

Draft Proposal to Establish  
The Center for Material Culture Studies

## I. Mission

The ways in which people interact with the objects in their daily lives forms the basis of the study of material culture. The mission of the Center for Material Culture Studies at the Ohio State University focuses on the interdisciplinary study of human mediated objects and the breadth of their cultural meanings. The center will provide a forum for inquiry and research centered on material culture and serve as an umbrella organization for the many diverse and disparate collections held across the university. The Center for Material Culture Studies (CMCS) will foster the creation of new knowledge by increasing the visibility, accessibility, and use of the collections by the faculty, professional staff and students as well as by allied organizations and the public.

### A. The center and the strategic plan

Material Culture studies bring together many disciplines. The center will be in a unique position to synergistically integrate the expertise of Ohio State's faculty and professional staff with the resources of its archives and collections and to extend these to students and scholars on campus and in the larger community.

The Center for Material Culture Studies will map directly onto a number of the OSU Strategic Plan initiatives. Critical and creative thinking are central to Material Culture studies, as researchers and students examine objects in their cultural context as it changes through time and consider all their multi-dimensional layers of meaning (influences, referentiality, marketing and propagandistic uses, psychological and sociological functions, etc.). Material Culture studies demand integrated knowledge, which is highly important for decision-making (#4 Decision Sciences and Human Behavior Change). Scholars will have the opportunity to explore the cognitive process of material object acquisition, i.e. collecting.

In keeping with the university's commitment to undergraduate programs (#5 Enhancing the Undergraduate Learning Experience) the CMCS will work with participating units to develop an undergraduate minor in Material Culture Studies, building on the momentum of the Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Material Culture which is already in place (section VI.D). The Center would encourage research projects (e.g. for the Denman) including formal mentoring of undergraduate research and experience in the affiliated collections and archives. There is also the possibility of engaging students with research experiences abroad (#9 Internationalizing the Arts and Sciences Curriculum and Programs). For example, the Department of Theatre already has programs in London and the Czech Republic with material culture components; French and Italian and Spanish and Portuguese teach courses in foreign languages that focus on fashion and culture; and the Historic Costume & Textiles Collection is in the planning phase of a program for OSU's American Culture Program in Wuhan.

The initial impetus for the center came from faculty and professional staff researching the history of fashion and dress in the Arts and Humanities, in Consumer Sciences (Fashion and Retail, Textiles and Clothing), and utilizing the Historic Costume & Textiles Collection. Given Columbus' strength in retail, one outcome we would seek would be to interest members of the community in programming related to fashion, retail, design, and even antiques evaluation (See #7, Integrated Arts and Enterprise Initiatives). Styles of the past have long alighted design innovation and technological innovation; the CMCS is foreseen as a seed for creativity. History has great insights to offer those interested in style, construction, materials, and habits of consumption; the CMCS will provide avenues for the multidisciplinary study of human behavior. Research in material culture includes examination and conservation of objects, as well as understanding their production and use by people; the CMCS will consider the material science of objects. Through University Communications, community members will also be invited to lectures, conferences, and

events, thereby expanding our outreach even as we collaborate with allied organizations in the conduct of material culture research. We also foresee developing an interdisciplinary course focused on appropriate professional and business skills to enable effective careers related to material culture, with advice and perhaps guest lectures from retail, design, museums, theatre and other related professions.

The Material Culture rubric extends to all objects worked by human artifice, and the environments in which they are employed. This ties the proposed Center to such initiatives as Environments, Energy, and Sustainability (#6). Material Culture offers evidence of human environments in the past, and their successes and failures at reuse and sustainability. Understanding the condition of an object can aid in understanding the pathways of long term degradation or preservation of materials. For the Biological, Psychological, and Social Pathways to Health and Wellbeing (#1) initiative, our affiliated collections and faculty (such as the Medical Heritage Center in the Special Collections area of the OSU Health Sciences Library) offer possibilities for exploring material culture objects and practices in medical environments. There are already interdisciplinary efforts to advance creative workforce initiatives and social safety nets for multiple populations, such as the Theatre department collaboration with OSU Medical Center on senior theatre (TRI holds several senior theatre collections).

