January 25, 2016

Dear David and Steven,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next Institutional Strategic Plan through the “Institutional Strategic Planning Process”. The town hall process and the opportunity to write to you directly gives me great hope and excitement for the next phase in the University of Alberta and I am pleased to offer ideas and feedback on behalf of the University of Alberta Museums.

Toward this end, we convened three lunch-hour focus groups in mid-December with faculty curators, academic and non-academic support staff, and staff from my unit to consider selected questions from the Discussion Paper. In this short time we identified a number of opportunities and challenges while considering how the strengths of the UA Museums contribute to what makes the University of Alberta a great university.

As background information to this submission, I am providing a bit of context for the University of Alberta Museums model – which is unique among universities, and based on feedback and development from our university museums community over many years. We are always learning from each other and attempting to improve our model as the University grows and changes.

Administratively, the UA Museums is a network of 29 museum collections located in the departments and faculties where they are integral to the unit’s academic mission. They are united under the University of Alberta Museums and Collections UAPPOL Policy which ensures standard practices and compliance with local, national and international regulations, granting agency requirements, legislation, etc. Each collection has a designated curator who is an academic staff member and whose research and teaching are naturally associated with museum objects (e.g., Michael Caldwell is a curator in vertebrate paleontology; Andrew Derocher is a curator in mammalogy; Chris Herd is a curator in meteorites; and Pamela Mayne Corrie is a curator in anthropology) and they are guided by their units’ mandates. A few collections also have support staff members that are equally expert in their fields. Museums and Collections Services facilitates/stewards the model and is responsible for the University’s central art collections, which are accessed by multiple units and faculties. This is accomplished with our small group of dedicated experts in curation, museum theory, documentation, practice and standards.

The UA Museums, including Museums and Collections Services, includes leaders in many fields who currently and in the future can contribute to exploring and addressing local and world issues and act as mentors to emerging leaders and the community at large. Our leaders are already engaged in research, teaching and community engagement and service not only with the U of A but with industry, government, k-12 partners, citizen scientists, other museums and cultural groups, etc. We all are
passionate about the University of Alberta and want to contribute to its future within society and for the public good.

We hope that our comments in the attached summary of our December 2015 focus-group meetings will help to contribute to the strategic planning process. We look forward to further discussions with both of you and we would be delighted if you have time in the coming weeks or months to meet with our UA Museums group.
University of Alberta Museums Curators Committee Meeting
Focus Group Meetings
December 11, 15, and 17, 2015

Purpose:

- To review the UA Museums current strengths and future needs within the context of relevant questions posed in the U Alberta institutional strategic planning process/discussion paper.

Attendees:

- Thirty-three UA Museums faculty and staff attended focus group sessions, including 15 Faculty/Curators; 2 FSO/Curators; 4 APO/Curator/ Administrative/Technical; and 12 NASA/Technical/Administrative/Communications

Summary of Comments on Specific Questions from the Institutional Strategic Plan Process:

(Questions posed to focus groups are in italics; bold regular text summarizes key themes; regular text indicates summary of participant comments.)

