

# **There and Back Again: Archivists Retracing Paths of University Teaching Collections**

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**Abstract:** The history of many colleges and universities is one of collecting. Students encountering primary sources in class sessions led by faculty may not be asked to consider the provenance of the resources being otherwise analyzed – but if we ask why not, who could? What acquisition stories do we tell, and might we explore collector-level reunification? Arising is an opportunity for archivists to join faculty in a collaborative effort to supplement the provenance information known and made accessible to students in such classes, especially if provenance data are engaged in an ancillary rather than central capacity to meet students’ research goals (i.e. objects’ historical function, use, or materiality). Teaching collections by their nature exist in a reality of distributed and decentralized custodianship, yet the complexity of that story is also that of the campus as a whole. Provenance research contributed to academic units, departments, or programs retaining physical custody offers archivists the ability to formalize the postcustodial praxis already in place outside of an institutional archives, in teaching collections.

Teaching collections are diverse in terms of key descriptive elements archivists seek: physical extent, dimensions, and condition. Expanding from examples drawn from the process of digitizing and researching some artifacts later illustrated in the 2016 publication *The Collections: The University of Texas*, a compendium of over 170 million objects and specimens said to be the largest institutional collection in the U.S., this presentation will articulate ways for archivists to improve awareness of localized object collections through the work of provenance research.

## **About the Author:**

**Sarah Buchanan** is an Assistant Professor at the School of Information Science & Learning Technologies (SISLT) at the University of Missouri. Her research and teaching examine provenance issues in archival studies, in the contexts of how we might organize, arrange, and describe data about heritage collections. Sarah is active in the Society of American Archivists and advises Mizzou’s student chapter.