With regard to the STEM initiative (#10 Literacy STEM and Research Interpretation), we would raise our collective voice urging that the Arts be included and the acronym changed to STEAM. We will provide support for material culture literacy related courses, such as AE 1600 Art and Music, perhaps integrated with the College of Education and Human Ecology's focus on literacy. The Center would promote interdisciplinary research on issues of art and cultural literacy, pedagogy, and critical thinking in conjunction with other units in the university.

#### B. The interdisciplinary nature of the center

Asking questions about how people interact with the objects in their daily lives across cultures and time is an activity that forces scholars to work beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Disciplines train us in sets of skills, such as chemical analysis, archeological excavation and preservation, production techniques, and analysis of language, documents, and images. However, a scholar examining historical fashion, for instance, must venture into realms such as History of Art seeking images and representations of people in clothing, as well methods for interpreting those images; into History, to understand styles in their economic, political, and international trade contexts; into philology and lexicography, to seek out what fashionable terms for garments meant at certain moments in time and how these words changed as fashions changed; into foreign languages, to work with primary source accounts of garment descriptions and how people felt about clothing trends and study how new styles were imported across national boundaries; into social and behavioral sciences such as sociology, anthropology, and consumer sciences for theories to interpret how consumption works in societies; into archeology, chemistry, and museum collections, to view, analyze, conserve, and compare actual objects; and into material sciences for technical expertise on the chemistry of fibers, and dyes, and to analyze object components such as garment patterning, cut, and construction. It is difficult for a single scholar to master multiple disciplines in their graduate training, or even in a lifetime. Collaboration is imperative. Furthermore, it is deeply enriching.

A growing number of scholars at Ohio State are doing such work, on topics such as historical fashion and dress, cuisine, medicine, history of the book, and media studies. Advances in women's studies of the past several decades have encouraged exploration into the lives of groups rarely represented in traditional histories, which chronicled the deeds of rulers and armies but not women, children, or the lower classes. Material culture can often shed light on these groups left obscure by many traditional sources. Where once clothing, food, ceramics, furniture, or tools were considered unworthy or frivolous topics, it is now recognized that they can contribute a great deal to our understanding of cultures, economics, and human behavior. Studying material culture can likewise inspire the artists, artisans, and designers of today and tomorrow.

We envision the Center for Material Culture Studies as a place where outreach to institutions beyond the university would easily occur. There are many institutions and professionals in Columbus and throughout Ohio and the Midwest with similar interests in material culture. They include art museums, historical societies, house museums, professional organizations, as well as collectors and dealers in artifacts. An alliance with the CMCS would allow them to engage with the university and each other on projects that would benefit everyone. The creation of a Center for Material Culture Studies would bring faculty, students, and members of the community together to collaborate, share expertise, enhance discourse and create new knowledge.

### **C. The goals of the center that cannot be met within existing units**

The Center for Material Culture Studies is by design meant to serve as a contextual bridge across existing academic units. It is not meant to replace or replicate an existing unit; rather it seeks to enrich the holdings of the many diverse and disparate collections held across the university by providing a forum for inquiry and research. The Center for Material Culture Studies will encourage research and intellectual discourse by:

- Serving as an umbrella organization to link OSU collections and areas of expertise of faculty and professional staff across the university.
- Increasing accessibility of the collections to the faculty, professional staff and students of the university as well as to the larger community of allied organizations.
- Developing partnerships locally, nationally, and globally, including with museums, historical societies as well as professional organizations.
- Planning thematic exhibitions and hosting symposia focused on emerging issues in material culture research e.g. learning from objects, cultural literacy.
- Offering a new way to link academic coursework in an interdisciplinary framework leading to an undergraduate minor and interconnected Master's and PhD programs.

## **II. Faculty**

### **A. The criteria for selecting the center's faculty membership**

A core group began plans for the center and created the proposal. The concept of the center was advertised broadly through email lists on campus. The faculty membership of the center will be inclusive of all who want to participate and express an interest in material culture.

