Co-Editors

*Jillian Cuellar, Director of Tulane University Special Collections*

Jillian Cuellar is the director of Special Collections at Tulane University Libraries. She provides leadership and vision for the division, and oversees staff, collections, and operations. Jillian is an active member of the Society of American Archivists (SAA); most recently she served as co-chair of the 2020 Program Committee and completed seven years of service as a member of the Association of Research Libraries/SAA Mosaic Advisory Group. Jillian has focused much of her career as an archivist on finding creative ways to engage users who are new to archives and special collections, as well as exploring strategies for more inclusive approaches to collection building and for increasing diversity in the profession. She previously held positions at the University of California, Los Angeles; New York University; and Columbia University. She holds a MLIS from Pratt Institute and a BA in English from the University of Texas at Austin.

*Agnieszka Czeblakow, Head of Research Services for Tulane University Special Collections*

As the Head of Research Services at Tulane University Special Collections, Agnieszka Czeblakow provides leadership and management for research services, instruction, and outreach programs. Prior to joining Tulane, she was the Rare Books Librarian at University of Texas at San Antonio, where she was responsible for curating and promoting access to post-1600 rare book collections focusing on the history and print culture of the Mexico-Texas border regions and the culinary history of Mexico. As a first-generation, multilingual professional, she is committed to practices that center access to collections and position curators, librarians, and archivists as co-learners and research partners rather than authorities and gatekeepers. She is an active member of the Abolition in Special Collection group. She holds a PhD in Latin American History from Emory University and MLIS from University of Wisconsin.

Title

*Fill in the Gaps: New Directions in Special Collections Curatorship;*

*Radical Visions: The Future of Special Collections Curatorship;*

*Radical Visions: New Perspectives in Special Collections Curatorship;* or

*Radical Futures: The Evolving Role of Special Collections Curators*

Theme, Purpose, and Scope

Curators play a key role in determining the research direction and priorities of an archives and special collections library. A curator’s vision and strategy influence a repository’s collecting policies, its priorities for preservation and access, and the outreach initiatives it pursues. Curators are essential to cultivating a repository’s financial and material donor base, and to developing lasting relationships with dealers, booksellers, collectors, and creators. They serve as ambassadors to external communities, communicating an organization’s mission to new learners, regular patrons, and the general public. Their appraisal and selection decisions shape the historical record, thereby setting the direction for future research and knowledge creation.

Despite the significant influence curators have on archives and special collections repositories, literature that critically examines and engages with the roles and practices of special collections curators is limited. This book will study curatorship in archives and special collections research libraries in an attempt to define the curator’s role in contemporary archives and special collections libraries; examine current trends and trajectories in curatorial work; and offer both practical and theoretical guidance for professionals who inhabit or aspire to curatorial roles. In recognition of the numerous archival organizations where functional roles may be blended into one position due to limited resources, this discussion will be inclusive of those who may not hold the title “curator” or who may oversee several other repository functions in addition to curatorial work.

Given the recent uptick in curatorial positions that are newly oriented towards “community focused” collection development, that emphasize relationships with non-traditional scholars and marginalized communities, and that prioritize seeking alternative forms of memory keeping, this topic is highly pertinent to currencies in the field.

The book will open by reflecting on the development of curatorial roles into the 21st century. The second section will examine core curatorial functions in light of contemporary issues and trends. The final section will consider emerging challenges for performing curatorial responsibilities. The editors will conclude the book with thoughts on the future of curatorial work. Invited contributors will respond to questions, issues or provocations from three sections (see below) based on their expertise and experiences. To address remaining gaps in coverage, the editors anticipate an open call for contributions.

The editors strongly feel that addressing the full spectrum of curatorial work as represented by museum and gallery practitioners is beyond the scope of this project. However, the editors (we) do recognize the important insights, interventions and conversations taking place in the museum world that are relevant and applicable to special collections, particularly the topic of repatriation, which remains “but a blip on the radar in library and archive circles.” [(Contested Collections: Grappling With History and Forging Pathways for Repatriation UCLA, May 17-19, 2022](https://guides.library.ucla.edu/c.php?g=1232016&p=9016390)). As such, the book project makes space for and invites contributions from museum practitioners to engage with this particular topic of restitutions, in hopes of opening pathways to deeper engagement and conversations across our allied professions.

