.

Maurice Davies, formally Head of Policy and Communication at the Museums Association (MA), in David Saunders’ article "Climate Change and Museum Collections," looked at interviews with professionals in the field, and concluded “their [the museum’s] mission and purpose – to serve the past, present, and future by communicating and caring for collections – is absolutely part of world sustainability.”⁴⁸ Merriman suggests “a socially sustainable museum

⁴⁴ Worts, Douglas. "Museums in Search of a Sustainable Future." *Alberta Museums Review*, Fall 2004. http://douglasworts.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/worts_ma_review_article.pdf.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 41.

⁴⁶ Merriman, Museum Collections and Sustainability, 26.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Saunders, David. "Climate Change and Museum Collections." *Studies in Conservation* 53, no. 4 (January 01, 2008): 287-97. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27867052?ref=no-x-route:0bf26610cbaa47781df6d288e1d18624>. Page 296.

in the future may be one whose success is gauged through the development of relationships rather than through the ownership of material.”⁴⁹

Museums

Museums must be sustainable in order to achieve their mission.⁵⁰ According to Steven Weil, former Deputy Director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden at the Smithsonian Institution, from his book *A Deaccession Reader*, “The fact that museum collections grow... is a simple fact of life... No museum can afford to clog its scarce storage with unconsidered collections that have simply been allowed to accumulate and lie fallow.”⁵¹ Conn in his book *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* discussed the American Alliance of Museums’ Code of Ethics for Museums, and noted that “all museums make a unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world.”⁵² However, AAM says that 10% of museums identify themselves as not owning or using collections.⁵³

On the other hand, Neil, Phillip, and Wendy Kotler, in their book *Museum Marketing and Strategy: Designing Missions, Building Audiences, Generating Revenue and Resources*, said 93% of all museums own collections.⁵⁴ Neil Harris says that many museums have focused more on quantity than quality.⁵⁵ “Acquisition often far outstrips that of disposal,” according to Merriman.⁵⁶ A way to counter this, according to Madan, is through the use of strategy and policy. Strategy provides long-term vision of sustainable development, (or the “what” and

⁴⁹ Merriman, *Museum Collections and Sustainability*, 43.

⁵⁰ Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler. *Museum Marketing and Strategy*, 6.

⁵¹ Weil, Stephen E. *A Deaccession Reader*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1997. Page 1.

⁵² Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 20.

⁵³ Merritt, *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums*.

⁵⁴ Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler. *Museum Marketing and Strategy*, 7.

⁵⁵ Harris, Neil. *Capital Culture*, 53.

⁵⁶ Merriman, *Museum Collections and Sustainability*, 21.

“why.”) Policies support the strategies (or the “how.”).⁵⁷

Society

Modern

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO,) the museum of the modern world shows “relevance to societies understanding of itself.”⁵⁸ According to G. E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep, from their book *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives, and Museums*, the world has an “absolute right to information.”⁵⁹ Since the 1970’s, there has been a shift in the role of museums as the new kingpins of cultural industry.⁶⁰ Russell Belk noted the major shift in the post-World War II art scene from Paris, France to New York City during the 1940’s and 1950’s.⁶¹ According to Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic of The New York Times, in his 2001 article “Museums in a Quandary: Where Are the Ideals?,” “Museums were conceived in the 19th century as places to improve public taste, and to educate the middle class.”⁶² Steven Conn says, “For some museums, collections are only secondary to their institutional mission. At others, objects are almost irrelevant to what the museum does and how it does it.”⁶³

According to Stephen Weil, the wealth of a museum tends to become concentrated in its collection. Unless that wealth is allowed to flow back into the museum, the collections may be ill

⁵⁷ Madan, *Sustainable Museums*, 75.

⁵⁸ Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 1.

⁵⁹ Gorman and Shep, *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*, 166.

⁶⁰ Altshuler, Bruce, and Shamita Sharmacharja. *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*. London: Koenig Books, 2009. Page 123.

⁶¹ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 131.

⁶² Kimmelman, "Museums in a Quandary", 2.

⁶³ Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 56.

cared for.⁶⁴ Yet, according to others at the Smithsonian Institution, "...a number of art museums redefined their mission in the 1990's to make the public dimension more central."⁶⁵ Museums have transformed from dead repositories into vital cultural resources.⁶⁶ But, a 1994 report by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) showed that 73% of Americans failed to visit an art museum each year.⁶⁷ Counter to the NEA report and according to Conn, more people are going to all types of museums than ever before.⁶⁸

According to Harris, "Museums have become equivalent to a circus,"⁶⁹ and "use art to boost tourism and the local economy."⁷⁰ Belk sums up the majority of the literature surrounding this when he said, "Art and commerce are blurred."⁷¹ Exhibits have become a cultural phenomenon, and are like art themselves.⁷² According to Harris, many are seeking a sight, [or destination, and] not [specifically] art."⁷³ This consumer culture since the Industrial Revolution resulted in larger museum collections, which require increasing resources to be maintained sustainably.⁷⁴

Shift in Values

According to Weil, institutional collecting has changed dramatically over the last few decades.⁷⁵ In the 1960's, improved museum management allowed for an awareness that

⁶⁴ Weil, *A Deaccession Reader*, 9.

⁶⁵ Smithsonian Institution, *Art Museums and the Public*, 16.

⁶⁶ Altshuler and Sharmacharja, *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, 15.

⁶⁷ Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler. *Museum Marketing and Strategy*, 51.

⁶⁸ Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 1.

⁶⁹ Harris, Neil. *Capital Culture*, 271.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 51.

⁷¹ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 110.

⁷² Altshuler and Sharmacharja, *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, 21.

⁷³ Harris, Neil. *Capital Culture*, 64.

⁷⁴ Keene, *Fragments of the World*, 25.

⁷⁵ Weil, Stephen E. "Collecting Then, Collecting Today: What's the Difference." *Making Museums Matter*, 2002, 284-91. Page 284.

collections were growing at exponential rates.⁷⁶ According to Merriman, collecting in museums is shaped by the attitudes and opinions of a particular group of individuals.⁷⁷ Bruce Altshuler, director of the Museum Studies program at New York University, said in his book *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*, “Broader social and political changes have generated new artistic categories and have broken down established national and ethnic divisions, all of which have affected how collections are built and their contents organized.”⁷⁸

Conn provides a way of broadening appeal to audiences by “shedding the museum’s traditional goal of timelessness and universalism, [and] replacing it with a notion of contemporary relevance that responds to the particular concerns of those committed to difference above commonality.”⁷⁹ People in the U.S. went to museums in the days following September 11, 2001 to reflect and feel safe.⁸⁰ “What museums really need is a sustainable culture of memory and mediation, which means they have a long-term task.”⁸¹ Recently, there has been a shift towards reflexivity.⁸² According to Weil, museums have moved from “being *about* something to being *for* somebody.”⁸³ Traditionally, according to Belk, art museums have represented high culture and snobbishness to the public.⁸⁴

Pat Villeneuve, Associate Professor at Florida State University in her article “Building Museum Sustainability through Visitor-Centered Exhibition Practices,” transformed “The

⁷⁶ Weil, "Collecting Then, Collecting Today", 284.

⁷⁷ Ovenden, Christine. *What Are Museums For?* Proceedings of What Are Museums For?, Cumberland Lodge. Accessed April 13, 2015. Page 5.

⁷⁸ Altshuler, Bruce. *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. Page 8.

⁷⁹ Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 9.

⁸⁰ Cuno and MacGregor, *Whose Muse?*, 49.

⁸¹ Altshuler and Sharmacharja, *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, 117.

⁸² *Ibid*, 149.

⁸³ Weil, Stephen E. "From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum." *Daedalus* 128, no. 3, America's Museums (July 01, 1999): 229-58. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/20027573?ref=no-x-route:dfaa53a36c578770aa26a4c7da72e5eb>.

⁸⁴ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 101, 109.

Hedgehog Concept” after Jim Collins.⁸⁵ This summed up these shifts in mission and approach. Collins studied successful companies to establish how and why they were successful.⁸⁶

Villeneuve proposed an adaptation in the Hedgehog Concept for an art museum, “The Art Museum’s Hedgehog Concept” (Figure 1). There are three areas, and three answers, which find common ground in the organization’s mission to become successful.⁸⁷ These are as follows:

“*What are you deeply passionate about? Art.*” “*What can you be the best in the world at?*

Connecting the Public with Art in Meaningful Ways.” “*What drives your resource engine?*

People who come to see museums as relevant and important.”⁸⁸ This research supported other author’s opinions present in the literature, such as Conn who discussed the continued changing attitude towards objects, ideas, museums, and education.⁸⁹

According to Suzanne Keene, “The museum of the future will be more a process or an experience, moving out of [the] spaces of the communities that it serves.”⁹⁰ ICOM agreed, saying museums of the 21st century will become “...outward looking organizations that are responsive and accountable to the public.”⁹¹ ICOM has also said that collections “will recognize all varied audiences,” and that “it is [currently] difficult to take the proper care and management of collections.”⁹²

⁸⁵ Villeneuve, Pat. "Building Museum Sustainability through Visitor- Centered Exhibition Practices." *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 5, no. 4 (2013): 37-50. Page 38.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 40.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 8.

⁹⁰ Keene, *Fragments of the World*, 139.

⁹¹ Ibid, 178.

⁹² Ibid.

Future

Thomas Krens, former director of the Guggenheim Museum, says in James Cuno's book *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, that a successful 21st century museum experience would include "great collections, great architecture, a great special exhibit, a great second exhibit, two shopping opportunities, two eating opportunities, a high-tech interface via the internet, and economies of scale via a global network."⁹³ Cuno counters this, saying that it should include "the permanent collection and the opportunity it affords for sustained and repeated engagements with individual works of art, presented without [the] hyperbolic promotional apparatus of the temporary exhibit."⁹⁴ Literature on this topic is divided, with Krens and Cuno on opposing sides, but is occasionally unified by approaches such as that by Altshuler.

According to Altshuler, 87% of Americans find museums to be trustworthy.⁹⁵ Vanessa Van Orden, former Master of Arts student at John F. Kennedy University, mirrors this when she said, "Over the past several decades, this civic role of the museum has greatly expanded. Museums have transformed from collections-centered institutions into ones that focus more and more on the needs and desires of their visitors."⁹⁶ According to Keene, "For the outsider, the museum is the entry point into society."⁹⁷ Museum collections contribute towards this globalization.⁹⁸ For an increase in this cultural capital, there needs to be a high standard of collections management.⁹⁹ Cuno said that museums must be secular, and not valueless.¹⁰⁰ The cultural capital ascribed to museums in society is crucial to their longevity.

⁹³ Cuno and MacGregor, *Whose Muse?*, 55.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, 16.

⁹⁶ Orden, Vanessa Van. *Exhibiting Tragedy: Museums and the Representation of September 11*. Master's thesis, John F. Kennedy University, 2004. Page 8.

⁹⁷ Keene, *Fragments of the World*, 7.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 161.

Art

Curation

Collections are considered just a piece of the curatorial puzzle, and fragments of culture.¹⁰¹ According to G. E. Gorman and Sydney J. Shep, they also have “...a cultural and political purpose that stresses the importance of their continued preservation.”¹⁰² Weil said that curators recognize that connoisseurship means not only taking in, but also weeding out.¹⁰³ In the case of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM), Altshuler discussed their curatorial choices when it came to collecting African art in the 1990’s, right after a major move was complete. Their African collection was small, and they wanted to address this. After acquiring and displaying some work, there was a crowd-discussed (by including audience opinions) attempt on what to keep in the permanent collection.¹⁰⁴ This process of transparency doesn’t occur often in the field. SAM was at a standstill in terms of collecting before they embarked on this.¹⁰⁵

Harris says, “Great art museums do many things...[But] their major claim to authority remains their collections.”¹⁰⁶ James N. Wood, former director of the Art Institute of Chicago and the J. Paul Getty Trust, said in Cuno’s book, *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, that collections define an institution’s strengths and weaknesses.¹⁰⁷ Altshuler said, “Museums intended to preserve and display works that withstood the test of time. But what about contemporary art?”¹⁰⁸ This might be understood more completely when looking at the founding of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1929. Alfred Barr, former director of MoMA, said

¹⁰⁰ Cuno and MacGregor, *Whose Muse?*, 120.

¹⁰¹ Altshuler and Sharmacharja, *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, 111.

¹⁰² Gorman and Shep, *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*, 2.

¹⁰³ Weil, *A Deaccession Reader*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, 115.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 121.

¹⁰⁶ Harris, Neil. *Capital Culture*, 219.

¹⁰⁷ Cuno and MacGregor, *Whose Muse?*, 103.

¹⁰⁸ Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, 1.

that MoMA shouldn't hold art for more than 50-60 years in order to stay up with the current art trends. The 1947 agreement that all art from the MoMA would go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) changed by 1953.¹⁰⁹ Viewing these collections as "semi-permanent" helped to better align them within the larger cultural context of Modernity, which AAM defined as 10-20 years in 1933. Much of today's artistic production does not lend itself to being collected long-term.¹¹⁰ The opportunistic nature of the collecting process makes it impossible to forecast future growth with certainty.¹¹¹ Art that is collected [must have] something to offer future generations.¹¹²

Digitization

An emerging trend in the literature is the concept of digitization. An institution can start with the digitization of collections by identifying metrics across all of the "memory institutions," as Hughes coined them, which include libraries, archives, and museums.¹¹³ With the global economic decline of 2007, a shifting focus onto the measuring of impact began.¹¹⁴ Sustainability costs money,¹¹⁵ and so do collections.¹¹⁶ Defining value is crucial.¹¹⁷ Investment is needed across the field, but understanding the long-term impact and then measuring that, is where the difficulty is, says Hughes.¹¹⁸ Digitization has changed the mission of collections.¹¹⁹ The shift from

¹⁰⁹ Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Altshuler and Sharmacharja, *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, 114.

¹¹¹ Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler. *Museum Marketing and Strategy*, 210.

¹¹² Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, 164.

¹¹³ Hughes, *Evaluating and Measuring the Value, Use and Impact of Digital Collections*, IX.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

¹¹⁶ Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler. *Museum Marketing and Strategy*, 349.

