

Professor: Dr. Brittany Slabach (Dr. B, she/her)

Email: bslabach@coa.edu

Office: Davis Center (south campus), 2nd floor – come visit!

Drop-in Hours: Wednesdays 2:00 – 4:00 PM and Thursdays 10:00 AM – 12:00PM, or by appointment. Drop-in hours will take place in my office, unless otherwise announced. I try to make myself available whenever I have free time. If the above times do not work for you, please send me an email with times you are available, and we'll make it work! I am more than happy to meet via zoom, but please email me to schedule a time to do so. Feel free to stop by my office anytime and say hi if I'm there.

Class time and location

Lecture: Museum classroom, Tuesday & Friday from 10:35 AM – 12:00 PM

Lab: CHE 101, Friday from 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Classes will be a mixture of lecture, discussion, and activities. Labs will be used for field trips to visit museums and collections; and to introduce, and practice, specimen preparation and care. There are several required course field trips (see *Field Trips* below) with some of these trips occurring during both lecture and lab times.

Course Objectives: This course is designed to introduce, and explore, the history and care of scientific collections. We will explore the science and art of scientific collecting, preparing, and caring for specimens (plant and animal). We will discuss the history of scientific collections, and collection practices, and consider their role and value. We will visit natural history museums, their collections, and the curators that care for them, gaining additional perspectives. Finally, we will practice the art of specimen preparation and care, learning different preparation and cataloging techniques. Throughout the term we will continue to ask what is – and should be – the role of collections.

Required Readings – There isn't one book we will use for this course. Instead, we will be reading a variety of book chapters and articles. I will provide all readings in the Google Classroom and a hard copy of all books (if available) will be put on a 4-hour reserve in the library. Below is a list of some of the books we will be using.

- *Cabinets of Curiosities* by Patrick Mauries
- *Life on display: revolutionizing U.S. Museum of science and natural history in the twentieth century* by Karen A Rader and Victoria E. M. Cain
- *The Lost species: Great expeditions in the collections of natural history museums* by Christopher Kemp
- *The Collectors: Creating Hans Sloane's extraordinary herbarium* by Mark Carine
- *Herbarium: The quest to preserve and classify the world's plant* by Barbara M. Thiers

Time Commitment

Students are expected to complete a minimum of 150 hours for this course, equal to 15 hours each week of active academic engagement (i.e., classes, readings, preparation for discussion, fieldtrips, and assignments). Your academic engagements should approximately follow this outline:

Hours	Commitment
60	Class time
30	Active reading of assigned material
10	Curatorial practices – 5 hours must be completed by week 5!
20	Writing assignments
30	Final project
Total	150

Guiding Policies & Expectations

Attendance and Participation: I expect you to attend and be active participants in our class. This means coming to class prepared, having completed the required readings, asking, and answering questions, taking notes and being present. I always prefer an open dialogue, so please ask questions! If I don't know the answer to a question, I will get back to you. If it seems that a question might divert class from immediate goals, I may ask you to come talk to me separately or to be sure we revisit the topic at another time but keep asking! And please do follow up – I don't forget on purpose; I just get distracted.

As this is an interactive course, attendance is important to your learning experience and success. Therefore, absences will be reflected in your participation grade. But illness and life happen! I completely understand this. I'm here to support your learning and success. Please communicate with me when you can. If you are not feeling well, do not come to class. Be sure to get notes from a classmate and we can set up a time to meet and review any missed materials. If absences become common, we will meet to discuss your goals and options moving forward.

There will be group work throughout the semester both in and outside of the classroom. Collaboration is a required part of life, and it can be a truly rewarding experience. It can also be frustrating. To be an effective collaborator it is important to communicate clearly, set expectations – and agree on them – and to be respectful. It is expected that you will treat each other with respect, listen to each other's perspectives and work through any issues together. Remember, we are a team and a community. Everyone has valuable input and perspectives!