- **What areas of strength differentiate the University of Alberta (“Museums”) from other universities (and “other museums”)?**
  - **Diversity of Museum Collections Support Academic Mission (Strategic/Key)**
    - Diversity in terms of strength/range/size/excellence/topics of collections not found elsewhere – especially in Biological Sciences (e.g., Paleobotany, Botany); Meteorites; Art Collection; Classics/Antiquities; Pathology
    - Strength in calibre of faculty working with UA Museum collections and in the topics that they research relevant to global issues – macro and micro (e.g., climate change; biodiversity; bumblebees as endangered species; forensic science)
    - Long tradition of involving community in the development of collections, academic disciplines and connected research (e.g., citizen science; volunteers and donors)
    - Deep history with many UA Museum collections that house irreplaceable cultural and scientific collections
    - Northern location of university and northern collecting strengths in some collections
  - **Active Use of Museum Collections in Academic Mission (Research/Teaching)**
    - Best in exploring biodiversity in Canada – both from a research perspective and in active participation/collaboration in the most important biodiversity information networks
    - Taxon-based natural history collections active, especially for teaching
    - On-line access fits research and teaching use both inside and outside University
- Used in teaching both undergraduate and graduate students
- Students actually get to look at and study collections across diverse disciplines
- Direct access to collections and data for off-campus community (researchers; public; environmental and government consultants; students/schools) better than most universities
- Some UA Museum collections largest/strongest in Canada – therefore U Alberta offers unique courses/experiences (Meteorites; Paleontology; Paleobotany; Mactaggart Art Collection, Print Study Centre)
- DNA studies produce physical remnants of specimens
- UA Museums Galleries at Enterprise Square has been successful in engaging diverse communities in accessing UA Museums experts and new knowledge/discoveries (e.g., meteorites, dinosaurs, art, etc.). Need to engage more students in this initiative
  - **UA Museums Model and Museums and Collections Services Unique/Effective**
    - Collaborative model of 29 collections across 4 faculties/and 12 departments with MACS coordinating/providing museum expertise is effective
    - Productive and successful model of embeddedness in both academic and museum administrative areas
    - Model and MACS links/unites together different disciplines/collections across campus – which is unique
    - UA Museums Model and MACS has a visibility that other universities have not caught up with yet
    - University-wide Museums UAPPOL policy – supporting museums across faculties
    - UA Museums Model brings contemporary and ongoing research to public programs and community engagement which cannot be easily achieved by different yet complimentary museums/institutions (e.g., Royal Alberta Museum)
    - UA Museums role is strongest in research and with on campus museums as educational spaces for university level undergraduates

- **What kind of support do we need for these areas of excellence?**
  - **Purpose Built Facilities to Facilitate Programs**
    - Need to revisit/update inter/multidisciplinary plan, approved in 2008, to build Curatorial Research Facility for all UA Museums
    - Still strong need for the Curatorial Research Facility to support purpose/uniqueness/strengths of UA Museums
    - The UA Museums Galleries at Enterprise Square programs need University support to continue. Short-term funding would provide leverage for grants, sponsorships, donors, etc. This program has shown that it is an excellent short-term solution to engage communities, build support and to fulfill access roles of the UA Museums and the University.
• Recognize UA Museums Galleries at Enterprise Square programs and exhibitions as a lens for understanding the importance of research and its benefits to society
• Displays and exhibitions are important, however, collections accessible storage/research areas should also be a priority
• Facilities need to be more than a warehouse – need to be research focussed
• UA Museums need close proximity to research and academic departments
• Off-site storage (e.g., South Campus) is not a solution for collections used daily by faculty and students in labs, classes, research projects, etc. (potentially up to 5,000 students annually)
• Some off-site storage for selected collections may be appropriate (e.g., mineralogy) although the Butler Building is not the solution
• UA Museums model is unique in uniting university museums across campus and disciplines. However, unlike other universities with multidisciplinary museum collections we have no purpose built spaces (as does e.g., Harvard, Princeton). The model and a purpose built facility(ies) would truly position the University of Alberta as a leader in this area.
• UA Museums needs facility as a focal point to raise profile

o Human Resources/ Basic Funding to Reach Vision
  • Need sustainable funding from the U of Alberta to support basic functions (e.g., basic maintenance and proper storage of objects; cataloguing/processing) rather than relying on ad hoc resources (e.g., research grants; temporary use of vacant positions; museum grants; etc.). Sustainable funding could then be used by UA Museums as leverage to obtain external funding sources and donations for strategic/creative/innovative programs.
  • Need support to replace retiring faculty and staff
  • Community Engagement a priority – need staff and funds
  • Recognition of museum expertise/duties across all positions from Faculty; FSO; APO and NASA (e.g., Faculty appointed as volunteer curators with little or no FEC recognition; Museum APO’s not recognized for museum expertise – only admin functions)

o Inter/Multidisciplinary Museum Training to Train/Engage New Leaders
  • Interdisciplinary museums training program proposed in 2008 is still seen as a need by UA Museums faculty, staff and students.
  • Support funds for graduate TA/RA related to UA Museums to assist collections with basic functions and to address student need for hands-on-training

o Coordinated UA Museums Volunteer Program to Engage and Train Students and Community
  • Many students and community members want to volunteer with the UA Museums to gain training and to help out. Funds needed to develop a UA Museums-wide volunteer coordination and programs