¹¹⁷ Hughes, *Evaluating and Measuring the Value, Use and Impact of Digital Collections*, 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 45, 64.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

museums focusing on collections to audiences can be seen in digitization as well, according to Hughes, who stressed community engagement through content.¹²⁰

Collections Growth

The collection exists for the benefit of present and future generations.¹²¹ AAM's 1989 National Museum Survey showed that museum collections grew, on average, 4.3-5.4% annually.¹²² A more conservative and accurate assumption, according to Stephen Weil, was 1-2% as cited in the Report on the Management of Collections in the Museums of the Smithsonian Institution from 1976.¹²³ Bruce Altshuler says, "We must recognize that museum collecting does not occur in a vacuum, but is rather at the center of a complex and sophisticated set of relationships...[That] warrant acquisition and presentation."¹²⁴ According to a study done in 1983 of a hypothetical museum situation, Architect George Hartman, cited in Weil's article "Collecting Then, Collecting Today," found that the proper housing of museum collections are costing organizations almost a third of their budgets.¹²⁵ Yet, others such as Michael Kimmelman in his New York Times article "Museums in a Quandary: Where are the Ideals?" postulated that in today's society "You don't even need a collection. You can borrow one."¹²⁶

Weil and Merriman are two big supporters of deaccessioning as part of a collections management policy. Weil believes that deaccessioning can be utilized to cull and upgrade the

¹²⁰ Hughes, *Evaluating and Measuring the Value, Use and Impact of Digital Collections*, 117.

¹²¹ *Professional Practices in Art Museums: Report*. Savannah, GA: Association of Art Museum Directors, 2011. Page 7.

¹²² Weil, *A Deaccession Reader*, 2.

¹²³ Weil, "Collecting Then, Collecting Today", 285.

¹²⁴ Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, 132.

¹²⁵ Weil, "Collecting Then, Collecting Today", 285.

¹²⁶ Kimmelman, "Museums in a Quandary", 2.

collection.¹²⁷ Marie C. Malaro, Professor Emeritus at George Washington University, cited in Bruce Altshuler and Sharmacharja Shamita's book *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, defines deaccessioning as "the permanent removal of an object that was once accessioned into a museum collection."¹²⁸ According to Belk and Shamita, "Only the tip of the iceberg is on display in the museum."¹²⁹ Belk also says, "Curators have been acquiring just for the sake of it."¹³⁰ Another component to this argument is offered by Glenn D. Lowry, Director of MoMA, who says in James Cuno's book *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, "You can't have an extraordinary experience without extraordinary works of art."¹³¹ He goes on to say that too many works of art are shown at once, which could be solved by allowing twice the space and half the amount of art.¹³² James Wood agrees with him, adding, "We are blessed with more [art] than we can show adequately." According to Weil, "By adhering to strict deaccessioning policies, museums can focus on culling the current collections to create space for future accessioned material."¹³³ Recent museological theory promotes deaccessioning stigmas.¹³⁴ Yet, according to Weil, there have been few deaccessioning programs established as part of routine collections management.¹³⁵

¹²⁷ Weil, *A Deaccession Reader*, 3.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 39.

¹²⁹ Altshuler and Sharmacharja, *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, 20.

¹³⁰ Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 125.

¹³¹ Cuno and MacGregor, *Whose Muse?*, 183.

¹³² Ibid, 184.

¹³³ Weil, *A Deaccession Reader*, 3.

¹³⁴ Merriman, *Museum Collections and Sustainability*, 3.

¹³⁵ Weil, "Collecting Then, Collecting Today", 286.

Best Practices

Standards

The museology field is informed by best practices, national standards, and models set forth by various organizations. Literature from organizations such as the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), American Alliance of Museums (AAM), Museum Association (MA), and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), informs the practices of many museums. The following two definitions are important when understanding the literature. National Museums Standards are things all good museums should do.¹³⁶ Best Practices are commendable actions for which they should get extra credit.¹³⁷ Standards change over time within the larger cultural environment.¹³⁸ According to ICOM, “Good decision-making is founded on good policy.”¹³⁹

The majority of museums spend part of their resources taking care of materials that do not advance their mission, serve their audiences or support their exhibits, educational, and research plans.¹⁴⁰ The AAMD requires member museums to develop clear, written collections management policies, including collection goals and acquisition and deaccession principles, procedures, and processes, as well as those that address preservation, conservation, and collection care.¹⁴¹ According to AAMD, “Art Museums as a group...will struggle more to agree on common practice and shared goals beyond their core belief in the value of art, artists, and

¹³⁶ Merritt, *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums*.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Boylan, Patrick J. *Running a Museum a Practical Handbook*. Paris: International Council of Museums (ICOM), 2004. Page 18.

¹⁴⁰ Merritt, *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums*.

¹⁴¹ *Professional Practices in Art Museums: Report*, Association of Art Museum Directors, 20.

societies that benefits from engagement with creativity and communication.”¹⁴²

According to a 2005 Smithsonian Report, “Acquisition and Disposal of Collections,” “Until fairly recently, there were few concerns about the size of collections or the practical aspects of holding them.”¹⁴³ According to AAM, “[While] national standards do not yet call for all museums to have a collections plan, there is a strong growing consensus that it is a core document that helps the museum make wise choices, and assures key supporters that the museum is making thoughtful use of the resources they contribute.”¹⁴⁴ According to AAM’s 2012 report “AAM Developing a Collections Management Policy,” a collections management policy is a core document supporting a museums mission and purpose.”¹⁴⁵ It is a living, breathing document that should always be practiced.¹⁴⁶ It sets guidelines for growing and developing the collection, and builds a shared vision for the collections, sets priorities for acquisitions and improvements, and convinces collectors to donate specific material or funders to support collections care needs.¹⁴⁷

The Museum Association’s Code of Ethics from 2007 states “Museums must look out for the future by ensuring collections are well-managed and sustainable.”¹⁴⁸ The collection function includes owning objects, conserving them, preserving them, and storing them in a way that is

¹⁴² Association of Art Museum Directors. *AAMD Art Museums and the Practice of Deaccessioning*. Report. Accessed April 13, 2015.

<https://aamd.org/sites/default/files/document/AAMD%20Policy%20on%20Deaccessioning%20website.pdf>.

¹⁴³ *Acquisition and Disposal of Collections*. Smithsonian Institution. Acquisition and Disposal of Collections. 2005. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.si.edu/content/opanda/docs/Rpts2005/05.04.ConcernAtTheCore.Disposal.pdf>. Page 142.

¹⁴⁴ American Alliance of Museums. *AAM Developing a Collections Management Policy*. Report. 2012. <http://www.aam-us.org/docs/continuum/developing-a-cmp-final.pdf?sfvrsn=2> Page 4

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Davies, Maurice, and Helen Wilkinson. *Sustainability and Museums: Your Chance to Make a Difference*. Museums Association. Sustainability and Museums. 2008. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=16398>. Page 15.

likely to maximize their longevity.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, according to ICOM, “Museum policies should ensure that the collections (both permanent and temporary) and associated information, properly recorded, are available for current usage and will be passed on to future generations in as good and safe a condition as practicable, having regard to current knowledge and resources”¹⁵⁰ To achieve this, ICOM also says that knowing how to achieve desired outcomes and planning accordingly is crucial.¹⁵¹

The governing authority protects and enhances the museum’s collections and programs and its physical, human and financial resources. The museum’s goals, as established in its plans, become important, self-identified indicators of whether the museum is meeting its mission.¹⁵² Considerations regarding future collecting activities are incorporated into institutional plans and other appropriate policy documents. The museum operates in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability.¹⁵³

According to a 2005 Smithsonian Report “Acquisition and Disposal of Collections,” nonprofits must abide by the following fiduciary responsibilities: Care (the preservation of collections for present and future generations), Loyalty (putting the interest of the unit ahead of the staff’s personal interests), and Obedience (adherence to the mission of the unit.)¹⁵⁴ Public trust embodies certain expectations to stay above these basic requirements. The museum may determine if it is unable in the long run to appropriately care for some parts of its collections.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Smithsonian Institution, *Art Museums and the Public*, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Boylan, *Running a Museum a Practical Handbook*, International Council of Museums, 9.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 143.

¹⁵² Merritt, *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, 13.

¹⁵³ American Alliance of Museums. "Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums." Characteristics of Excellence for US Museums. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/characteristics-of-excellence-for-u-s-museums>.

¹⁵⁴ *Acquisition and Disposal of Collections*. Smithsonian Institution, 166.

¹⁵⁵ Merritt, *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, 69.

In such cases, the most responsible action may be to deaccession and transfer material to another suitable caretaker in an orderly manner that safeguards the collections and their documentation.¹⁵⁶ It should improve the quality, scope, and appropriateness of the collection, and support the mission and long-term goals of the museum.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, acquisitions policies should have the institutional mission in mind.¹⁵⁸

The fifth edition of *Museum Registration Methods* lists the following five underlying principles that make up collections management policies:

Each object or specimen entering the museum must be documented; Collections should be stabilized for long-term preservation and housed in a proper storage environment; Collections must be regularly inventoried and monitored; The collections storage environment must be regularly monitored; All collection activities and monitoring must be documented.¹⁵⁹

According to the following sampling from AAM National Standards, museums must ensure:

Collections in its custody support its mission and public trust responsibilities; collections in its custody are lawfully held, protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for and preserved; ...acquisition, disposal and loan activities conform to its mission and public trust responsibilities; disposal of collections through sale, trade or research activities occurs solely for the advancement of the museum's mission; ...collections-related activities promote the public good rather than individual financial gain.¹⁶⁰

Sustainable Growth

Suzanne Keene summarized the literature surrounding sustainability and its application to best practices adequately when she discussed collections growth. “Do museum collections

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Association of Art Museum Directors. *AAMD Art Museums and the Practice of Deaccessioning*.

¹⁵⁸ American Alliance of Museums. *AAM Developing a Collections Management Policy*, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Buck, Rebecca A., and Jean Allman Gilmore. *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods*. 5th ed. Washington, DC: AAM Press, American Association of Museums, 2010. Page 24.

¹⁶⁰ Merritt, *National Standards & Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, 26.

need to be so large? It is not economical for collections to grow indefinitely.”¹⁶¹ The Museum Association held a conference in 2004 to discuss whether there was any significance in the exponential growth of museums in terms of their function or mission, and whether museums should embrace a policy of collecting for sustainability, make better use of private collections, and be maintained in perpetuity.¹⁶² The Smithsonian discussed similar ways of addressing the structure of museums, saying, “Art museums... may also need to reconsider their internal structures to better express their priorities.”¹⁶³

Susan R. Orr said in her Masters Thesis “Historic House Museum Sustainability in the 21st Century: Paths to Preservation,” “Preservationists, scholars, museum professionals, museum volunteers, governments, and emerging museum professionals need to begin addressing the problem of sustainability.”¹⁶⁴ Maxwell L. Anderson of the Dallas Museum of Art says that there is an unsustainable dependence on quick fixes rather than long-term planning.¹⁶⁵ Bruce Altshuler says that an assessment of collections is important. Identifying strengths and weaknesses that were not consistent with the mission is crucial to an assessment that should be conducted often.¹⁶⁶ In the U.K., national guidance is best, according to Adrian Babbidge, otherwise “the legacy of this generation to the next may be in danger.”¹⁶⁷ The establishment of national policies in the U.K. didn’t occur until the 1990’s, and are not universal.¹⁶⁸ The fragmentation of the U.K. sector threatens long-term sustainability.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶¹ Keene, *Fragments of the World*, 6.

¹⁶² Ovenden, *What Are Museums For?*, 3.

¹⁶³ Smithsonian Institution, *Art Museums and the Public*, 11.

¹⁶⁴ Orr, Susan R. *Historic House Museum Sustainability in the 21st Century: Paths to Preservation*. Master's thesis, Seton Hall University, 2010. Page 12.

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, Maxwell L. *Metrics of Success in Art Museums*. Report. Getty Leadership Institute. Page 6.

¹⁶⁶ Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, 154.

¹⁶⁷ Babbidge, Adrian. "UK Museums: Safe and Sound?" *Cultural Trends* 10, no. 37 (2000): 1-35. doi:10.1080/09548960009365106. Page 1.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

AAM issued formal collection management guidance starting in the 1960's.¹⁷⁰ Museums are spending between 65-75% of their annual budgets on maintaining museum collections in some way in perpetuity.¹⁷¹ Nick Merriman discussed a report on the cost of collecting that was published in 1989, which showed that on average, over 60% of museums' resources were being devoted to the direct and indirect costs of managing their collections.¹⁷² Merriman suggested that sustainable collection could be undertaken through the management of the museum's collection.¹⁷³

Merriman also suggests in his report "Museum Collections and Sustainability" that the literature shows "that gradual growth can be sustainable if it is undertaken in a context in which a path towards sustainable practice is being followed."¹⁷⁴ As sustainability becomes mainstream for potential funders, it is important to look at how the museum will carry out its mission in the future.¹⁷⁵ Merriman says that the aim of his research is to establish whether museum collections in general are continuing to grow through time, and what the implications of this are.¹⁷⁶ Rachel Madan says that "The sustainable museum of the future may operate in an entirely different way to those of today."¹⁷⁷ Sarah Brophy, an independent consultant, and Elizabeth Wylie, director of business development activities at Finegold Alexander & Associates, said in their book *The Green Museum: A Primer on Environmental Practice*, "curators and collections managers take to

¹⁷⁰ *Acquisition and Disposal of Collections*. Smithsonian Institution, 143.

¹⁷¹ Weil, "Collecting Then, Collecting Today", 285.

¹⁷² Lord, Barry, Gail Dexter Lord, and John Nicks. *The Cost of Collecting: Collection Management in UK Museums*. London: H.M.S.O., 1989. Page 8.

¹⁷³ Keene, *Fragments of the World*, 4.

¹⁷⁴ Merriman, *Museum Collections and Sustainability*, 41.

¹⁷⁵ Madan, *Sustainable Museums*, 29.

¹⁷⁶ Merriman, *Museum Collections and Sustainability*, 11.

¹⁷⁷ Madan, *Sustainable Museums*, 29.

heart the phrase ‘in perpetuity’ for collections care.”¹⁷⁸ Merriman goes on to say that museums “can only continue to collect if they do so in a sustainable manner.”¹⁷⁹ Roy Clare, Director of the Auckland Museum, in his work “Evolving for the 21st Century?” as part of Museum Identity, says, “Museums face two major challenges: how to collect sustainably, and how to remain relevant.”¹⁸⁰

Chapter 3: Methodology

The goal of this research was to identify how art-collecting institutions approach and handle collections growth, and if that growth is sustainable. Interviews were conducted under the established research goals listed below. One individual was selected to participate from each institution. The criteria for choosing them focused on the curatorial/collections management staff at each institution, primarily by looking at the institution’s online resources. The tiered choices of people to interview were as follows: Collection Managers, Registrars, Curatorial Staff, and Exhibit Staff. The method used to conduct this research was a semi-structured interview. When an in-person interview was not possible, a phone interview was conducted.

Research Goals:

1. To obtain a description of collections and collecting practices.
2. To establish factors relating to collections growth.