Estimated Format and Length

Softcover print with an accompanying digital edition. The editors will write the introduction, conclusion and the historical overview. The remainder of the book will be include three sections comprised of a thematic set of research articles, interviews, case studies, and personal perspective essays (3,000 to 5,000 words each) by individual contributing authors. The format of individual contributions will be determined in consultation with each contributing author.

Outline/Proposed Table of Contents

Introduction

Introduces the premise of the book and why it has particular resonance with contemporary conversations in our field. Poses the central questions we will address. Also addresses parameters of the discussion, i.e., what is left out of this book and why. (Written by one of the editors.)

Section: A History of Curatorial Practice

*Curatorial Antecedents* (Written by one of the editors.)

A retrospective look at how curatorial positions evolved into the late 20th century. Examines how historical trends in research and the maturation of the special collections library in research institutions shaped the core responsibilities and perception of a curator. Defines core functions and critical skills, and details how they are typically acquired or developed.

*The Evolving Role of a Curator*

Examines how we define contemporary curatorship. How have curatorial roles, responsibilities, and qualifications evolved in the early 21st century? How does one learn to become a curator, what are a curator’s core responsibilities, and what are the key skills for success? This piece could potentially be an interview or profile with one curator or a group of curators representing different areas of curation (archives, rare books and print, audiovisual, visual/photographs, community collections). Can also include an examination of positions that assume curatorial functions in addition to other responsibilities.

Section: Issues in contemporary curatorship

*The Marketplace*

Considers the curator’s relationship to the book and archives market. It offers a perspective on conducting background research on materials for sale and making informed purchase decisions; building relationships with dealers and sustaining them over time; and negotiation skills. It may also consider the ethics of market competition, setting market price expectations, as well as the ethics of who gets paid for cultural heritage materials in the context of race, class, and generational wealth.

*Donor Relationships*

How do curators engage respectfully and ethically with donors and creators? This discusses curatorial responsibilities in working with donors, including education, transparency, and accountability, as well as managing donor expectations and ensuring the ability to deliver what is promised. It may also discuss recent professional movement away from valorizing creators and how this impacts past, current, and prospective donor relations.

*Fundraising*

How do curators leverage their subject expertise and relationship building skills to advance fundraising efforts? What are the ethical and practical considerations in working with individual donors? How can curators successfully partner with senior administrators and development officers, and connect with institutional campaigns? What factors complicate these efforts and how do curators approach and overcome these challenges?

*The Curator as Ambassador*

Outreach is a core function of a curator’s role. How do curators plan and set priorities for outreach programs that enable creative engagement with a diverse range of audiences? How do curators successfully collaborate with others on these efforts? How do curators approach education on and contextualization of archives and special collections when working with materials that may be harmful, sensitive, or offensive?

*Cultivating Communities*

Considers how curators approach relationship building in a variety of contexts, including the academic community, public citizenry, marginalized communities, and building community among peers (alliances in collecting or documentation strategy). It may also invite a perspective on the challenges and opportunities of developing these relationships when one may be an “outsider” to these communities.

*Building Trust and Repairing Harm Through Community-centered Practice*

Following the foundation set in the previous essay, this discusses new theories, trends, and initiatives that curators are exploring to earn the trust of communities historically excluded from our spaces. This may include reparative practices, post-custodial work, enabling self-identity and definition, community-centered relationship building, and engaging with inherited collections responsibly and respectfully.

*Ethics of Collecting*

Examines ethical and legal considerations in negotiating material and financial gifts; intellectual property rights; cultural heritage restitution or repatriation requests; acquisition/disposal of collections containing content that is restricted, harmful or sensitive, or dubious provenance; “Operational Impact” and being able to deliver on what is promised; and considers what a code of ethics for curators might address.