### **B. Faculty and professional staff expressing interest in associating with the center**

- Harry Campbell, Conservator, OSU libraries
- Nena Couch, Curator, The Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute
- Patricia Cunningham, Fashion history and Textile history, Consumer Sciences
- Clayton Funk, Art Education
- Rebecca Haidt, Spanish and Portuguese
- Rebecca Harvey, Art
- Sarah-Grace Heller, French and Italian,
- Kathryn Jakes, Textile and Fiber Science, Consumer Sciences
- Myroslava Mudrak, Art History
- Margaret Newell, History
- Andrew Shelton, Art History
- Deborah Smith-Shank, Art Education
- Gayle Strege, Curator, Historic Costume & Textiles collection

- Jenny Robb, Curator, The Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum
- Nancy Rudd, Cultural Use of Dress, Consumer Sciences

### C. Students and Staff

The Center for Material Cultural Studies will involve and engage staff and students in multiple ways. Several of the special collections of material cultural artifacts on campus are managed and preserved by professional staff, and as a result are supported and will continue to be supported by their individual units. Administrative staff will be needed to coordinate tasks including but not limited to preparation and distribution of event announcements and communications with center members, event coordination, document preparation, and support in financial monitoring. These duties would be split between a part-time civil service position and a Graduate Administrative Assistant who could be supported by a student fellowship shared by some of the partnering departments in the center. In future development activities endowment funds will provide support as well as grants funds.

Students will have opportunities to engage with the material culture special collections through internship and volunteer opportunities. Student volunteers will also assist with logistics during symposia and lectures, which will be available for participation from the entire campus and off-campus communities.

Increasing use of the collections held in Ohio State is anticipated as the Center sponsors symposia describing the many ways in which objects can be used to enhance knowledge. Courses will be enhanced or new courses will be developed which will focus on material culture; the graduate interdisciplinary specialization in Material Culture will be strengthened. Graduate students may propose a lecture series or event that complements the center's symposium series, perhaps to be offered in years alternating with the center's symposia. The center will serve as a liaison for internships with on and off campus groups. Student-generated exhibition opportunities, both physical and virtual, are also foreseen as part of this center.

Finally, the broad community of university staff will be welcomed to become involved in the center through participation in the lecture series and activities.

## III. Administration

### A. The name of the director or interim director of the center, TBD

### B. The responsibilities of the center director

The responsibilities of the center director will include:

- Overall administrative responsibility for the center.
- Lead strategic planning activities, and provide vision for the guidance of the center.
- Monitor and maintain the sustained growth of the center.
- Administer funds.
- Conduct annual evaluation of the accomplishments of the center and its members
- Prepare and present an annual report documenting the achievements of the center for review by the oversight committee, and the governing board of deans, as well as the Office of Academic affairs.
- Call meetings, set meeting agendas
- Meet quarterly with the oversight committee
- Represent the Center in development activities on campus and in the community
- Supervise the administrative assistant.
- Write proposals for support for initiatives of the center, along with members of appropriate subcommittees.

- Supervise communications efforts to inform faculty, students and the community about the center and to publicize events of the center.

#### C. Oversight committee

The oversight committee will be comprised of one representative from each of the units encompassed within the center. This member will serve as the liaison between their unit and the center.

#### D. Reporting

The Center for Material Culture Studies will be administered by a director who shall report to a governing board of deans representing the scope of the units encompassed by the center.

#### E. Patterns of Administration

The Center for Material Culture Studies Patterns of Administration document will include:

- Mission and Vision of the Center
- Center Director
  - Appointment
  - Responsibilities
- The Oversight Committee
  - Selection of members. At least two thirds of the members of the oversight committee will be regular faculty from academic units involved in the center. Members are nominated by the committee and the director and serve a 3 year term
  - Responsibilities. The committee serves as the primary visioning body for the center. The center director will consult with the oversight committee on a quarterly basis. Aid in the preparation of the annual reports.
- Subcommittees
  - Symposium planning committee
  - Undergraduate and graduate student program coordination committee
  - Lecture series planning committee
  - Communications committee
- Review process
  - Annual report to deans
  - OAA review 2 years after inception and every 4 years thereafter

#### IV. Budget/Funding

A separate fiscal unit shall be established and maintained in the operation of the Center for Material Culture Studies.