o Support Community Engagement as Critical to our Public Trust Mandate
- Raise profile of UA Museums with more stories related to UA Museums through social media
- Open collections to University community and others – through open house programs, etc.
- Bring back school programs – cancelled due to lack of resources/grants
- Communication about UA Museums needs meaningful venue to engage and inform various communities about work done by UA Museums and the University

  o **Support for Fundamental Collections Management and Cataloguing**
    - Data basing/cataloguing of specimens/objects needs University support and needs to be accelerated to support teaching, research, and fiduciary responsibilities
    - Support for UA Museums web presence and accessibility

  o **Build Endowment to Support Training/Volunteer/Leadership Programs**
    - Build UA Museums endowment for training/volunteer program

  o **Maintain Academic Freedom of UA Museums**
    - Maintain academic freedom to ensure collections develop in relation to academic mission/strategic priorities
    - Support to integrate museum collections into the UA curriculum

  o **Recognize and Promote UA Museums as an Entity**
    - Coordination of all UA Museums under MACS is effective but needs to be better communicated within community
    - UA Museums UAPPOL policy needs to be respected across campus to ensure U Alberta fiduciary roles respected, limit risk, limit collecting costs, build collections/museums that are integral to U Alberta mission and strategic directions – ensure strategic collecting is observed; Faculties/Departments cannot randomly opt out of policy.
    - We need to think/plan strategically as UA Museums (faculty, staff, MACS)

- **How should and can our programs evolve to ensure that our students have the creativity, critical thinking, and technical knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to be social and economic entrepreneurs in the future?**
  - **Develop Interdisciplinary graduate diploma or certificate program**
    - Complete plans to offer inter/multi-disciplinary museum training/volunteer training program. Note: UA Museums in a unique position to offer important training to students in diverse areas (collections management; community engagement; volunteerism; DNA sampling; translating research into community engagement; not-for-profit models; cultural property legislation; endangered species; gifts-in-kind; etc.)
    - Offer university-wide course in object-based research/museum studies
    - Encourage students working with collections to present research to community
- Help with resumes/interviews/grant writing/Project management/planning
  - **Expand Internship program**
    - Student interest in current UA Museums (Friends) paid internship program is high. Expand number of internships from 1 or 2 to several and consider offering to graduate students as well. Funds required.
  - **Develop Volunteer program**
    - Develop UA Museums volunteer program to promote skills development for students and community

**How are we engaging with communities? And to whom**

- Community engagement programs related to UA Museums are participatory; educational; source collections and related information/research; service focussed; and entertaining
- Programs at UA Museums Galleries at Enterprise Square (lectures/exhibitions)
- Tours of U A Museums
- Loans of museum objects – local, national, international
- Online access
- Hallway exhibitions on campus
- MOOC’s
- Citizen Science/Let’s Talk Science
- K-12 Programs
  - Muse – effective/valuable – stopped due to lack of funding
  - Anthropology forensics – high school
- Community Programs
  - Science Sunday – cancelled – no funds
  - Friends of UA Museums programs
  - Uschool/ELLA
  - Alberta Native Plant Council
  - Volunteer programs
- Summer camps
- City of Edmonton Police/RCMP/Rescue; environmental scientists; government agencies; environmental companies; Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
- Problems: no resources/many programs become ad hoc
- Investigate new means of engagement that are sustainable and participatory

**Why are we engaging with communities?**

- Student recruitment
- University mandate
- Granting agencies require on community engagement activities (e.g., SSHRC; museums; etc.)
- The right thing to do; should have open face to community
- Raise profile of U Alberta in community
- UA Museums are great means of presenting research/collaborating with individuals/groups to solve contemporary issues.
- UA Museums belong to the people (public trust); have obligation to share them and related research with the people.

**What can we do as UA Museums to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and engage Indigenous communities?**

- Ensure UA Museums Internship Program is inclusive.
- Consider different voices when presenting/developing exhibitions/collections information/research.
- Engage indigenous communities in research discoveries.
- Engage indigenous communities in planning UA Museums projects/programs.
- Ensure diverse UA Museums workforce.
- Engage Native Studies/Aboriginal Student Services in programs.
- Continue with open approach to the return of cultural property with all communities – including repatriation and reburial.
- Disclose what is in collections related to indigenous communities and other communities.
- Integrate aboriginal traditional knowledge into collections research/programs.