

## HOW DO WE TRAIN PROFESSIONALS FOR 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY MUSEUMS?

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**Розглянуто теоретичні та практичні підходи до підготовки музейних працівників в контексті сучасних вимог.**

What is a museum worker?

There has never been a clear consensus on the best way to train museum professionals nor even a clear definition of what a museum worker is or how we define the term, here in Ukraine or elsewhere. Some believe a subject specialty – archaeology, biology, art history – is more important than a museum studies degree. And for most Ukrainian museum workers, that has been the path to their jobs. Others, both inside and outside of museums, insist that on-the-job training is the only instruction that matters. Still others think that non-profit management – budgeting, strategic planning, donor cultivation for instance, – is as crucial as nuts-and-bolts museum skills.

In recent years, museum professional development has begun to emerge in Ukraine. The MATRA project from the Netherlands, almost a decade ago, trained educators and directors, and in the education realm, at least, continues to pay results. Programs supported by the United States and Europe provide additional opportunities for professional learning. But the question still remains – here and elsewhere – what is needed to work in a museum?

In my book, *Creativity with Museum Practice*, (Left Coast Press, 2013) co-authored with Rainey Tisdale, we make a passionate case for the value of creative practice in the museum field and identified a number of ways that museum studies programs could enhance their students' creative practice. Teaching students to think creatively – defined for us as problem-solving–will enable them to tackle a host of challenges when working in museums and help them adapt to a continuously changing cultural landscape in Ukraine. From our book, here are just a few ways in which Museum studies programs could expand their creative focus into the existing curriculum:

- Adopt a more imaginative approach to course design and assignments to model creativity to students (museum studies professors: you should have a creative practice of your own). This requires moving beyond the traditional classroom techniques of Ukrainian universities.

- Encourage open-ended, divergent thinking, not one right answer including the development of a learning environment where students actively participate in developing a class's creative culture.

- Set an expectation that students will debrief, evaluate, and reflect on their own work as well as other students' work. Make that debrief and evaluation a part of an iterative process of work and study.

- Ensure that students leave with a toolkit of creative practices that they can put to use in any museum setting.

Over the past year, my thinking about museum studies programs has continued to deepen, raising as many questions as answers. In spring, 2015 I taught an online course, Museums and Community Engagement for Johns Hopkins Museum Studies Program; last fall I participated in a standing-room-only session at the New England Museum Associations conference about the value of museum studies programs, and for the past month, I've been working here at L'viv Polytechnical University considering what a museum studies program in Ukraine needs to train new museum professionals who can look forward to work in museums of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – not just in Ukraine, but in Europe and around the world. But we must first consider – what will those jobs look like?

In 2013, Elizabeth Merritt of the Center for the Future of Museums of the American Alliance of Museums, wrote about museum jobs that didn't exist ten years before: Director of Web and New Media; Director of Community Engagement; Director of Audience and Civic Engagement; Chief Curiosity Officer, Manager of Digital Strategies, Director of Citizen Science. ("Museum Jobs that Didn't Exist in 2003," Center for the Future of Museums Blog, accessed May 31, 2015 <http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/museum-jobs-that-didnt-exist-in-2003.html>) Those director-level jobs all have staff with similar job titles reporting to them. Today in Ukraine there are also now jobs that are not new to the United States, but new to Ukraine: Director of External Affairs,

Vice President for Marketing, and Visitor Services Manager to name just a few.

All of these positions require a combination of two primary kinds of knowledge.

The first knowledge realm is technology; or more accurately, the skills to effectively use technology. The museum world, like the rest of our world, now relies deeply on technology: to do research, to connect with colleagues, to learn about the rest of the world. This means that museum students have to be up-to-date, but also that museum studies faculty must also be up-to-date in skills and knowledge. At the very least, faculty must be able to scan the web for resources, to create connections with colleagues, and to stay current with our changing field. Our students need to learn the skills of managing big data and making it accessible to the public. They need to learn ways to use technologies like gaming and geo-location to engage our visitors and enhance learning, and they need to understand the importance of social media and the many different platforms at hand. Students—and faculty-- need to understand that this field's evolution never stops. We must all commit to being life-long learners.

The second type of knowledge coalesces around what are often called soft skills, those skills about dealing with people: the ability to communicate, to manage people, to be a leader and to build social capital with your colleagues and your community. These are in contrast to hard skills, which might be anything from basic plumbing to, in our field, how to catalog an object.

It's clear that some of Ukraine's most talented museum professionals have these soft skills in abundance and they know their importance for the future of the field. In preparing this paper, I asked colleagues here what future museum professionals needed. Here's a bit of what they said:

- "Critical thinking and writing skills"
- "A very open mind"
- "For the next generation of museum staff it is a combination of strong theoretical (thinking) ability and good communication skills, frequently dealing with new devices, open to innovation, and the focus of the interdisciplinary essence of the museum."
- "How to ask questions"

How can Ukrainian museum studies programs help students develop soft skills? A few, far from comprehensive suggestions:

- Redesign the curriculum to provide an emphasis on the future rather than the past
- Ensure that practice has the same weight as theory in classroom learning. Create new partnerships with museums, including the development of internship programs.
- Encourage, if not require, faculty to improve their own skills and knowledge in both technology and soft skills; teach and model engagement and teamwork
- Develop projects that facilitate collaboration and teamwork
- Take the lead in translating vital and relevant museum material into Ukrainian
- Understand that leadership does not necessarily reside only in the director's office, working to develop leadership skills in everyone.
- Embrace the uncertain future.

Everyone can change our field. Here's a few suggestions for those of you who are students:

- Take charge of your own learning. Read widely. To start, begin with following the Ukrainian Center for Museum Development on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ucrms?fref=nf>) or follow me on Twitter (lindabnorris) or on my own blog, The Uncataloged Museum ([www.uncatalogedmuseum.blogspot.com](http://www.uncatalogedmuseum.blogspot.com)). Each of these will lead you to more and more information.
- Ask questions – and then ask more questions.
- Gain practice experience through internships and volunteer work. Many museums will welcome your help.
- Learn how to work collaborative as a team. Ask your faculty for team projects as coursework.
- Don't be afraid of risk and failure, which are both part of the creative learning process.

When I first came to Ukraine in 2009 I remember finding only a very few bright spots in the museum landscape. But now I look around me and I although still see much work to do (just as there is everywhere) in terms of how we train museum workers and how we deeply engage our communities, I also regularly see and hear about exciting changes in Ukrainian museums led by creative museum workers at all levels in museums. Museum studies programs have an opportunity now – right now – to make the shift from training workers from the past to training workers for the future. It is not an opportunity to waste.