- A. Budget for first year of operation (2013-2014)
  - 1. Staff
    - a) Director, part time stipend
    - b) Graduate administrative associate, part time stipend
  - 2. Symposium costs
    - a) Visiting speaker, ~\$1600 to include travel, lodging, dinner with faculty, lunch with student, honorarium
    - b) Advertising, room reservation, breaks, other arrangements for attendees
  - 3. Newsletter and promotional materials
    - a) Glossy booklets, digital copies to other collections, museums, antiques dealers. Advertise events, use as development tool, highlight the collections
    - b) Website development, use RSS
  - 4. Office start-up costs
    - a) Computer, phone service, letter head, business cards
- B. Funding sources and one-time and recurring costs.
  - 1. University central funds, deans and chairs of represented units to provide support for first symposium (autumn 2013). Humanities Institute support for the working group for the CMCS received for 2012-2014.
- C. Existing or new equipment, space, and facilities needed to establish the center.
  - 1. Existing space, equipment available.
    - a) Display and promotion: Urban Arts Space, Snowden Gallery of the Historic Costume & Textiles Collection, Gallery in the Thompson Library.
  - 2. Space, equipment needed.
    - a) Office space for administrative assistant.
    - b) Support for computer and other office furnishings.
- D. Sustainability of the center—possibilities for external funding, and details of related funding proposal submissions.
  - 1. Resources for the center will be derived from
    - a) Cross department course offerings
    - b) Grant proposals including Ohio Humanities Council, Limited Brands Foundation, Nationwide.

#### V. Evaluative Criteria and Benchmarks

Some of the specific criteria and benchmarks against which the center will be measured include:

- Achievements which propel the center into an internationally recognized center for research
- Number of active faculty and professional staff members
- Publications and presentations of members
- Grants and awards achieved, grants activity.
- Partnerships created within and beyond the university
- Commercialization potential
- Number of active student members, student activities, research, presentations, publications
- Course enrollment, involvement with student minor and interdisciplinary specialization activities

- Outreach activities, including display of objects in Urban Arts Space, publicity
- Attendance at lectures and symposia, student attendance, public attendance. Publicity stemming from lectures and symposia

## VI. Supporting Materials

- A. Letters of support from relevant department chairs, school directors, deans, and vice presidents from within the university.
- B. Letters of support from interested parties outside the university.

The Center for Material Culture Studies will be broadly promoted through the avenues of professional organizations including The Costume Society, The Popular Culture Society, the American Institute for Conservation, and the United States Institute for Theatre Technology.

### C. Entities with similar emphases at other universities.

The most notable material culture program elsewhere is the one at the University of Delaware. It however, is primarily focused on the decorative arts. Other schools that have material culture programs focus on studies prior to the 20th century or have a narrow focus, e.g. 18th c. or American Culture. The Center for Material Culture Studies at the Ohio State University is unique in the following ways.

- Material culture is defined broadly and is not limited chronologically or geographically.
- CMCS is inclusive of faculty and professional staff across the campus.
- CMCS encompasses the diverse and numerous collections housed within the university.
- CMCS will engage organizations in Columbus, across the state, and throughout the surrounding region including art museums, historical societies, house museums, businesses (collectors and dealers of artifacts) and professional organizations.
- There is a Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Material Culture already in place at the university (section VI.D).

### D. Summary of the Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Material Culture

The Interdisciplinary Specialization in the Analysis of Material Culture focuses on the examination and description of objects through aesthetic, historical, cultural, physical, and chemical perspectives. Artifact research has become central to scholarship in a number of fields – from art history to architecture, from archaeology to popular culture studies. In order to carry out such studies, it is imperative that scholars have a complete understanding of how and why these artifacts were made, how and why they were consumed, and the meaning of these objects to the people that produced and used them. One of the essential keys to understanding the meaning of an object, whether it is classified as a work of art, a cultural artifact, an ethnographic object or an item of everyday life, is the description and identification of its component parts. The Interdisciplinary Specialization in the Analysis of Material Culture will provide a multifaceted view of the object including both the processes of description and identification and of the use of interpretation of data as approached by scholars in differing fields.

The Interdisciplinary Specialization in the Analysis of Material Culture provides students with a broad range of experience in the techniques and theories for the examination of materials and subsequent application of the

data derived there from. Through the combined resources of multiple disciplines in different departments, students will learn to examine objects through aesthetic, historical, cultural, physical and chemical perspectives.

**E. Potential topics for symposia, workshops, and exhibitions**

- Learning from Objects, Teaching with Objects, Listening to Objects.
- How objects help us learn how people have lived and how we live better
- Elusive histories, stories of objects helps cultures survive, sustainable cultures
- Heritage education, cultural literacy
- Care of collections, handling materials, collecting opportunities and responsibilities, ethics of collecting and collections care

Draft