Section: What is the future of curatorship?

*Reimagining Roles*

Curatorial job postings in the last five years reflect new strategic directions for many archives and special collections repositories. Increasingly, curatorial jobs are focused on documenting the lived experiences and contemporary activities of local and regional communities, particularly through a social justice lens. This will examine what it means to be a “community curator.” What skills or training does it take to be successful in these roles, and how do the responsibilities of these roles overlap or diverge from traditional curator positions? How do repositories ensure these roles are in alignment with an overall collecting strategy? How can administrators, supervisors, and colleagues support curators in these efforts to ensure their success?

*A New Kind of Curator*

As new generations of professionals assume curatorial roles, they bring different perspectives and skills. They may also be from more diverse backgrounds (racial, ethnic, class, training and education). How does this new kind of curator find community among their colleagues when they may feel like outsiders? How can they reconcile their beliefs, practices, and experiences with a profession that can be slow to accept change? What can archives and special collections practitioners learn from these non-traditional perspectives? How can curators actively influence the profession to move towards a more diverse and inclusive future?

*Breaking Tradition*

As curators increasingly seek to document and represent the histories and experiences of diverse communities, as well as reach new audiences, they are pushed to think beyond traditional forms of documentation. How do digital archives impact collection development strategies and curatorial expertise? What is the role of the curator in creating or collecting oral histories and other forms of storytelling? How are curators approaching the acquisition of materials that challenge traditional notions of provenance? What are the resource implications of acquiring non-traditional materials for an archives and special collections repository? How are curators helping to facilitate new understandings of authority, ownership, and recorded memory?

*Confronting and Combating Prestige*

Archives and special collections libraries have historically prided themselves on their exclusivity, encouraging an image of prestige, elitism, and accessibility to a privileged few. This section considers the many factors that contributed to that image (whiteness, Eurocentrism, patriarchy, social class, the academy, generational education and wealth). It examines increasing criticism of these notions, and a more recent movement in our profession towards wide accessibility, transparency, accountability, K-12 and undergraduate education, and professional training. The section invites interventions to the notion of curators as collections gatekeepers and/or its ambassadors, considering ways in which internal hierarchies among special collections staff can be and are dismantled. It will examine how organizations can actively resist the assignations of prestige and organizational power that curators have historically received by intentionally designing work environments where this power is shared and distributed among special collections workers, increasingly including students and faculty.

*New Strategies for Collection Development*

Examines what informs collecting priorities (professional, institutional, subject expertise, relationships) and considers the impact of those priorities on other aspects of the archival enterprise and librarianship (description, digitization, accessibility, instruction). Examines new methods for building collections such as distributed collection development and decentering “authority” through community/colleague involvement in collection development. Considers being comfortable with what we don’t have (not everyone wants to be documented in PWI). Considers new formats or modes of collecting in light of climate change, as well as degrowth as a collecting strategy and sustainable collection development.

*Partners within the Profession*

As institutions seek broader and more diverse representations of cultural memory, the strategic directions they set typically prompt a critical examination of how the organization’s structure and positions do or do not support these plans. Organizational restructuring may also be accompanied by the creation of new positions necessary to carry out a long-term strategic plan. Curatorial roles must be considered in tandem with new and legacy positions in an archives and special collections library. How do curators cultivate productive relationships with colleagues in other functional areas? What considerations should curators be aware of as they partner with other archivists and librarians on core work, such as setting access priorities, creating description, or engaging with creators and donors? How do colleagues navigate tensions or friction that may arise at the points where functional roles intersect? How do they collaborate with fellow curators to create a cohesive approach to collection development? How do curators work with department directors and other senior administrators to advance the larger institutional mission?

*Growing the Profession*

This chapter considers how curators may develop a strategic approach to career development. What future skillsets should curators anticipate and how can they be acquired? What skills are most challenging to develop and what are practical possibilities for growth? How can curators work with colleagues to cross-train or facilitate peer-to-peer learning?