¹⁷⁸ Brophy, Sarah S., and Elizabeth Wylie. *The Green Museum: A Primer on Environmental Practice*. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008. Page 35.

¹⁷⁹ Ovenden, *What Are Museums For?*, 6.

¹⁸⁰ Clare, Roy. "Evolving for the 21st Century?" Museum Identity Ltd. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.museum-id.com/idea-detail.asp?id=283>.

3. To understand the impact of collections growth.
4. To approach thoughts about sustainability and how it applies to museum collections.

Subjects and Sampling Procedure:

Institutional Selection:

Institutions were selected based on their active art-collection, location in urban settings, and a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (or equivalent) designation. Ten institutions were scouted as possible locations to include. No institutions declined, and only seven participated due to scheduling conflicts. Table 1 illustrates the seven institutions and their locations that were included in the research. Organizations included in this study were contacted by email (Appendix B) with a consent form (Appendix C) after the University of Washington’s Internal Review Board approved the research project.

Table 1

Institution	Location
Henry Art Gallery (HAG)	<i>Seattle, Washington</i>
Portland Art Museum (PAM)	<i>Portland, Oregon</i>
Tacoma Art Museum (TAM)	<i>Tacoma, Washington</i>
Seattle Art Museum (SAM)	<i>Seattle, Washington</i>
Frye Art Museum (FAM)	<i>Seattle, Washington</i>
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV)	<i>Victoria, British Columbia, Canada</i>
Museum of Contemporary Craft (MCC)	<i>Portland, Oregon</i>

Institution Profiles

Interviews were conducted at seven art-collecting institutions located between Victoria, Canada and Portland, Oregon. Documents from each institution (including strategic plans, collections management plans, collections development policies, and annual reports) were requested based on the American Alliance of Museum's "sample documents" suggestions.¹⁸¹ Whenever possible, documents were obtained to look for relevant data. The data collected was used to illustrate how often the reports were revised, institutional outlooks on their future, annual averages of attendance and total income. Profiles of each institution (outlined below) were compiled from available documents from each institution, documents available on Guide Star (www.GuideStar.org), as well as each interview conducted. All are nonprofit 501(3)(c) tax-exempt status, or the appropriate equivalent in their region.

*Seattle Art Museum (SAM)*¹⁸²

In 2014, SAM had an annual attendance of around 650,000 people among their three locations in Seattle, Washington.¹⁸³ Their primary downtown location saw roughly 300,000 people. Their strategic plan was last revised in 2014, and looks ahead through 2017. SAM's collection plan was last revised in 2014. Their total income for fiscal year 2013 was \$39,300,038.¹⁸⁴ They are accredited by AAM.

¹⁸¹ American Alliance of Museums. "Sample Documents." Sample Documents. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/information-center/sample-documents>.

¹⁸² Curatorial Associate for Collections. "Seattle Art Museum." Interview by author. Recorded in-person interview. Seattle, March 30, 2015.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms 990 for Donors, Grantmakers, and Businesses. Accessed April 13, 2015. <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

Tacoma Art Museum (TAM)¹⁸⁵

In 2011, TAM had an annual attendance of 104,819 in Tacoma, Washington. Their strategic plan was last revised in 2013, and doesn't specify target years in the future. TAM's collection plan was last revised in 2013. Their total income for fiscal year 2012 was \$28,499,411.¹⁸⁶ They are accredited by AAM.

Portland Art Museum (PAM)¹⁸⁷

In 2014, PAM had an annual attendance of around 350,000 people in Portland, Oregon. Their strategic plan was last revised in 2014, and looks ahead through 2017. Their total income for fiscal year 2013 was \$12,925,713.¹⁸⁸ They are accredited by AAM.

Frye Art Museum (FAM)¹⁸⁹

In 2014, FAM had an annual attendance of 95,421 people in Seattle, Washington. FAM's collection plan was last revised in 2014. Total income for fiscal year 2013 was not available. They are accredited by AAM.

Henry Art Gallery (HAG)¹⁹⁰

In 2014, HAG had an annual attendance of 54,492 people in Seattle, Washington. Due to their affiliation with the University of Washington, they don't have an individualized strategic

¹⁸⁵ Curator of Collections. "Tacoma Art Museum." Recorded telephone interview by author. Seattle, March 27, 2015.

¹⁸⁶ GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

¹⁸⁷ Collections Manager. "Portland Art Museum." Recorded telephone interview by author. Seattle, March 11, 2015.

¹⁸⁸ GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

¹⁸⁹ Collections Manager and Registrar. "Frye Art Museum." Recorded telephone interview by author. Seattle, March 18, 2015.

¹⁹⁰ Curator of Collections. "Henry Art Gallery." Interview by author. Recorded in-person interview. Seattle, March 18, 2015.

plan. HAG's collection plan was last revised in 2014. Their total income for fiscal year 2013 was \$4,838,945.¹⁹¹ They are accredited by AAM.

Museum of Contemporary Craft (MCC)¹⁹²

In 2014, MCC had an annual attendance of around 45,000 people in Portland, Oregon. Their strategic plan was last revised in 2015, and looks ahead through 2020. MCC's collection plan was last revised in 2012. Their total income for fiscal year 2013 was \$577,681.¹⁹³ They are not accredited by AAM, but adhere to the same policies and procedures.

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV)¹⁹⁴

Annual attendance figures for AGGV in Victoria, Canada were not available. Their strategic plan was last revised in 2015, and looks ahead through 2018. AGGV's collection plan was last revised in 2011. Total income for fiscal year 2013 was not available. . They are not accredited by AAM because they are a Canadian institution. They are accredited by Canada's equivalent of AAM, the Canadian Museum Association.

Participant Selection:

Online research was conducted following established criteria to select participants. The interviewees were as follows:

¹⁹¹ GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

¹⁹² Curator of Collections and Deputy Director. "Museum of Contemporary Craft." Recorded telephone interview by author. Seattle, March 31, 2015.

¹⁹³ GuideStar Nonprofit Reports and Forms, <http://www.guidestar.org/>.

¹⁹⁴ Manager of Collections and Exhibits. "Art Gallery of Greater Victoria." Recorded telephone interview by author. Seattle, March 10, 2015.

Table 2

<i>Institutions</i> <i>Included:</i>	Position	Interview Conducted	Interview Medium
TAM	Curator of Collections	3/27/2015	Phone
PAM	Collections Manager	3/11/2015	Phone
AGGV	Manager of Collections and Exhibits	3/10/2015	Phone
MCC	Curator of Collections and Deputy Director	3/31/2015	Phone
FAM	Collections Manager and Registrar	3/18/2015	Phone
HAG	Curator of Collections	3/18/2015	In Person
SAM	Curatorial Associate for Collections	3/30/2015	In Person

Instrument

Seven institutions were involved, with one individual from each location interviewed. A total of 25 questions resulted in a recorded interview that lasted 30-60 minutes, both in person and via phone. The instrument (Appendix A) contained 25 questions. Some of the questions were close-ended, while the majority of them were open-ended to allow for maximum freedom of response. The original instrument (Appendix A) was divided into two main sections. Each related to a portion of the thesis statement. Section one focused on how art-collecting institutions address collections growth. Section two focused on if the growth of art collections is sustainable. Once data was collected from the instrument, the two sections were refocused into four sections to align with new research goals. A combination of mostly open-ended and several closed-ended questions, as well as Likert-scaled question, provided answers that satisfied the intended data collection process.

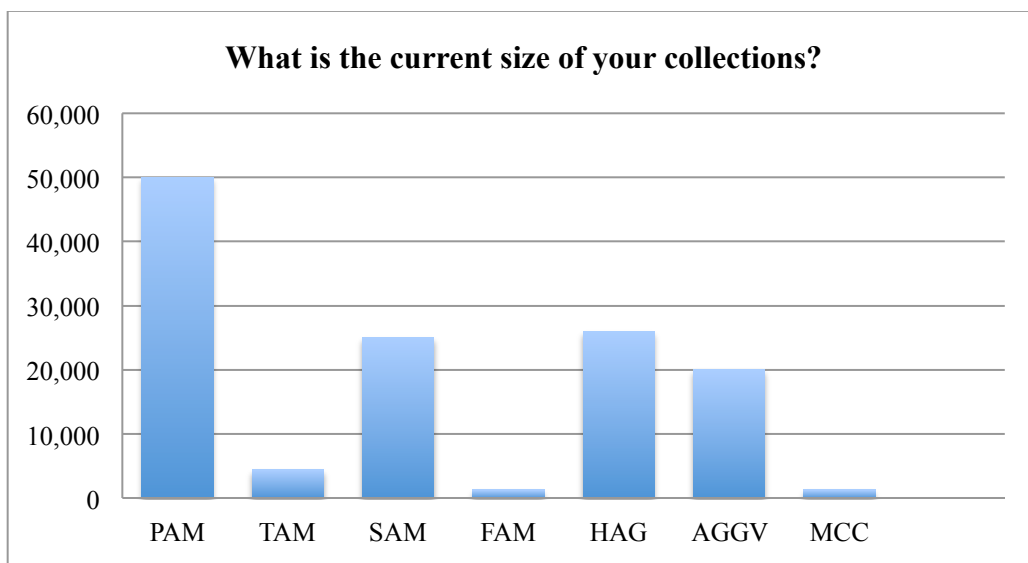
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

Findings

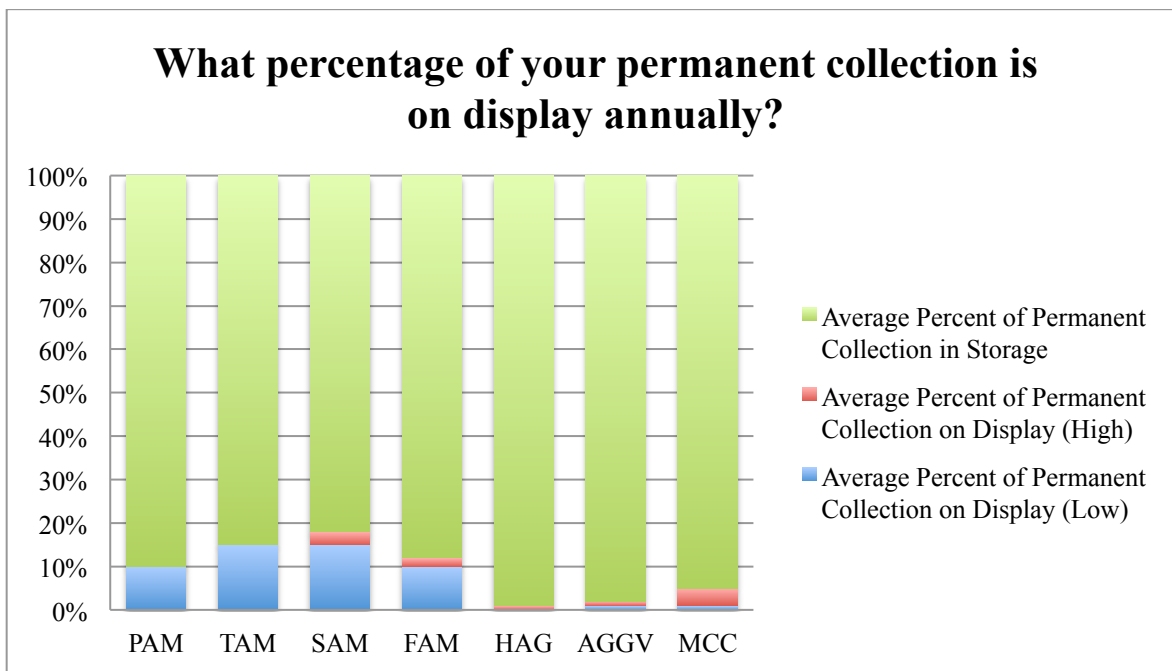
Answers to each research question were analyzed to establish trends, patterns, and outlying responses. The following findings were compiled from the responses to the interviews conducted in March 2015. Interviews were recorded. Findings are reported by research question and grouped by research goals. Questions 1-5 relate to research goal one, which focused on a description of collections and collecting practices. Questions 6-15 relate to research goal two, which focused on factors relating to collections growth. Questions 16-21 relate to research goal three, which focused on the impact of collections growth. Questions 22-25 relate to research goal four, which focused on thoughts about sustainability and how it applies to museum collections.

Section 1: Description of Collections and Collecting Practices

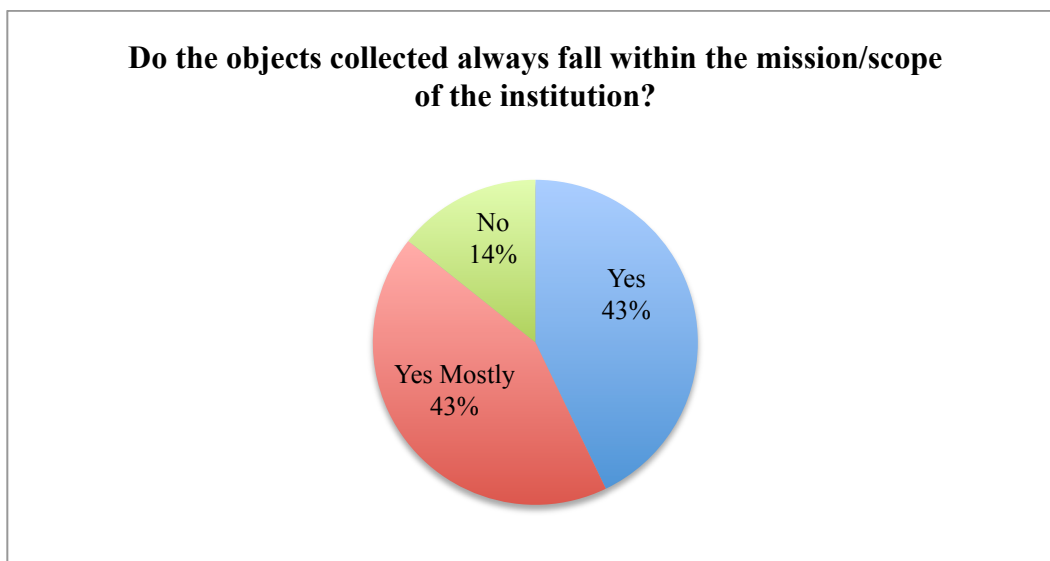
Question #1: What is the current size of your collections?



Question #2: *What percentage of your permanent collection is on display annually?*



Question #3: *Do the objects collected always fall within the mission/scope of the institution?*



Question #4: If not, how does your institution address this issue?

PAM: Objects are put up for auction when appropriate, or sent to an acceptable institution.

