Sample Lesson 3: Initial Contact with Collections (3 sessions)

Overview:
Accessing original object collections in a museum is a new opportunity for most students. This series of “initial contact” lessons is designed to expose students to the available resources and to stimulate thinking about their research potential prior to lessons in systematic data collection and critical analysis. In addition, each lesson covers some basic operational skills.

Students will prepare in advance using publicly available online resources to identify materials they wish to see. Working in groups of 3 to 4 and rotating through the three sections of the lesson, students will begin examining materials relating to their individual research projects.

Lesson 3A: Initial Contact: Objects

Goals:
- gain skill defining specimens to be examined
- learn to examine and handle objects safely
- begin to develop note-taking and other recording strategies
- begin to understand the time required for object examination
- begin to collect data for individual research projects

Session outline:
- use online resources to identify material of interest (in advance)
- define parameters for staff search of non-public database (in advance)
- work in collection storage examining materials under supervision
- training in object handling to be incorporated into examination

Lesson 3B: Initial Contact: Records

Goals:
- gain skill locating dispersed records documenting collections
- learn how to access and cite museum records
- begin to develop strategies for taking notes
- begin to understand the time required to locate and examine collection records
- begin to collect data for individual research projects

Session outline:
- use online and other resources to identify material of interest
- work in various repositories to examine materials
- consult with appropriate staff at each repository regarding handling practices and conventions for citation
Lesson 3C: Initial Contact: Archival Sources

Goals:
- gain skill identifying diverse materials relating to object study, such as correspondence, reports, photographs, and film
- learn how to access, handle, and cite archival materials
- begin to develop strategies for taking notes
- begin to understand the time required to locate and examine archival collections
- begin to collect data for individual research projects

Session outline:
- use online and other resources to identify material of interest
- work in various repositories to examine materials
- consult with appropriate staff at each location regarding handling practices and conventions for citation