Conclusion

Concludes by synthesizing preceding essays and offers further thoughts on a future vision for curatorship’s continuing evolution in research libraries and beyond. (Written by one of the editors.)

Appendices

Possible appendices include: examples of job descriptions, collection development policies, acquisition proposals.

Intended Audience and Potential Market

Cultural memory workers of all backgrounds and levels of experience can use this book to gain insight into the theoretical and practical strategies and considerations that govern contemporary curatorial practice, as well as gain an understanding of modern collecting’s historical antecedents. The targeted audience includes curators seeking peer-to-peer inspiration or guidance on their work; administrators who recruit, train, or oversee staff with curatorial responsibilities or who are tasked with curatorial work themselves; students, early career, or mid-career professionals who aspire to become curators or wish to incorporate curatorial work into their current roles; and any memory worker or learner who is interested in understanding what it means to be a curator in contemporary cultural heritage organizations. Faculty in Library and Information Science, Archival Studies, Museum Studies, History, or Public History programs may also wish to include this book, or chapters from it, on their syllabus. Beyond the archives and special collections field, curators in allied professions such as galleries and museums, will gain perspective on the considerations of curatorship across a broader professional landscape and perhaps find parallels and shared issues.

Prospective Value to the Archival Profession

While most core aspects of the archival enterprise and special collections profession have been defined, examined, codified, challenged, and opined upon in book-length publications, a book that comprehensively examines the curatorial role in contemporary archives and special collections repositories does not currently exist. Our field is in the midst of a remarkable shift. We seek to reimagine our structures and practices to build a more diverse and inclusive historical record. We aim to center the communities we hope to document, partner with, and welcome into our spaces. We strive to not only respond to traditional research needs, but to anticipate emerging and non-traditional research needs. Curators are central to these efforts, and as such, the role of a curator is being redefined—once seen as gatekeepers, 21st century curators are now visible ambassadors, tasked with cultivating diverse communities and diverse collections. To be successful in these endeavors, we require definitive and authoritative resources to inform our strategies. We hope this book will provide new theoretical frameworks for archivists, librarians, and administrators to consider, to inform our practices, and to inspire future visions of what we might become.

Relationship to Literature in the Field

*Monographs*

The last monograph published by the Society of American Archivists that is exclusively dedicated to the topic of curatorial work was Michael Shallcross and Christopher J. Prom’s *Appraisal and Acquisition Strategies*, 2016. Part of the *Trends in Archives Practice* series, this book focused on the practical aspects of integrating born-digital archives and manuscripts into collection development and acquisition. Published in 2005, Frank Boles’ *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts*, offers one archivist’s perspective on appraisal theory and its applied practice in the twentieth century. Intended to give guidance on this fundamental archival function and an update to Gerald Ham’s 1991 edition, this is the only other book SAA has released that focuses exclusively on collection development and appraisal. SAA has a few publications that include chapters focused on collection development, appraisal, and other curatorial considerations. This includes Christine Weideman and Mary A. Caldera’s 2019 *Archival Values*, which includes a few chapters on selection and *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*, a collection of essays edited by Randall Jimerson and published in 2000. Terry Cook’s *Controlling the Past: Documenting Society and Institutions*, 2011, dedicates the first half of the book to examining how technological changes in record creation and maintenance, as well as evolving values in memory keeping, have impacted appraisal.