TAM: N/A

SAM: The history of philanthropy and collecting changes over time, and the mission and scope are refined as time goes on. Deaccessioning occurs when appropriate.

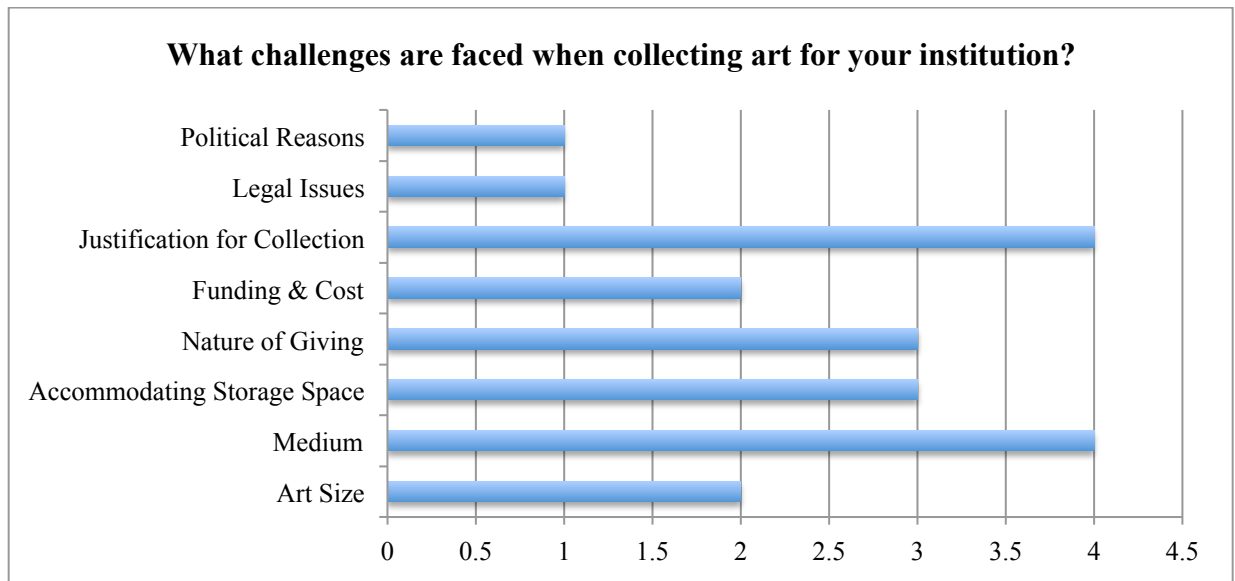
FAM: N/A

HAG: N/A

AGGV: There is minimal to address. Most of the time objects fall within the mission.

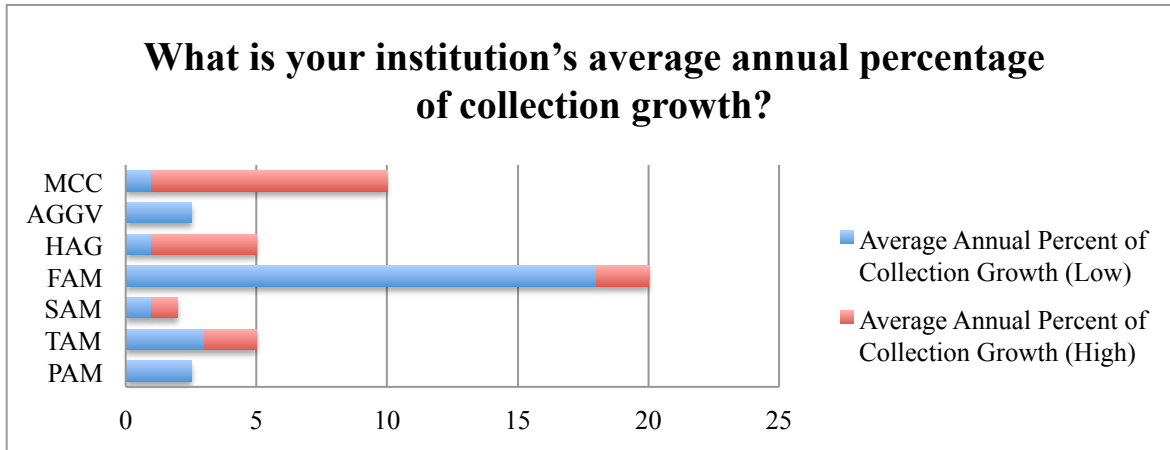
MCC: N/A

Question #5: What challenges do you face when collecting art for your institution?



Section 2: Factors Relating to Collections Growth

Question #6: *What is your institution's average annual percentage of collection growth?*



Question #7: *How do deaccessioning processes affect collection growth at your institution?*

PAM: The deaccessioning process takes a long time, up to several years. But it does create more space; If an object doesn't meet certain standards, or is repetitive, it is up for deaccessioning; There are no negative stigmas.

TAM: There is a deaccessioning curve, but it follows institutional guidelines; Accession and deaccession processes are time-consuming.

SAM: There is an increased awareness in the last several decades about what is accessioned and deaccessioned. They only take some objects, not everything offered. Making sure an object has a use in the museum, regardless of its ability to be exhibited, is important.

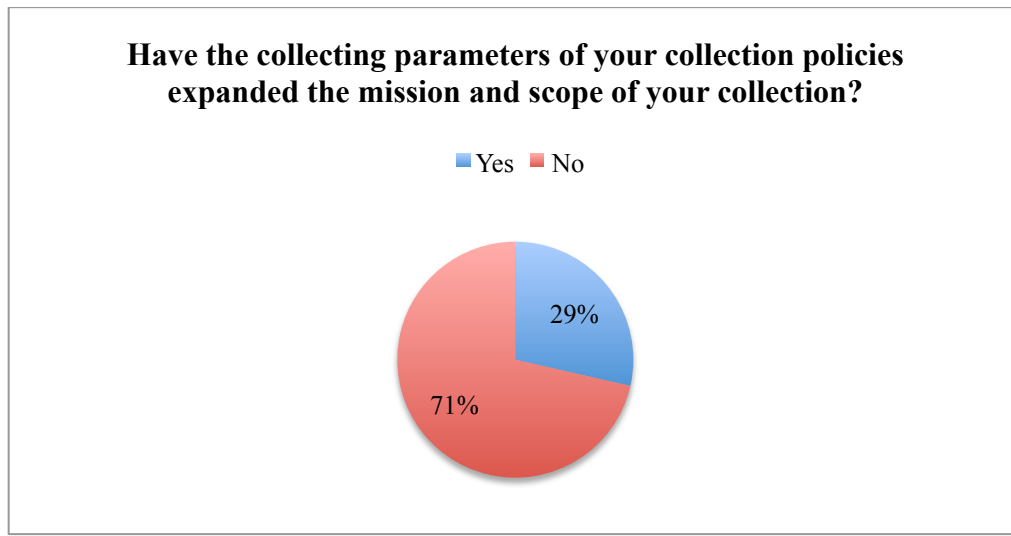
FAM: There has been some deaccessioning in the past but minimal/none recently.

HAG: There has been no deaccessioning recently. Objects often develop other uses.

AGGV: Deaccessioning processes are time consuming compared to the acquisition process.

MCC: There have been few deaccessions in the last decade. Objects may take on other uses.

Question #8: Have the collecting parameters of your collection policies expanded the mission and scope of your collection?



Question #9: How is collection growth reflected in your institution's current policies and procedures?

PAM: It is implied; Curatorial voice through collections growth is important.

TAM: It is central to the goals.

SAM: The written policies reflect our growth goals.

FAM: It is an important part of the policies in place.

HAG: It is in the policies.

AGGV: There is a narrowing in collections scope due to the policies in place.

MCC: Part of collection/implied.

Question #10: How does your institution's exhibit and storage space impact collections growth?

PAM: The reverse happens. There is a reaction to what is collected.

TAM: There is a focus on off-site storage space. Current spaces are retrofitted. There is a question of what we *really* need.

SAM: The reverse happens because growth is address procedurally. Current spaces are reassessed for storage.

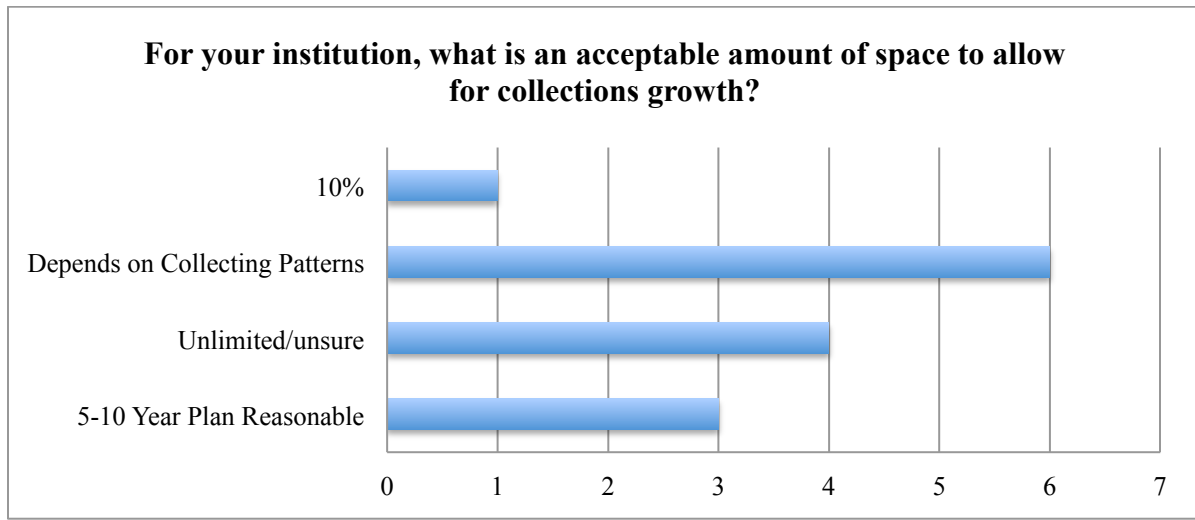
FAM: The reverse happens.

HAG: There is a partial focus on off-site storage. Current spaces are redesigned and retrofitted. Some things can't be taken. There is a question of what *really* need.

AGGV: There is some deaccession occurring due to lack of space.

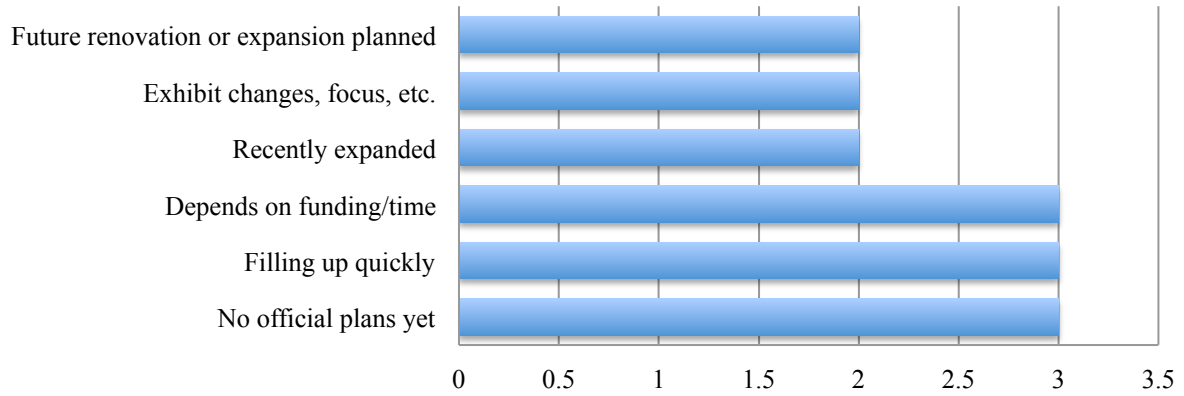
MCC: There is a reaction to what is collected, and some things can't be taken. There is always a challenge of space.

Question #11: For your institution, what is an acceptable amount of space to allow for collections growth?



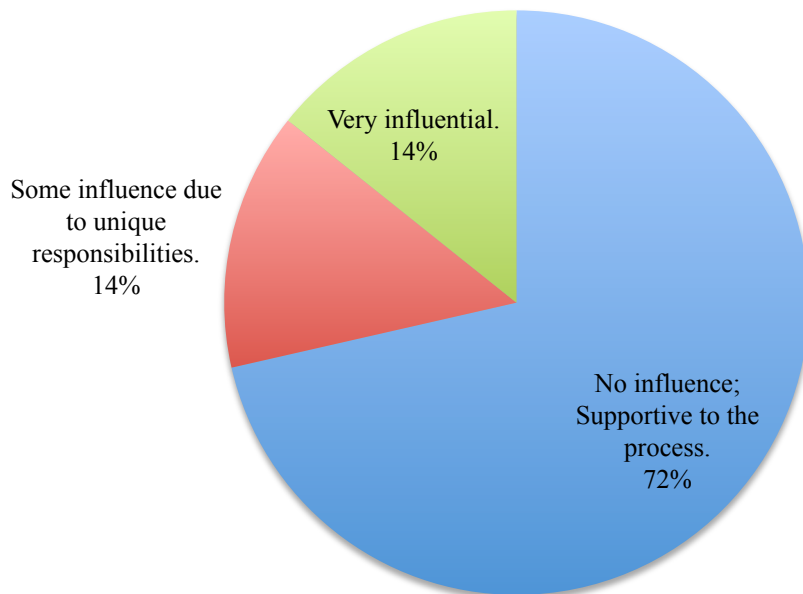
Question #12: Are there any recent changes or proposed changes that have been implemented or discussed that directly affect how collections growth occurs?

Are there any recent changes or proposed changes that have been implemented or discussed that directly affect how collections growth occurs?