Field Trips: I have organized several field trips during, and outside of, our standard class and laboratory time. These experiences are meant for us to explore natural history collections, the curators that care for them, and the exhibits they produce, live and in person! These are important and integral portions to this class, *and attendance on these trips is required.* Two of these field trips are local and will occur during our regular class/lab time. The other field trip is a weekend overnight to visit Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. During this trip we will meet with several curators and get a behind the scenes tour of the collections. The following day we will visit the museum and tour the exhibit! We will depart very early on Friday, January 31st and return the evening of Saturday, February 1st. I realize an early departure means you may need to miss a Friday

morning class. If this is the case, please talk to me ASAP. I am aware of the additional time commitment required of this trip and have canceled a class and lab to ensure this experience doesn't overload anyone. I will provide draft itineraries, and we'll discuss more details in class.

Communication: Please don't hesitate to email me or stop by with any questions or to just chat. I try to respond to all correspondence at least once a day. But if I haven't responded within 24 hours, email me again. I do typically respond to emails on weekends, but responses may be delayed more than 24 hours given field work and life. I will be corresponding with the class via email, so please be sure to check correspondence regularly.

Use of Electronics in Class: Cell phone use is not permitted once class has begun, unless it is to take pictures of specimens or exhibits. If you would like to use any devices to record classroom lecture or discussions, this must be approved prior to use. Some discussions may not be recorded due to privacy reasons. Laptops may be used to take notes, but if there is multi-tasking or perusing the interwebs that occurs, this privilege will be removed.

Statement on plagiarism and academic honesty: By enrolling in an academic institution, a student is subscribing to common standards of academic honesty. Any cheating, plagiarism, falsifying or fabricating of data is a breach of such standards. A student must make it their responsibility to not use words or works of others without proper acknowledgment. Plagiarism is unacceptable and evidence of such activity is reported to the academic dean or their designee. Two violations of academic integrity are grounds for dismissal from the college. Students should request in-class discussions of such questions when complex issues of ethical scholarship arise. Use of AI, of any sort, to complete assignments is plagiarism and will result in a zero for that assignment. If you have any questions about the use of AI, please come and talk to me!

Accommodations: I am happy to work with anyone who requires special accommodation to thrive in this class. Please reach out to me to discuss any accommodation needs.

A note on deadlines: There is a 48-hour grace period for each of your essays, meaning you may submit each of your essays within 48 hours of the due date and there is no penalty associated. If they are submitted after this 48-hr grace period, there will be late penalties applied to your grades. Your final project is a **hard** deadline, meaning the poster and written pieces must be submitted at the stated due date. Any submissions after this will receive a late penalty. No late work will be accepted after March 16th, unless you have previously discussed this with Dr. B.

Grading & Assessments

Essays – 30% (15% each)

Throughout the term, I want us to reflect on what we are reading, discussing, and experiencing. In doing this I want us to think about why we collect; what we value and why; how have collection practices biased what we value and what we know about the natural world; and what is – and should be – the role of collection in today's world. There will be two essays for you to explore these topics in an individualized way throughout the term. The essays will have prompts, but there will be flexibility in topics and your approach. Individual prompts and requirements for each essay

can be found in the Google Classroom. Writing it an iterative process and to help practice this, I'm happy to review drafts at any time! If you are unhappy with your grade, you may edit and resubmit each of your essays within two weeks of getting your initial grades back. Your new grade will replace the initial grade, if you choose to resubmit.

Curatorial Practice – 15%

Caring for a specimen doesn't end after preparation, instead it is a long-term relationship. We will practice specimen care throughout the term by assisting with different projects involving our collections. You are required to complete 10 hours outside of class time working with our collections. Five of these hours must occur prior to the beginning of week five! A schedule will be provided for you to sign up. More on this in class. Note, if you are a museum work study student, these are separate hours from your work-study hours!

Final Project – 40% (20% group, 20% individual)

For your final project, I want you to consider the value and role of our COA collections by creating proposals for studies, uses, or exhibits that could be conducted using our collections. You will be working in pairs to create these proposals, which will include a written and presentation portion. A draft submission will be due mid-term, and brainstorming meetings with Dr. B will be required! Additional information can be found in the final project handout.