The 2016 publication, *Forging the Future of Special Collections*, published by the American Libraries Association and edited by Arnold Hirshon, Robert H. Jackson, and Melissa A. Hubbard, examines several aspects of collections appraisal and acquisition with an eye towards contemporary considerations such as digital archives, donor relationships, and changing valuations of archives in special collections repositories. The 2017 book, *New Directions for Special Collections: An Anthology of Practice*, published by Libraries Unlimited and edited by Lynne M. Thomas and Beth M. Whittaker, similarly focuses on digital acquisitions, as well as privacy issues. Aaron D. Purcell’s 2015 book, *Donors and Archives: A Guidebook for Successful Programs* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) serves as a how-to guidebook to donor relations, discusses all aspects of the process of acquisition, from first contact to taking possession, includes discussion of "donor types and personalities" as well as issues that emerge while working with donors. None of these volumes, however, focus exclusively on examining the role of the curator in all its capacities, nor do they attempt to provide insight into how this role has and will continue to evolve. Moreover, this literature still positions curatorial practice as extractive and pays little attention to the power relations inherent in Western modes of acquisition and preservation of cultural heritage, especially from historically marginalized communities. More recent post custodial interventions spearheaded by the University of Texas in Austin center the “uses of digital technology in pursuit of a more collaborative approach to multinational archival work,” and are a welcome change from the traditional archiving paradigms where the control of all aspects of stewardship rests solely with archival institutions, curators, and archivists.

*Journal Articles*

A review of the last few decades of research articles published in the *American Archivist* turns up a number of articles related to appraisal and collection development strategies, though none explicitly view these topics from a curatorial perspective, nor do they specifically discuss the role of the curator. Gerald Ham’s “The Archival Edge,” a seminal article in appraisal theory, and Michelle Caswell’s more recent article, “Dusting for Fingerprints: Introducing Feminist Standpoint Appraisal,” both center their discussion on appraisal and collection development issues rather than larger considerations that comprise curatorial work. Mark Dimunation’s 2006 article in the *RBM* journal, “Red Wine and White Carpets: What We Didn’t Learn in Library School, or When the Dog and Pony Goes Bad,” briefly touches on the evolution of the rare books curatorial role in the later half of the 20th century, while pointing to the lack of educational opportunities or formal training available for those who aspire to become rare books curators--a need this proposed book aims to address. Marvin Taylor’s 2002 article in *RBM*, "I'll Be Your Mirror, Reflect What You Are": Postmodern Documentation And The Downtown New York Scene From 1975 To The Present,” discusses 20th century/contemporary collection development, particularly centered on underground cultures, but doesn’t examine the role of curators in other aspects of special collections or archives work. Itza Carbajal’s 2021 article in *JCLIS,* “ The Politics of Being an Archival Donor: Defining the Affective Relationship Between Archival Donors and Archivists,” is a welcome attempt to refocus the conversation from traditional positioning of donor relations and “donors as a means for acquiring more things” to one that examines the affective relationships between donors and archivists and calls for a reimagination of the roles and obligations of both.

*Educational Opportunities*

A review of courses available in the leading MLIS programs that feature archives and special collections concentrations show that few offer coursework in curatorship. Course offerings at Simmons, UCLA’s Information Studies program, Michigan’s Information School, and the Information School at the University of Texas at Austin include classes that focus on appraisal, collection development, data curation, and community based archives, but many of these are not specific to archival practice and none are exclusively devoted to the curatorial perspective on these topics.

Co-Sponsorship/Outside Financial Support

The editors will explore opportunities to develop a related symposium (online, in-person, or hybrid) that will serve as a forum for contributing authors to present their work and for attendees to engage in deeper examinations of this topic through discussion and/or workshops. Tulane University Libraries, where both editors are currently employed, may be able to offer financial support for this symposium.

Graphics and Illustrations

None anticipated.

Contributors

Editors will reach out to a group of potential contributors to invite participation and also solicit recommendations from our professional networks in the archives field and the rare books/special collections field. We will prioritize the following criteria in identifying contributors: early career professionals or those who have recently assumed curatorial roles or responsibilities, BIPOC professionals and those who identify with marginalized communities, and individuals with a record of innovation and provoking change. We will also consider issuing a call for contributors via standard communication channels, i.e. professional listservs and social media.