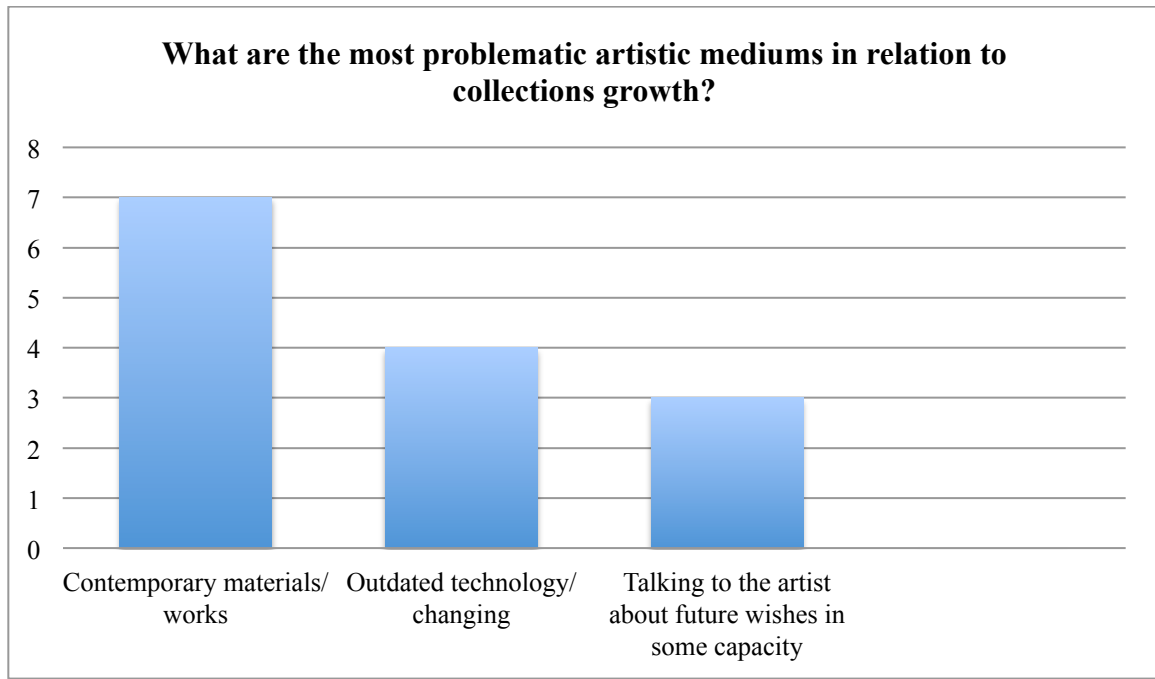


Question #13: How does your role as [position] influence the collections growth process?

How does your role as [position] influence the collections growth process?



Question #14: *What are the most problematic artistic mediums in relation to collections growth?*



Question #15: *Can you tell me whether these factors impact your institution's collections growth? Rate 1-9, with 9 being the most impactful: A - Digitization of collections; B - Funding; C - Shift from being focused on collections to being audience focused; D - Space (used, available); E - Care of objects; F - Medium (artistic); G - Curatorial influence; H - Reputation of institution; I - Accessibility (ADA);*

Key:

(AMB.) = An ambiguous or range for an answer.

(#) = Original number given; reinterpreted in the context of the conversation and scale 1-9.

Raw Data

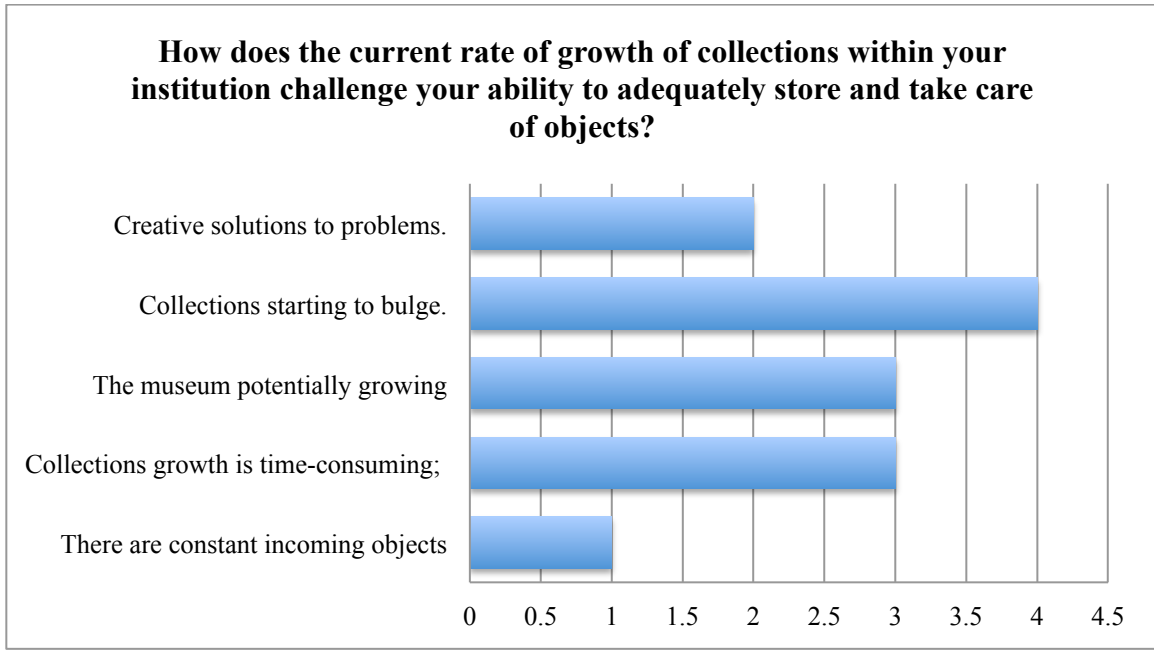
Part:	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>I</i>
<i>PAM</i>	5	6-9	2	4	6-9	3	6-9	6-9	1
<i>TAM</i>	2	9	1/2	7	8/9	5	8/9	5/6	1
<i>SAM</i>	2	5	3	7	8	6	9	4	1
<i>FAM</i>	2	9	5	7	6	3	8	4	1
<i>HAG</i>	It does	It does	1/2	2/3	It does	9	9	7-9	1
<i>AGGV</i>	4	9	5	9	7	4	8	6	6
<i>MCC</i>	8	9	4	7	7	9	5	8	7

Adjustments Based on Interview Discussions

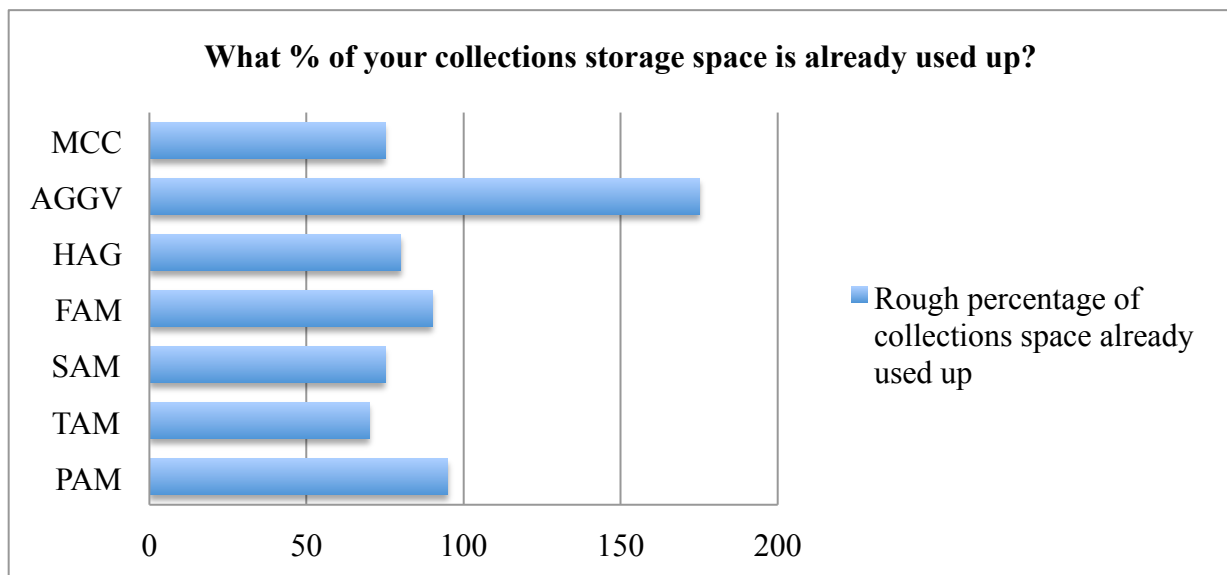
Part:	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>I</i>
<i>PAM</i>	5	9(amb.)	2	4	6(amb.)	3	8(amb.)	7(amb.)	1
<i>TAM</i>	2	9	3	6(7)	7	4(5)	8	5	1
<i>SAM</i>	2	5	3	7	8	6	9	4	1
<i>FAM</i>	2	9	5	7	6	3	8	4	1
<i>HAG</i>	4(amb.)	5 (amb.)	2	3	6 (amb.)	8	9	7(amb.)	1
<i>AGGV</i>	3(4)	9	4(5)	8(9)	6(7)	2(4)	7(8)	5(6)	1(6)
<i>MCC</i>	6(8)	9	2(4)	5(7)	4(7)	8(9)	3(5)	7(8)	1(7)

Section 3: Impact of Collections Growth

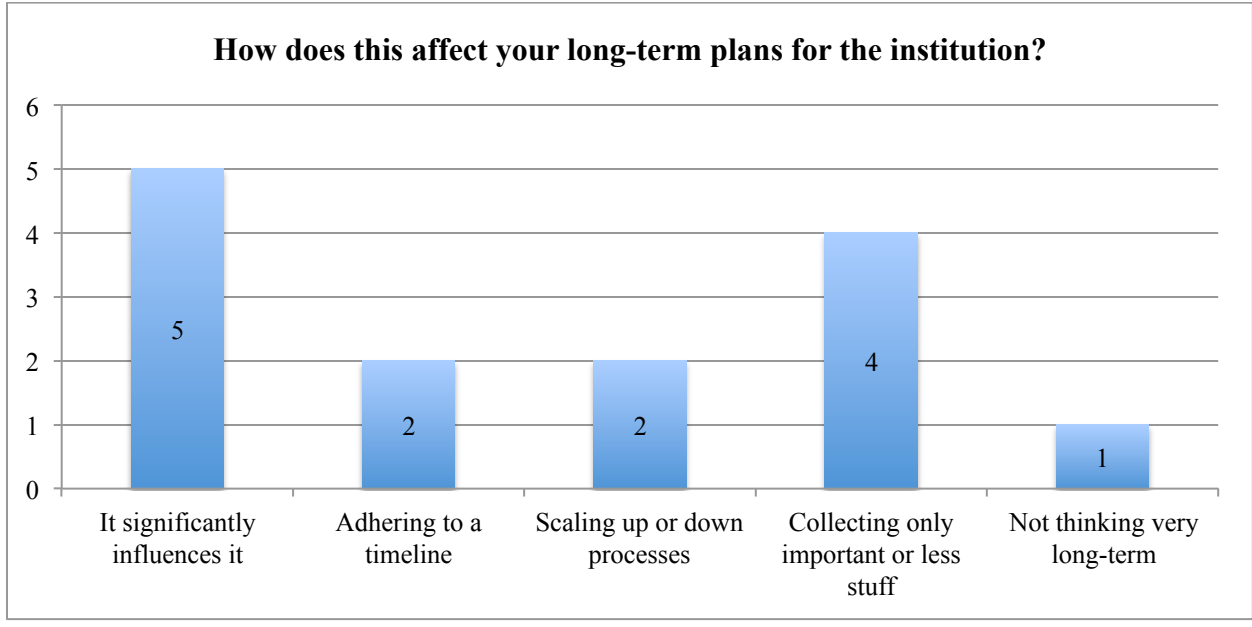
Question #16: *How does the current rate of growth of collections within your institution challenge your ability to adequately store and take care of objects?*



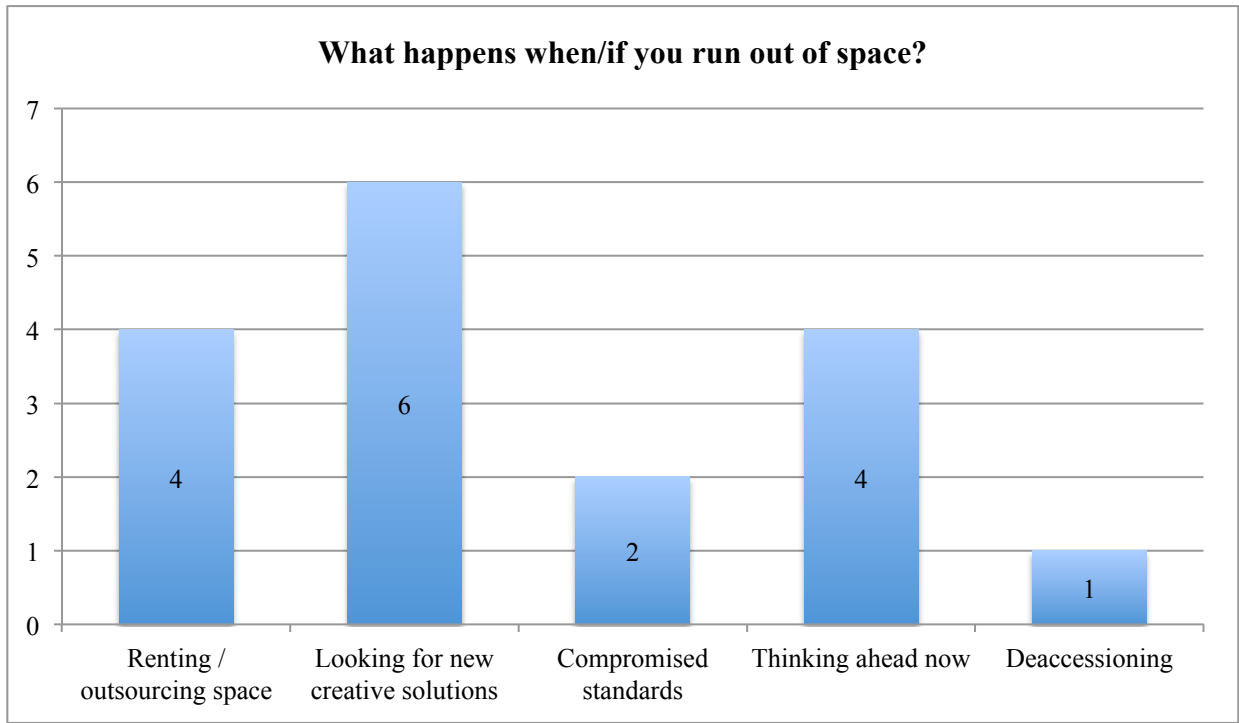
Question #17: *What percent of your collections storage space is already used up?*