Attendance & Participation – 15%

Class attendance is required. You are expected to be present at, and actively participate in, all class meetings. I understand that participation can be somewhat subjective, therefore, this portion of your grade will be determined by the following: attending all required meetings; being punctual to all meetings; and being actively engaged. Active engagement means you are not surfing the interwebs, texting/emailing others, having side conversations, or conducting any other work that does not pertain to the course. Instead, you are being an active listener, asking and/or answering questions, and participating in discussions with your peers about subject matter. If you need to miss for some reason, let me know as soon as possible! If you have four or more unexcused absences will not receive a passing grade for this course.

Title IX/Sexual Misconduct Reporting: As a Responsible Employee who is committed to creating an environment where every member of our community can thrive, I want to let you know that I am a Mandatory Reporter. What that means is that I am required to report any instances of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual intercourse, nonconsensual sexual contact, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence, stalking, and related retaliation that I am aware of to the Title IX Coordinator. So, if you share information with me about any incidents that implicate the Sexual Misconduct or Anti-Harassment Policies, I am required to report all information to the Title IX Coordinator to make sure you have information about support resources and complaint resolution options. My report does not initiate the complaint process, and you are in control over how you choose to engage with our Title IX Coordinator, Puranjot Kaur. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, I encourage you to share this information directly with our Title IX Coordinator (pkaur@coa.edu) or one of the individuals who has been designated as a confidential resource on campus. For more information

regarding Title IX, our institutional policy, and to access helpful resources, visit COA's Title IX website: coa.edu/human-resources/title-ix.

Course Schedule – Winter 2025 ** *The following is a draft schedule.*

Topics and schedule are subject to change at instructor's whim, class needs or in response to college requirements. All readings will be made available on the Google Classroom.

Week	Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due
1	7-Jan	Tuesday	Introduction to the course	Syllabus
	10-Jan	Friday	What is the value of collections?	Podcast, Grinnell 1910, Holmes et al. 2016
2	14-Jan	Tuesday	Collections Care & Legality	
	17-Jan	Friday	Scientific Thinking and Cabinets of Curiosity	Farber 2000; Cabinets of Curiosity; Herbaria
3	21-Jan	Tuesday	Colonial Collections: The Famous, and Hidden, Collectors	Darwin, Wallace, and Bates
	24-Jan	Friday	LC Bates Museum Visit	New England Travel Article; <i>Proposal Check Ins this week</i>
4	28-Jan	Tuesday	The "New" World Collections	Simpson 1942, Akeley Expeditions, and Grinnell Project; <i>Essay 1 due</i>
	31-Jan	Friday	MCZ Trip	Podcast
5	4-Feb	Tuesday	The New Museum	Life on Display, Smithsonian Magazine; Meineke and Daru 2021; Cooper et al. 2019
	7-Feb	Friday	Specimen Preparation	Collecting Manuals
6	11-Feb	Tuesday	<i>Flex day – proposal check in</i>	
	14-Feb	Friday	No class - Dr. B at U. of Maine	
7	18-Feb	Tuesday	Evolution of Collections	Johnson et al. 2023, TBD; <i>Essay 2 due</i>
	21-Feb	Friday	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>
8	25-Feb	Tuesday	The Lost Species	Chapters to be assigned; <i>Poster printing deadline!</i>
	28-Feb	Friday	Prepping giants	TBD
9	4-Mar	Tuesday	Entomology Preparations	TBD
	7-Mar	Friday	Collecting as Conservation *	Larson 2002; Hornaday Bison Group; Andrei 2005
10	11-Mar	Tuesday	Who should own collections? *	WSJ 2024, Kekatos and Vilcarino 2024
	14-Mar	Friday	Flex Day	

*LC Bates Museum back up day

Laboratory Schedule – Our schedule is subject to change based on weather, availability of speakers, specimen availability, and student interest!

Please review any assigned readings prior to the laboratory!

Date	Topic
10-Jan	Carrie Graham, Dorr Museum and Collections Tour
17-Jan	Herbarium*
24-Jan	LC Bates Museum Tour*
31-Jan	Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Two-day trip
7-Feb	Specimen Preparation
14-Feb	No lab – Dr. B at the U. of Maine
21-Feb	TBD* - Collections care part 2, freezer surprise?
28-Feb	Prepping Giants – Field trip to Dan DenDanto's workshop
7-Mar	TBD* - Specimen Preparation Part 2?
14-Mar	Proposal Round Table

*Dates subject to change