

Rebecca A. Buck

*The New Museum Registration Methods* was written for museum collections personnel. Throughout this book we refer to the registrar as the staff member who undertakes the task at hand. That person may, in reality, be a registrar (chief, head, associate, assistant, assistant to), collections manager, curator (associate, assistant), director (executive, deputy, assistant), project director, keeper, conservator, collections technician, computer specialist, exhibition technician, mountmaker, archivist, consultant, board member, or volunteer. There are, within some organizations, even greater proliferations of titles.

Title and job functions vary from museum to museum and are determined by size, discipline, and history of the institution. In order to understand a position and be effective in it, a prospective staff member should become fully aware of the organizational structure, history, and culture of the specific museum. Titles may be similar, but working within the framework of a large science museum is far different from working in a small history museum.

Small museums may have only one paid staff member. That person is charged with everything from development to housekeeping and may call on volunteers to perform registration and collections management tasks. Small to mid-size museums often rely on a curator, sometimes called a curator of collections, for the performance of collection work. As the museum grows, an employee with the title of registrar may be hired to take over many of the collections functions. Some museums include a collections manager who focuses on the physical aspects of handling and storage, while the registrar concentrates on records, logistics, and legal matters.

Registrars in art museums, where the department is central to collections management and documentation, are often charged with a full scope

of collections tasks. The registrar, among other duties, develops storage; oversees computer projects; works through accessions, loans, and exhibitions; and drafts collections policy and procedure.

In very large art museums, collection departments (European art, prints and drawings) that are defined by institutional collecting focus and history care for and document specific parts of the overall collection. In these cases, the registrar serves a more specialized and centralized function; the registrar's office generally deals with accessions, deaccessions, loans, exhibitions, and many administrative tasks related to collections. Large history museums may be similarly organized.

Science museums rely on collecting departments, often staffed with collections managers in addition to curators, to care for collections. The registrar's function in the science museum may also be centralized and is often removed from collection activities, except for accessioning, deaccessioning, and loans. If departments are responsible for inventory and care, the registrar may be the auditor who assures accountability.

The following description of a registrar's job encompasses a wide range of work related to collections. It is culled from job descriptions requested for the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums' journal *REGISTRAR* in 1993, from the job descriptions on file with the RC-AAM, and from a model developed for a management seminar. Depending on the type and size of museum, the registrar's office may do many, most, or all of the tasks that are listed, alone or in concert with other departments in the museum.

## A COMPOSITE JOB DESCRIPTION for the REGISTRAR

*Rebecca A. Buck*

### Profile

#### Academic background

B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. in museum's specialty field and/or museum studies; information sciences and business/legal studies a plus

#### Reports to

Director or head of collections division

#### Supervises

Assistants for loans, collections, and information management; preparators, packers, handlers, and photographers; interns, work-study students, and volunteers

### Areas of Responsibility

#### Information management: manual and computerized

Creates/compiles and maintains legal documents, histories of use, and physical histories of permanent collections objects and/or specimens

Legal forms and acknowledgments

Permanent collections catalog and files

Loan, conservation, condition, publication records

Exhibition, insurance, and location records

Develops and implements inventory projects

Coordinates/assists with computer projects

Systems specifications and software choices

Data standards committees

Data input management

Disseminates information as needed to other departments, researchers, and students

Coordinates object identification services

#### Collections management

Monitors legal and ethical implications and care standards of transactions

Facilitates care and control of collections on site

Initiates, develops, and, upon adoption, implements collection policies

Oversees object movement, internal and external

Oversees packing and shipping

Acts as courier or designates courier

Implements security procedures/works closely with security forces

Designs and controls storage areas

Works with contractors

Develops storage methods

Oversees integrated pest management programs

Contracts for outside services as needed

Conservation, rigging, packing, crating, shipping, photography, insurance

## Exhibitions

### Borrowed exhibitions

- Negotiates loan contracts
- Schedules and supervises packing, shipping, condition reporting, and object movement
- Prepares grant reports as necessary

### In-house exhibitions

- Provides information to other departments as needed
- Coordinates object movement and record keeping
- Prepares or helps in preparation of label copy

### Traveling exhibitions

- Develops/reviews contracts
- Prepares documentation, packing, shipping
- Provides courier service

## Other services and responsibilities

### Maintains archives

### Manages photographic services

- Supervises collections photography
- Stores photographic collections
- Maintains rights and reproductions services

## Administrative Responsibilities

### Administers department

- Hires, trains, and evaluates staff
- Develops and runs internship program
- Prepares and implements budgets, in whole or in part
  - Departmental
  - Exhibitions
  - Storage and other special projects
- Contracts for services
- Purchases office and collections management equipment and supplies
- Prepares rate structures
  - Loans, traveling exhibitions
  - Photographic services