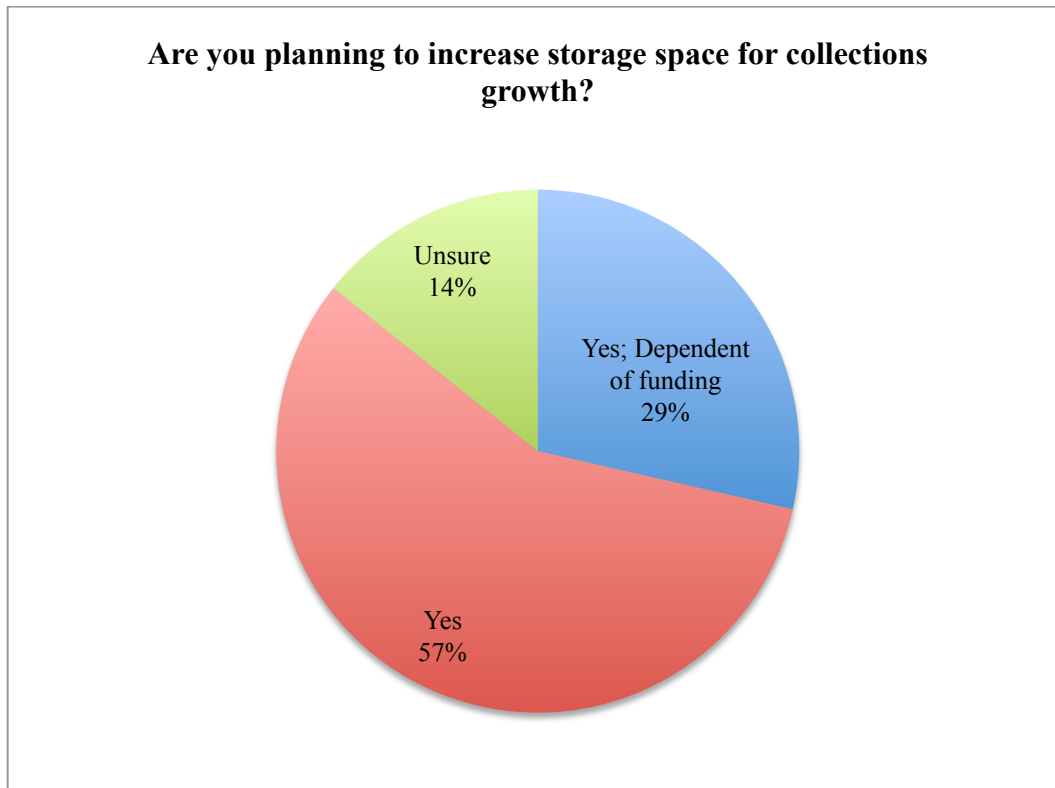
Question #18: *How does this affect your long-term plans for the institution?*



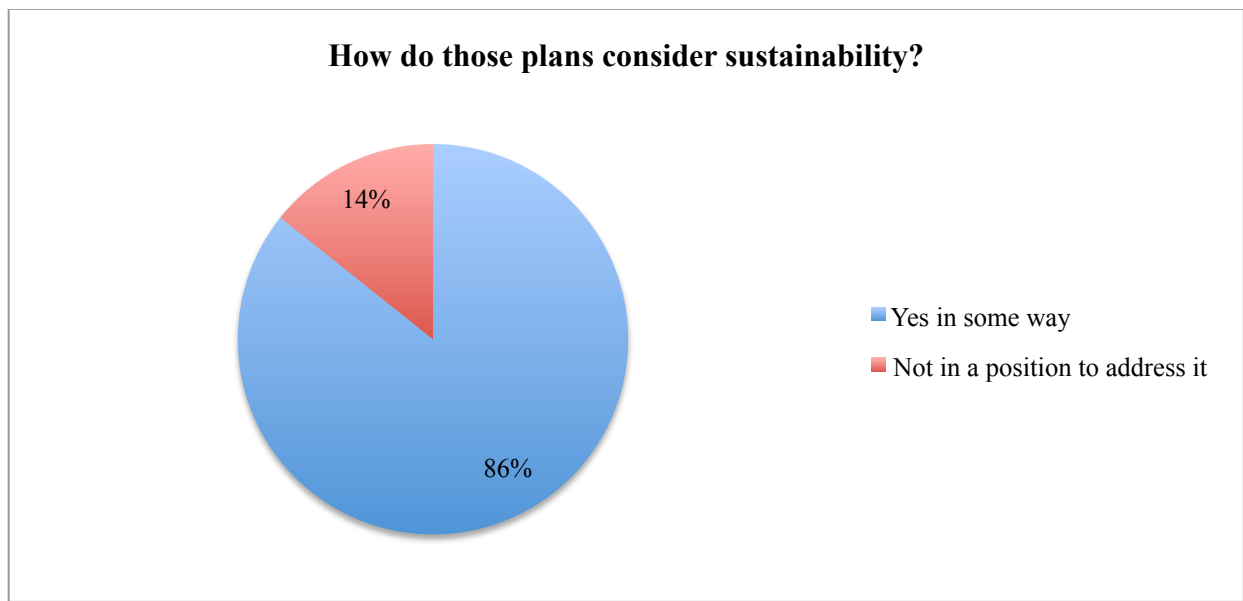
Question #19: *What happens when/if you run out of space?*



Question #20: *Are you planning to increase storage space for collections growth?*

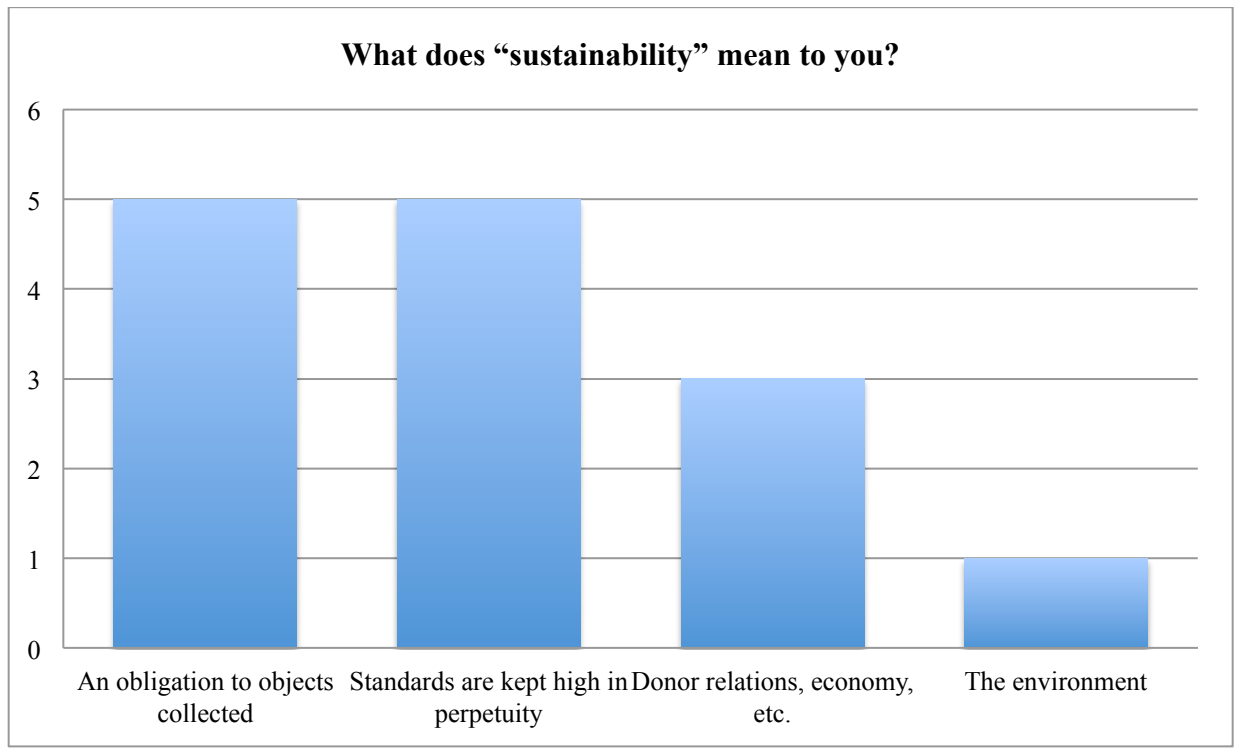


Question #21: *How do those plans consider sustainability?*

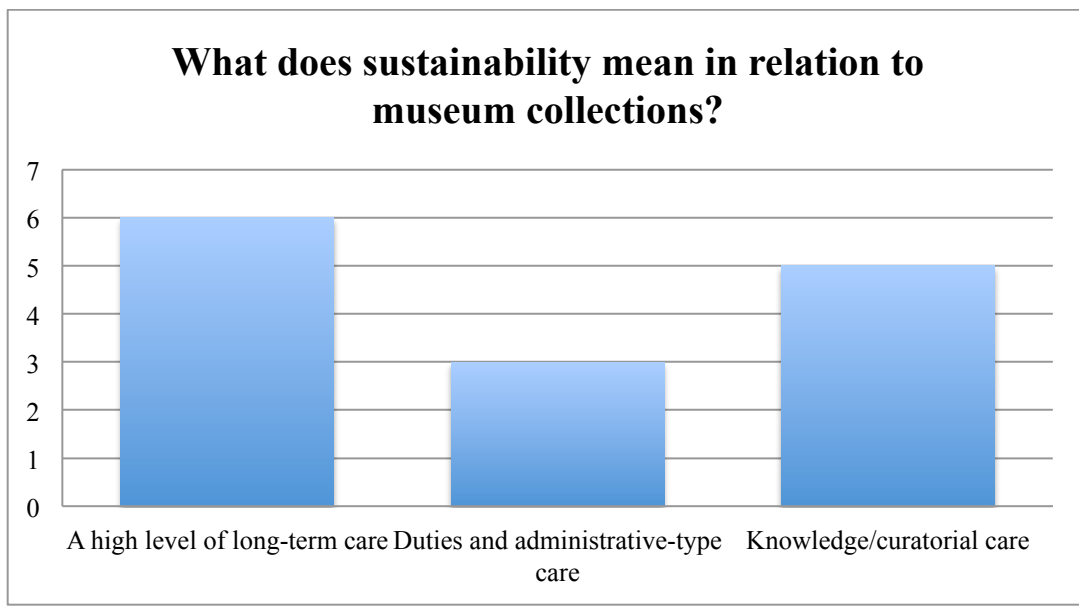


Section 4: Thinking About Sustainability and How it Applies to Museum Collections

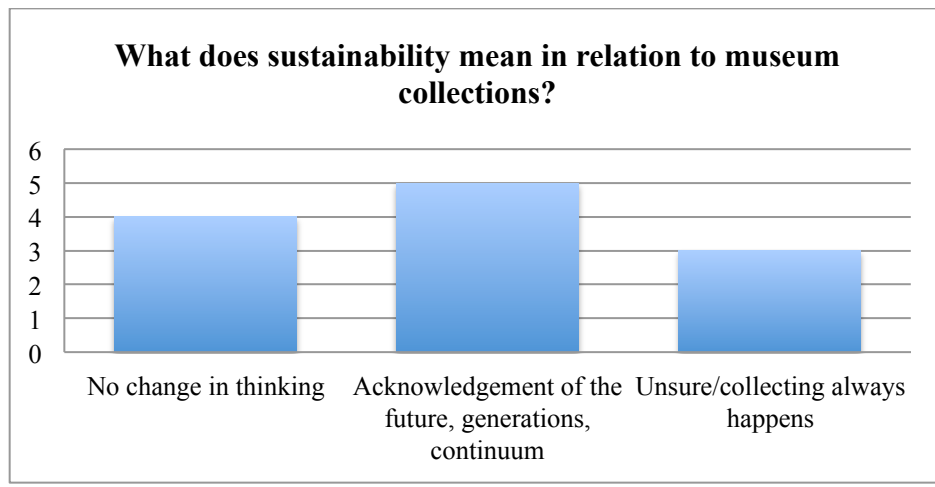
Question #22: *What does “sustainability” mean to you?*



Question #23: *What does sustainability mean in relation to museum collections?*



Question #24: Does your thinking about sustainability in regards to museum collections change when the definition of sustainability is presented as: “[The] development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹⁹⁵ If so, please explain.



Question #25: Do you have any final thoughts about collections growth and sustainability?

The following answers were the emergent key themes from the open-ended final question of the interview.

- There is a focus on quantity over quality.
- Museums rely heavily on donations and are at their mercy.
- There is a lot of high-paced activity, such as donors, outreach, etc.
- There is considerable marketplace competition.
- The concept of the “real” object.
- The concept of capitalism, where only growth means success.
- Not enough of a collection is shown or utilized.

¹⁹⁵ Madan, *Sustainable Museums*, 20.

- How long can we go on collecting like this?
- The importance of refocusing a collection's use is increasing.
- What about everything [art] that we don't take?
- Changing definitions of sustainability over time are hard to track.

Analysis

Findings from the questions above were synthesized into analysis, listed below. Similar phrases and words were chosen from each institution's answer to a specific question. Words that occurred often are indicative of how the institution felt; similarities across answers showed additional emergent trends. By developing and synthesizing the responses, resulting patterns and outliers were established, and further discussed in the analysis.

Section 1: Description of Collections and Collecting Practices

Question #1: What is the current size of your collections?

The answers ranged from 1,300-50,000 objects. Three of seven participants responded with fewer than 4,400 objects. Three of seven participants responded with between 20,000-26,000 objects. The two respondents with "art gallery" in their name had about the same amount of material, with 20,000 and 26,000 objects respectively.

Question #2: What percentage of your permanent collection is on display annually?

All respondents acknowledged challenges when providing a numerical value to this question, due to the changing circumstances every year that vary greatly between institutions. The range of answers was between 0-18%, with the average being 7.5-9% on display annually.

Question #3: *Do the objects collected always fall within the mission/scope of the institution?*

Six of seven respondents to this question answered either “Yes” or “Mostly.” Three of seven said yes, three of seven said yes/mostly, and one of seven said no.

Question #4: *If not, how does your institution address this issue?*

Four of seven did not reply to this prompt. Of the three that did, they discussed how objects were sent to appropriate substitute institutions, deaccessioning, and the history of philanthropy.

Question #5: *What challenges do you face when collecting art for your institution?*

Two of seven participants noted object size as a challenge in collecting. Four of seven respondents discussed the importance of justification when collecting art. Four respondents acknowledged some element of space or financial challenges when collecting. Artistic medium was discussed in three responses. Another strong theme in the responses was the nature of gifting and donor relations, and how often collections growth relies on these gifts.

Section 2: Factors Relating to Collections Growth

Question #6: *What is your institution's average annual percentage of collection growth?*

The average range was between 4.25-6.75% annual collections growth. The two smallest institutions had the highest percentage of collections growth. Their responses were given based on memory, and not specific data. The smallest locations, in terms of physical objects in their collection, had the highest percentage of annual growth.

Question #7: How do deaccessioning processes affect collection growth at your institution?