The editors have identified the following potential contributors:

* **Christine Jacobson,** Houghton Library, Harvard Assistant Curator of Modern Books & Manuscripts
* **Lizeth Ramirez**, Librarian/Archivist for Los Angeles Communities and Cultures, Bibliotecaria/Archivista para Comunidades y Culturas de Los Ángeles, UCLA Library Special Collections
* **Shannon O’Neill,** Curator for Tamiment-Wagner Collections, NYU
* **Krystal Tribbett, U**niversity of California Irvine Libraries, Curator for Orange County Regional History
* **Thuy Vo Dang, UCI,** Curator for the Southeast Asian Archive, Research Librarian for Asian American Studies
* **Maureen Cresci Callahan,** Sophia Smith Collection Archivist, Smith College
* **Shannon Supple,** Rare Books Curator, Smith College
* **Cheryl Beredo,** Curator of the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
* **Angel Diaz,** University of California, Santa Barbara Library, Curator, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives
* **Heather Wolfe,** Folger Shakespeare Library Curator of Manuscripts and Associate Librarian for Audience Development
* **Lisa Darms**, senior archivist for NYU's Fales Library & Special Collections from 2009 to 2016; founder and curator of the Fales Riot Grrrl Collection
* **L’ae’l Hughes-Watkins**, University Archivist, University of Maryland
* **Kelly Wooten,** Research Services and Collection Development Librarian, Sallie Bingham Center, Duke University
* **Clint Fluker,** Emory University, Curator of African American Collections (speculative Black fiction, comix )
* **Juli McLoone,** Special Collections Research Center, University of Michigan Library, Curator Children’s Literature Collection, the Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive, the Hubbard Collection of Imaginary Voyages, literary and theater archival collections, and books published after 1700.
* **Molly Schwartzburg,** Curator, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library
* **Julie Grob,** Coordinator for Instruction - Special Collections, Houston Hip Hop Research Collection and the Rare Books Collections.
* **Janet Weaver,** Assistant Curator, Iowa Women's Archives
* **Meredith Evans,** Director, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum in Atlanta
* **Lynne M. Thomas** , Juanita J. and Robert E. Simpson Rare Book & Manuscript Professor ofThe Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
* **Ayshea Khan**, Asian Pacific American Community Archivist, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library
* **Martin Tsang**, Cuban Heritage Collection Librarian and Curator of Latin American Collections, University of Miami Libraries
* **Rebecca Baumann,** Head of Public Services and Associate Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts,University of Indiana, Bloomington
* **Eira Tansey**, Digital Archivist/Records Manager, University of Cincinnati, OH
* **Jesse R. Erickson**, Astor Curator and Department Head, Printed Books and Bindings, Morgan Library
* **Joyce Gabiola**, Head Archivist, Lambda Archives
* **Yusef Omowale**, Library Director, Southern California Library
* **Ndubuisi C. Ezeluomba**, Françoise Billion Richardson Curator of African Art, New Orleans Museum of Art
* **José Adrián Barragán-Álvarez**, Curator of Latin Americana or Teresa Salazar
* **Camille Callison** (Tahltan Nation), University Librarian, University of the Fraser Valley; Co-Lead, National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance
* **Michal Bušek**, Jewish Studies researcher, Jewish Museum in Prague
* **Brian Carpenter,** Curator of Native American Materials, American Philosophical Society

Anticipated Schedule, 24 months

Months 1-3:

* Contact potential contributors to solicit abstracts; solicit abstracts via a general call

Months 4-5:

* Review submitted abstracts; make selections; solicit more contributors if needed; finalize contributors and their assignments

Months 6-8:

* Contributors draft essays; editors check in and/or offer support and guidance

Months 9-11:

* Receive first drafts from contributors; review drafts; provide edits; return to contributors

Months 12-13:

* Contributors revise essays based on feedback; editors check in and/or offer support and guidance

Months 14-16:

* Receive second drafts from contributors; review, provide edits, and return to contributors for final review
* Editors draft introduction and conclusion;

Months 17-19:

* Receive final drafts from contributors
* Editors review each other’s introduction and conclusion first drafts, provide edits, and return to each other

Months 20-24:

* Editors trade second drafts of introduction and conclusion for editing; editors finalize drafts of introduction and conclusion
* Planning and implementation of symposium to coincide with publication of the volume

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