Three respondents acknowledged that there was no, or very little, deaccessioning done in the last decade or longer. Two of those institutions discussed how collections are typically reclassified or repurposed within the institution. Three of seven respondents acknowledged the multi-purpose use of collections. Three of seven respondents discussed the long process that deaccessioning takes. Three of seven respondents also discussed the guidelines and procedural implications of deaccessioning, as well as the accessioning that occurs with objects brought into the collection.

Question #8: Have the collecting parameters of your collection policies expanded the mission and scope of your collection?

Two of seven responded “yes” to this question. All respondents gave context and justification for their answers. The common theme in six of seven responses was that it narrowed or focused their collecting practices.

Question #9: How is collection growth reflected in your institution’s current policies and procedures?

Seven of seven respondents responded to this question and mentioned the implication of collections growth as being reflected in their institutional procedures and policies. Implied responses demonstrated that growth is a goal.

Question #10: How does your institution's exhibit and storage space impact collections growth?

All respondents reacted positively to the use of space in various ways and its implications for collections growth. Two of seven respondents spoke about questioning collections coming in, and what is *really* necessary for accessioning. Three of seven respondents discussed it as the reverse effect. Four of seven respondents stressed the importance of space, and how off-site storage or retrofitting existing space was crucial to allow for collections growth.

Question #11: For your institution, what is an acceptable amount of space to allow for collections growth?

Three of seven respondents discussed the use of a 5-10 year plan; Two respondents have “idealistic” percentages of 50%, while four of seven were unsure or responded with “unlimited.”

Question #12: Are there any recent changes or proposed changes that have been implemented or discussed that directly affect how collections growth occurs?

Three of seven respondents didn't have anything specific lined up for an expansion or renovation. Three respondents discussed funding and the importance of that on collections, space, or other components of the collection. Four of seven respondents clearly cited the influence collections growth has on their definite plans to renovate or expand in the future. Three of seven respondents spoke about the impact collections growth has on their current space,

including the problematic nature of increased rates of collections growth. Two respondents cited the shift in exhibition breadth, or curatorial voice or focus, and its impact on collections growth.

Question #13: How does your role as [position] influence the collections growth process?

Two of seven participants acknowledged that their role does influence the collections growth process in some way. Five respondents discussed the lack of influence they have on incoming collections. All respondents have “collections” in their title in some fashion.

Question #14: What are the most problematic artistic mediums in relation to collections growth?

All responses to this question included contemporary artwork, challenges, artists, or similar themes. All respondents collect contemporary work in some manor. Four of seven respondents acknowledge the importance of the inclusion of living artists in the collections process. This was directly tied to contemporary materials and mediums. Three of seven responded with concerns of technology in contemporary work becoming outdated.

Question #15: Can you tell me whether these factors impact your institution’s collections

growth? Rate 1-9, with 9 being the most impactful: **A** - Digitization of collections; **B** - Funding;

C - Shift from being focused on collections to being audience focused; **D** - Space (used,

available); **E** - Care of objects; **F** - Medium (artistic); **G** - Curatorial influence; **H** - Reputation of

institution; **I** - Accessibility (ADA);

The responses to this answer included numerical values assigned as the instrument intended with one number per answer, and for several answers ranges were provided. The terms indicated for potential impact were taken from research conducted into collections growth, museum

functionality, and sustainable practices. The term “impactful” proved problematic to several respondents; including “influential” could have proved more useful, and was presented as an alternative to each respondent due to confusion. Most factors had at least half of respondents expand upon their feelings towards assigning the numbers they did. The most consistent numerical answers included the following: Funding (important), Shift to audiences from collections (less important), Care of objects (important), Curatorial influence (important), and Accessibility [ADA] (less important). Two respondents discussed accessibility in relation to access to the public, such as physical opportunities to view/research; this accounts for the outlying responses to accessibility.

(The averages below are based on the “Adjustments Based on Interview Discussions” chart.)

Scale: 1-9, 1 = least important; 9 = most important.

A - Digitization of collections: The average for this factor was 3.43.

B – Funding: The average for this factor was 7.86.

C - Shift from being focused on collections to being audience focused: The average for this factor was 3.

D - Space (used, available): The average for this factor was 5.71.

E - Care of objects: The average for this factor was 6.14.

F - Medium (artistic): The average for this factor was 4.86.

G - Curatorial influence: The average for this factor was 7.43.

H - Reputation of institution: The average for this factor was 5.71.

I - Accessibility (ADA): The average for this factor was 1.

Section 3: Impact of Collections Growth

Question #16: How does the current rate of growth of collections within your institution challenge your ability to adequately store and take care of objects?

The time consuming nature of collections growth was acknowledged by three of seven respondents. Four of seven spoke of collections as becoming increasingly problematic. Short-term fixes were explicitly mentioned in two responses. Five respondents discussed to varying degrees the challenges associated with institutional growth.

Question #17: What percent of your collections storage space is already used up?

The average percent of collections storage space is 94.3% full. If the anomalous answer, 175%, is excluded, then the average percentage drops to 80.8%. All answers were based on estimates, and not specifics from their databases.

Question #18: How does this affect your long-term plans for the institution?

One of seven responded that it does not affect long-term plans. Six respondents acknowledged some level of significance on their long-term plans for their institution. Two respondents discussed the importance of institutional timelines. One respondent specifically spoke of scaling up or down their processes for acquisitions and deaccessions. A key theme that emerged was in four responses focusing on limiting their intake of objects to only collecting the best artworks.

Question #19: What happens when/if you run out of space?

Six responses focused on finding solutions in some manor. Four respondents specifically discussed renting or buying off-site storage. Two respondents focused on compromising on standards and the importance of avoiding this. The key emergent theme was finding solutions.

Question #20: *Are you planning to increase storage space for collections growth?*

Six of seven respondents said “yes”. One respondent was unsure. Two respondents specifically cited the importance of funding on their plans to increase space for collections growth.

Question #21: *How do those plans consider sustainability?*

Six respondents consider those plans sustainable, but there was a level of uncertainty in four of those responses. Two respondents said it was very much dependent on various things, especially funding. Two respondents specifically acknowledged adapting plans for more space, and one of those mentioned adapting to changing audiences.

Section 4: Thinking About Sustainability and How it Applies to Museum Collections

Question #22: *What does “sustainability” mean to you?*

One respondent mentioned the environment. Four respondents discussed the economy or nature of donor relations. In six of seven it was clearly outlined, and in the seventh it was implied, that sustainability to museum professionals means an obligation to the objects collected.

Question #23: *What does sustainability mean in relation to museum collections?*

Seven of seven respondents connected sustainability to the care of collections. Physical care was mentioned in six of seven responses. Administrative care was mentioned clearly in three of seven responses. Intellectual care was clearly mentioned in five of seven responses. All three, (physical, intellectual, and administrative) were heavily implied throughout all responses.

Question #24: Does your thinking about sustainability in regards to museum collections change when the definition of sustainability is presented as: “[The] development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹⁹⁶ If so, please explain.

Four of seven noted no change in thinking when presented with the definition above. Three of seven discussed the theme of collection as always occurring, regardless of their approach to sustainability. This left those respondents with a certain level of uncertainty regarding the definition. The key concept emerging from all responses to this question, including five of seven responses with explicit discussion, of the future and/or generational concerns in the future in relation to sustainability.

Question #25: Do you have any final thoughts about collections growth and sustainability?

The following concepts were discussed:

- There is a focus on quantity over quality.
- Museums rely heavily on donations and are at their mercy.
- There is a lot of high-paced activity, such as donors, outreach, etc.
- There is considerable marketplace competition.

¹⁹⁶ Madan, *Sustainable Museums*, 20.

- The concept of the “real” object.
- The concept of capitalism, where only growth means success.
- Not enough of a collection is shown or utilized.
- How long can we go on collecting like this?
- The importance of refocusing a collection’s use is increasing.
- What about everything [art] that we don’t take?
- Changing definitions of sustainability over time are hard to track.

All participants had different answers to this question. Six of seven had something to say, with one not having anything else to discuss. The main three themes focused on the past, present, and future of their individual institutions, collections, in addition to the museum field overall.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Results

The goal of this research study was to identify how art-collecting institutions addressed collections growth, and if that growth was sustainable. Four main research goals informed the process: To obtain a description of collections and collecting practices; To establish factors relating to collections growth; To understand the impact of collections growth; and To approach thoughts about sustainability and how it applies to museum collections.

To obtain a description of collections and collecting practices

Three results were identified for the findings related to this research goal. They include the retention of a permanent collection, collecting of mission-related art, and the challenges

associated with art collection. The first result was that each museum has a permanent collection; there is no significant pattern in the size of the collections for the participants in this study. The size of collections at included institutions ranged from 1,300 to 50,000 objects. Three institutions were right in the middle, with 20,000-26,000 objects. Furthermore, regardless of size of collection, each museum only displayed a small percent of their permanent collection.

The second result was that each of the museums in this study collected mission-related art. When asked if objects always fall within the scope or mission of the institution, most participants said yes or mostly yes. The one that said no spoke mainly to the factors relating to being a government repository for some cultural objects, and as such, some things didn't always fall directly within their scope. They also stated, "It would be an anomaly when they don't."¹⁹⁷ Another respondent said, "Now, yes. I wouldn't say that it didn't used to, but I would say that our mission was less clearly defined for a long time."¹⁹⁸ The pattern here is that usually objects fall within the institution's mission or goals.

The third result was there were four major challenges when collecting art for their museums: justification, space, philanthropic expectations, and the artistic medium. The pattern is that these four are the most common challenges noted. Over half of respondents spoke to needing a justification for the artwork to come into the collection. Over half also discussed the challenges that space raised for their institution. Medium and the nature of giving and philanthropic support were also key findings. "We are at the mercy of what gets offered to us for the most part. So it's sometimes hard to say no to people whether we want the gift or not."¹⁹⁹ Medium was addressed in over half of respondents, too.

¹⁹⁷ Manager of Collections and Exhibits. "Art Gallery of Greater Victoria." Interview by author.

¹⁹⁸ Curatorial Associate for Collections. "Seattle Art Museum." Interview by author.

¹⁹⁹ Manager of Collections and Exhibits. "Art Gallery of Greater Victoria." Interview by author.

To establish factors relating to collections growth

There are four factors that affect collections growth. Based on the findings, these factors are: strong policies, the nature of contemporary art, donor relations, and funding sources. Bruce Altshuler said, “We must recognize that museum collecting does not occur in a vacuum, but is rather at the center of a complex and sophisticated set of relationships.”²⁰⁰ Institutions are subject to evolving missions and visions, which demonstrate a focusing and narrowing the collections of their institutions, as the SAM interviewee spoke to. Collections staff at these institutions are creative with their space, preservation, conservation, and institutional policies. Strong procedures and administration is what informs the museums included in this study. With strong policies to adhere to, museums are able to sustain their collections growth accordingly. “Your best deaccession policy is to have a really robust and careful accession policy.”²⁰¹ This coincides with ICOM’s stance that, “Good decision-making is founded on good policy.”²⁰²

The notion of tackling challenges as they arose was a strong thread of discussion during the research process. Objects always fall within an institution’s mission or scope. When they don’t, there is a good reason for it, and a solution is sought immediately, based on the policies in place. The nature of contemporary art in size, medium, discipline, and focus all were brought up multiple times by multiple respondents. Retrofitting existing spaces was discussed in over half of respondents, as well 86% discussing the importance of finding solutions. The consensus is that contemporary art is challenging to collect, store, conserve, and to adapt with. “[With] contemporary works that are large [there] is a challenge on how to store them adequately.”²⁰³ Bruce Altshuler would agree when he says “Much of today’s artistic production does not lend

²⁰⁰ Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, 132.

²⁰¹ Curator of Collections and Deputy Director. "Museum of Contemporary Craft." Interview by author.

²⁰² Boylan, *Running a Museum a Practical Handbook*, International Council of Museums, 18.

²⁰³ Collections Manager and Registrar. "Frye Art Museum." Interview by author.

itself to being collected long-term.”²⁰⁴ All institutions in this study collected contemporary art in some way. The average percentage of growth was found to be between 4.25-6.75%. This is in line with AAM’s 1989 figure of 4.3-5.4% annually.²⁰⁵

A result that doesn’t impact collections growth is shown from the findings. A shift in consciousness from museums being about collections first, to being about the audience first, doesn’t appear to have a large impact specifically on the collections growth. “We talk about audience development and growth, and paying attention and being responsive to audience needs; And trying to anticipate that audience needs are changing, and continue to change.”²⁰⁶ The respondents gave this a relatively low rating, and the consensus that the audience is just another component of the museum sphere, as collections are.

There were four findings that may warrant future research, due to their secondary importance within the research. They are deaccessioning, reputation, exhibit and storage space, and the influence of the interviewed staff over museum collecting. The relationship of the object to the consumer can shift. This means that even as collecting institutions, some don’t actively deaccession materials, and repurpose them in educational or archival collections. Nick Merriman agrees, saying, “Acquisition often far outstrips that of disposal.”²⁰⁷ This may also be because the process takes a long time, (potentially too long,) as several respondents pointed out.

An institution’s exhibit and storage space impacts collections growth. Art-collecting institutions are aware of the realistic possibility that expanding will need to occur in the future. “At this point, the best solution is actually a major building campaign of some sort, because we

²⁰⁴ Altshuler and Sharmacharja, *A Manual for the 21st Century Art Institution*, 114.

²⁰⁵ Weil, *A Deaccession Reader*, 2.

²⁰⁶ Manager of Collections and Exhibits. "Art Gallery of Greater Victoria." Interview by author.

²⁰⁷ Merriman, *Museum Collections and Sustainability*, 21.

are past the point where Band-Aid solutions can do much good for us in [our] building in the way it exists.”²⁰⁸ Almost half of participants spoke of the importance of their 5-10 year plans.

Reputation and staff influence were the third and fourth secondary findings.

Conversations between departments are crucial, because institutional support is key. The participants that had dual titles noted their varying levels of influence on the collections growth process at their respective institutions. A collections manager summed it up when they said, “Regarding acquisitions and what is accepted, I don’t have an influence. But I do have an influence on how things are stored, cared for, and I also consult with the conservator and conservation staff on any conservation needs, etc. I am more reactionary than influential on the front end.”²⁰⁹ The reputation of an institution was also shown to be somewhat important. The interviewees held their institution in high regard, and cited their reputation both of the past, present, and future, as very important.

To understand the impact of collections growth

Three results were identified from the findings related to this research goal. They include problematic rates of collections growth, limiting acquisitions, and adhering to specific institutional timelines. The first result suggests that for art-collecting institutions in the Pacific Northwest, collections growth is perceived as a problem. “Growing the collection and shrinking the collection are intrinsically tied.”²¹⁰ All respondents spoke of this to some degree, whether implicitly or explicitly. “We are very much aware that we need more space.” But right now I’m

²⁰⁸ Manager of Collections and Exhibits. "Art Gallery of Greater Victoria." Interview by author.

²⁰⁹ Collections Manager. "Portland Art Museum." Interview by author.

²¹⁰ Curatorial Associate for Collections. "Seattle Art Museum." Interview by author.

making it work.”²¹¹ According to this research, the average amount of collections storage space that is already used is 94.3%. Museums are filling up fast, and this seems to be supported by others in the field. “We are spilling out of our designated permanent storage area; it has been a big challenge.”²¹² This is in line with Stephen Weil’s observation that “...improved museum management [has] allowed for an awareness that collections were growing at exponential rates.”²¹³ If that storage space fills up on the conservative end at 4.25% annually, then museums may be at a crucial tipping point.

The second result focuses on limiting what is being acquired to only the very best of their respective artistic styles, etc. “We are getting to capacity, in terms of storage. It does impact what we think we can take. it does play a really big role in what we think we can do. We need to start thinking about how are we going to start planning for the future.”²¹⁴ Neil, Wendy, and Phillip Kotler pointed out that, “The opportunistic nature of the collecting process makes it impossible to forecast future growth with certainty.”²¹⁵ “It’s about compromise and trying to do the best with what you’ve got.”²¹⁶

The third result is about strict institutional timelines. This, in addition to how full their storage space is, heavily influences institutional goals and relationships between departments. The institutional timelines, whether explicitly laid out or implied, are difficult to forecast beyond 5-10 years. These plans, when asked if they are sustainable, elicited varying responses. While most consider their plans to be sustainable, it is very difficult to ascertain an accurate depiction of sustainability on the ground. These plans are dependent on various things, particularly funding

²¹¹ Collections Manager and Registrar. "Frye Art Museum." Interview by author.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Weil, "Collecting Then, Collecting Today", 284.

²¹⁴ Curator of Collections and Deputy Director. "Museum of Contemporary Craft." Interview by author.

²¹⁵ Kotler, Kotler, and Kotler. *Museum Marketing and Strategy*, 210.

²¹⁶ Manager of Collections and Exhibits. "Art Gallery of Greater Victoria." Interview by author.

and institutional goals. “[Running out of space is] definitely is one of the motives behind us coming up that 10-year collection plan, and sticking to it so tightly.”²¹⁷ “Every decision has such a spider web effect. There is a whole team that makes sure decisions that are made in one part of the team are known by everybody else.”²¹⁸

To address thoughts about sustainability and how it applies to museum collections

Three results were identified for the findings related to this research goal. They include the importance of a shared definition of sustainability, the relationship of sustainability to museum collections, and the discussion and reflection of the role that collections have played historically, and continue to play in the future of the museum world.

The first result of the findings focuses in on the term “sustainability.” As noted earlier, Gro Harlem Brundtland defined sustainability as “[The] development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”²¹⁹ When respondents were asked if their thoughts of sustainability changed when presented with this definition, over half specifically said no. The others expressed some level of uncertainty, but clearly were thinking about the topic and definition. The main theme that emerged from these responses was about future generations, both of museum professionals and museum patrons. “Maybe we don’t call it sustainability; maybe we call it another term. What is best practices, or forecasting, or future thinking. I think that we may have different terms for it, but if you are trying to shape your collection, you are always contributing to it.”²²⁰ The key themes

²¹⁷ Curator of Collections. "Tacoma Art Museum." Interview by author.

²¹⁸ Curatorial Associate for Collections. "Seattle Art Museum." Interview by author.

²¹⁹ Madan, *Sustainable Museums*, 20.

²²⁰ Curator of Collections and Deputy Director. "Museum of Contemporary Craft." Interview by author.

surrounding sustainability reflect the diverse nature of the term, its historical relevance depending on its context, and the emergence of the term within the nomenclature of museology.

The second result focuses on the applicability of sustainability to museum collections. “I think [sustainability] means having the adequate funding, staffing, storage, and institutional support or focus, in order to fulfill our mission of caring for artworks, in a manner suitable with best practices, for posterity. If any of those factors diminish or disappear, then that impairs our ability to do that. We should not be growing the collection if we can’t take care of it.”²²¹ An overarching presentation of sustainability in relation to institutional functionality was clear, too. Barry and Gail Lord, and Lindsay Martin agree, saying “Museums must be sustainable in order to achieve their mission.”²²² An institution’s sustainability is the bigger picture of which collections are but a small component.

Museum professionals have an understanding of sustainability, in the context of it meaning an obligation to the objects collected. “Sustainability in terms of the collection is growing in a way that you know you can nurture in the future. It is not critical of production trends. It’s about being thoughtful about each opportunity, and seeing sort of how each object feeds off of what is already there. And then grow off that platform in the future.”²²³ A pattern in the findings demonstrates that sustainability is shown to be associated with care, according to all respondents in this research. These include physical (storage), administrative (paperwork), as well as intellectual (curatorial). This trifecta of sorts encompassed all thoughts that emerged about sustainability in relation to museum collections by the respondents. “Sustainability, I feel, is something that you can continue to have with the proper amount of time to adequately and

²²¹ Collections Manager and Registrar. "Frye Art Museum." Interview by author.

²²² Lord, Lord, and Martin. *Manual of Museum Planning*, 6.

²²³ Curatorial Associate for Collections. "Seattle Art Museum." Interview by author.

safely care for each object by giving it the attention that it deserves. Starting with the paper trail, all the way to long-term storage allowing the object to have the ability to remain safe in that situation for as long as possible.”²²⁴

The third result is based on findings from an open-ended question meant to establish themes that were not adequately addressed. The main patterns were centered on three themes: past, present, and future. The past pattern includes collections that are already in institutions, the objects that were not taken previously, and relevance of a real object and the idea of collections use. Neil Harris supports this when he said, “Great art museums do many things...[But] their major claim to authority remains their collections.”²²⁵ This theme has been traditionally a core focus of the museum sector, and now is possibly shifting.

The present theme focuses on the complicated structure of art-collecting institutions. A lot of art in storage isn’t being utilized to its full potential. Glenn D. Lowry would disagree: “...too many works of art are shown at once, which could be solved by allowing twice the space and half the amount of art.”²²⁶ Also, the desire for real objects, combined with marketplace competition and the nature of capitalism, is hard to reconcile when focusing on the future of these institutions. “Objects are central to what we do in this business. It’s easy to lose sight of that.”²²⁷ Steven Conn agreed when he said, “For some museums, collections are only secondary to their institutional mission. At others, objects are almost irrelevant to what the museum does and how it does it.”²²⁸

The future theme included the trajectory of the museum field. “Yes we are growing it [the collection] for the future, but how much of that can be shown in the future... How long can

²²⁴ Collections Manager. "Portland Art Museum." Interview by author.

²²⁵ Harris, Neil. *Capital Culture*, 219.

²²⁶ Cuno and MacGregor, *Whose Muse?*, 184.

²²⁷ Manager of Collections and Exhibits. "Art Gallery of Greater Victoria." Interview by author.

²²⁸ Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 56.

it go on? It can't go on forever."²²⁹ The Smithsonian agreed when saying, "Art museums... may also need to reconsider their internal structures to better express their priorities."²³⁰ The apparent collecting outpacing available resources, combined with structural challenges within museums is further complicated when definitions of sustainability change over time. "Those definitions of sustainability change over time. In the future we may be calling it something different."²³¹ Roy Clare summed it up well when he said, "Museums face two major challenges: how to collect sustainably, and how to remain relevant."²³² Rachel Madan may also be right by noting, "The sustainable museum of the future may operate in an entirely different way to those of today."²³³

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Conclusions:

Art-collecting institutions address collections growth by focusing on strong internal policies and procedures, adapting their space and resources to accommodate incoming collections, and acknowledging the importance of the particular objects being acquired. The growth occurring within art-collecting institutions appears to be sustainable in terms of the rates of collection, but it is too difficult to conclude that growth as fully sustainable. Staff at art-collecting institutions recognize the implication of sustainability and its importance to museum collections growth, and are cognizant of the challenges faced when applying it day-to-day.

²²⁹ Collections Manager and Registrar. "Frye Art Museum." Interview by author.

²³⁰ Smithsonian Institution, *Art Museums and the Public*, 11.

²³¹ Curator of Collections and Deputy Director. "Museum of Contemporary Craft." Interview by author.

²³² Clare, "Evolving for the 21st Century?", Museum Identity Ltd.

²³³ Madan, *Sustainable Museums*, 29.

The research goals addressed included a description of collections and collecting practices, establishing factors relating to collections growth, understanding the impact of collections growth, and thoughts about sustainability and how it applies to museum collections. The collection description and collecting practices demonstrated that these institutions have permanent collections of mission-related art and face challenges when collecting art, which include justification of artwork, space, philanthropic expectations, and medium. Factors that relate to collections growth included strong institutional policies, the nature of contemporary art, donor relations, and funding sources.

Results surrounding the understanding of the impact of collections growth included problematic rates of collections growth, limiting acquisitions, and adhering to institutional timelines. Addressing thoughts about sustainability and its application to museum collections included the importance of a shared definition of sustainability, the relationship of sustainability and museum collections, and the discussion and reflection of the role collections have played historically and continue to play in the future of the museum.

Limitations

There were two primary limitations to this study. These included the sample size and size differentials among the institutions analyzed. The most significant limitation was the sample size of seven institutions. This is limiting because it eliminates any generalization for the field. A larger sample size would have allowed for more generalizable results. The second limitation was the size differentials among the institutions analyzed, which ranged small to medium sized. This is limiting because it doesn't allow for results to be representative of a specific size of museum,

in terms of objects, staff, and budget. A narrowing to similar institutional size would have resulted in data that could be increasingly generalizable for the field.

Possibilities for Future Research

There are several possibilities for future research. One is that similar research could be conducted with other types of collecting institutions, such as history, natural history, non-contemporary art museums, specialized museums, ethnic museums, etc. A second possibility for future research is to examine institutions such as zoos, aquariums, etc. that have living collections. A third possibility would be the same type of research as conducted in this study, but on a much larger scale. This could include either a national or international focus. By including more specific, or more diverse, sample size, additional data could be gathered to assess collections growth and its sustainability within the broader museum sector.

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Appendix A: Instrument

Thesis statement:

The goal of my research is to identify how art-collecting institutions address collections growth, and if that growth is sustainable.

Research Goals:

- To establish how and to what extent art-collecting institutions address collections growth.
- To understand if collections growth in art-collecting institutions is sustainable.
- To analyze how procedures and policies at institutions affect goals stated above.

Instrument:

Section 1: How do art museums address collection growth?

1. What is the current size of your collections?
2. What is your institution's average annual percentage of collection growth?
3. What percentage of your permanent collection is on display annually?
4. How do deaccessioning processes affect collection growth at your institution?
5. Have the collecting parameters of your collection policies expanded the mission and scope of your collection?
6. Do the objects collected always fall within the mission/scope of the institution?
7. If not, how does your institution address this issue?
8. How is collection growth reflected in your institution's current policies and procedures?
9. How does your institution's exhibit and storage space impact collections growth?
10. How does your role as [position] influence the collections growth process?
11. What challenges do you face when collecting art for your institution?
12. How does the current rate of growth of collections within your institution challenge your ability to adequately *store* and *take care of* objects?
13. What are the most problematic artistic mediums in relation to collections growth?

Section 2: Is the growth of art museum collections sustainable?

14. What does "sustainability" mean to you?
15. What does sustainability mean in relation to museum collections?
16. Does your thinking about sustainability in regards to museum collections change when the definition of sustainability is presented as the development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Is so, please explain.
17. For your institution, what is an acceptable amount of space to allow for collections growth?

18. Are there any recent changes or proposed changes that have been implemented or discussed that directly affect how collections growth occurs?
19. What percent of your collections storage space is already used up?
20. How does this affect your long-term plans for the institution?
21. What happens when/if you run out of space?
22. Are you planning to increase storage space for collections growth?"
23. How do those plans consider sustainability?
24. [I'm going to read off a list of some factors that could potentially impact collections growth.] Can you tell me whether these factors impact your institution's collections growth?

Rate 1-9, with 9 being the most impactful:

- Digitization of collections
- Funding
- Shift from being focused on collections to being audience focused
- Space (used, available)
- Care of objects
- Medium (artistic)
- Curatorial influence
- Reputation of institution
- Accessibility (ADA)

25. Do you have any final thoughts about collections growth and sustainability?

Appendix B: Email

A Collections Growth and Sustainability Discussion Invitation

Dear (interviewee):

I am Andrew Walsh, a graduate student in the Museology Graduate Program at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA, and I am hoping that you will agree to participate in a research study that explores the issues of growth and sustainability of museum collections. I am particularly interested in studying institutions that collect art in the Pacific Northwest; thus, your participation would be extremely significant and beneficial to my research efforts. Additionally, collections growth within art museums has not been an area of active study in the field in recent years. Given the assumption of the growth of collections in the 21st century and the relationship of collection growth to sustainable practice, results of this research may prove helpful to museums and other collecting entities in evaluating and planning for collection growth and policy development.

This research will involve two methodologies: an in-person or phone interview of 30-60 minutes and a document review of collections related policies and procedures from participating institutions. The interview questions will touch on three main questions:

1. How does your institution address collections growth?
2. What issues do you/your institution face when collecting art?
3. Is the collections growth at art institutions sustainable?

I would be happy to send a copy of my research paper to all the participants in the study.

I will contact you shortly (or within the next week) to confirm your participation and schedule an interview appointment. Thank you very much for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Andrew Walsh
Masters of Arts Candidate - Museology
University of Washington, Seattle
(206)451-9261

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form

The Sustainability of Collections Within Art-collecting Institutions of the Pacific Northwest

University of Washington - Seattle

Researcher's Name: Andrew Walsh

Phone: (206)451-9261

Email: Anwalsh@uw.edu or andrewkhwalth@gmail.com

Thesis Advisor: Wilson O'Donnell, Associate Director of the Museology Graduate Program Phone: (206)543-4642

Email: wilsonod@uw.edu

I am asking you to participate in an interview that is part of my Master's Thesis work at the University of Washington. The purpose of this research is to identify how art museums address collections growth, and if that growth is sustainable. Your participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time. This interview will be audio recorded for my note taking only. I may use your title and name of your institution in my final paper. If I directly quote you, I will send the quote to you before publication.

If you have any questions now or in the future, you may contact me through the information on this document.

Do you have any questions? Do you agree to participate in this interview?

Signature:

Date:

Figures:

Figure 1

