The Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences offers an interdepartmental program leading to the degree of master of arts in the field of museum studies. Courses in museum studies are supplemented by additional courses offered by departments such as American Studies, Anthropology, History, Educational Leadership, Fine Arts and Art History, Interior Architecture and Design, and Theatre and Dance.

The program is designed for those who seek a deepening of their primary academic interest along with training in the broad range of talents required in the successful operation of museums. The goal of the program is to produce graduates who are prepared to assume museum positions that require both scholarship and functional skills.

In addition to the master’s degree, the program offers graduate certificates in museum studies and museum collections management.

Students whose career interests are primarily in museum education should refer to the master of arts in teaching in the field of museum education program in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development.

Specific admission requirements are shown on the Graduate Program Finder.

Visit the Museum Studies program website for additional information.

GRADUATE

Master's program
- Master of Arts in the field of museum studies

CERTIFICATE

Certificate programs
- Graduate certificate in museum studies
- Graduate certificate in museum collections management and care

FACULTY

Committee on Museum Studies
S. Anderson, M. Coughlin, K.S. Rice, L. Schiavo, M. van Balgooy, J. Wetenhall

Assistant Professors
S. Anderson, M. Coughlin, K.S. Rice, L.B. Schiavo, M. van Balgooy

COURSES

Explanation of Course Numbers
- Courses in the 1000s are primarily introductory undergraduate courses
- Those in the 2000s to 4000s are upper-division undergraduate courses that can also be taken for graduate credit with permission and additional work
- Those in the 6000s and 8000s are for master’s, doctoral, and professional-level students
- The 6000s are open to advanced undergraduate students with approval of the instructor and the dean or advising office

MSTD 1000. Dean's Seminar. 3 Credits.
The Dean’s Seminars provide Columbian College first-year students focused scholarship on specific intellectual challenges. Topics vary by semester; see department for more details.

MSTD 6101. Museum Management. 3 Credits.
Overall operation of the museum: legal status of the museum and its obligations to the public; governance, staffing, policymaking as a nonprofit organization. Theory applied to practical situations.

MSTD 6102. Nonprofit Fiscal Management. 3 Credits.
Basic concepts of general accounting; fund accounting for nonprofit organizations; budgets and budget systems; use of the budget as a management tool; long-range planning; income sources; other financial management concepts.

MSTD 6103. Leading Change. 3 Credits.
Leadership challenges and styles as they relate to organizational change efforts. Case studies of museums undergoing change; best practices in leadership at all levels of the museum.

MSTD 6104. Managing People and Projects. 3 Credits.
Organizational development and modern management concepts as applied to museums. Managing people in the organization; the importance of project management systems to museum administration.

MSTD 6105. Museum Fundraising. 3 Credits.
Introductory topics in museum fundraising, including sources of funds, best practices and approaches, annual funds and capital campaigns, and the internal management of the fundraising effort. Restricted to graduate students.

MSTD 6201. Introduction to Museum Collections. 3 Credits.
Establishing collection management policies. Laws, regulations, conventions, and codes that affect acquisitions; deaccessions, loans, and collection care; accountability; and access problems.
MSTD 6202. Museum Collections Management. 3 Credits.
The implementation of collections policies: establishing and managing collections, management procedures and systems, documentation of collections, records preservation, collections access and storage, handling, packing and shipping, and inventory control.

MSTD 6203. Preventive Conservation Concepts. 3 Credits.
Historical development of preventive conservation in museums, conservation ethics, team approaches to conservation, interactions of various materials with agents of deterioration. Basics of materials testing, preparation of condition reports, choosing museum storage and exhibition materials, and risk assessment. Same as ANTH 6203 and AH 6286.

MSTD 6204. Preventive Conservation Techniques. 3 Credits.
Practical applications of preventive conservation of materials, monitoring environmental conditions, conducting risk assessments, evaluation of exhibit and storage areas; developing plans, policies, and procedures for collections care; grant proposal preparation for collections care initiatives. Same as ANTH 6204 and AH 6287.

MSTD 6205. Archival Practice. 3 Credits.
An introduction for museum professionals to the core ideas and practices of archivists and archival institutions. Restricted to graduate students.

MSTD 6301. Museum Exhibitions: Curatorial Research. 3 Credits.
Museum research from a curatorial point of view, with emphasis on exhibit theory and practice. Research techniques, information sources, and script production.

MSTD 6302. Museum Exhibition Design. 3 Credits.
The processes of research, conceptualization, planning, and evaluation from a designer's point of view. Focus is on individual projects with some group collaboration. The designer's vocabulary, visual thinking, design documentation, and specifications.

MSTD 6303. Advanced Exhibition Design. 3 Credits.
The processes of research, conceptualization, planning, and evaluation from a designer's point of view. Focus is on individual projects with some group collaboration. The designer’s vocabulary, visual thinking, design documentation, and specifications.

MSTD 6304. Museum Exhibition Development. 3 Credits.
Research techniques; information sources; script production from a content perspective.

MSTD 6305. Visitor Perspectives: Museum Evaluation in Exhibitions. 3 Credits.
Theory and practice of museum evaluation, especially as related to exhibition development. (Same as EDUC 6706).

MSTD 6306. Race, Gender, Sexuality, and the Museum. 3 Credits.
Exploration of the role that museums play in the construction, reification, and representation of ideas about race and gender. Restricted to graduate students.

MSTD 6403. Museums and Digital Technology. 3 Credits.
The history and impact of digital technology in modern museum practice; variety of uses and functions of digital technology in modern museums; effects of culture on technology adoption; basic digital strategy and user experience skills. Restricted to graduate students.

MSTD 6501. Museum Internship. 1-3 Credits.
Individual work experience in museums of the Washington area and possibly elsewhere. Each student should make arrangements with the Museum Studies Program staff. Museum internships are supervised by one or more members of the cooperating museum staff in the areas of museum management, object care and conservation, and exhibiting.

MSTD 6502. Directed Research. 3 Credits.
Individual research on special topics in the museum field. Topics must be approved by the director of the Museum Studies Program. May be repeated for credit.

MSTD 6601. Special Topics. 3 Credits.
May be repeated for credit provided the topic differs.

MSTD 6701. Museum History and Theory. 3 Credits.
More often than not, museum practitioners and theorists speak at cross purposes. This course will take steps to bridge that gap. We will first explore the origins of the modern museum and the history of (mainly) American museums. Then, using U.S. and non-U.S. examples, we will engage with theorists whose ideas have been accessed to inform our understanding of museums as places of meaning making, power and empowerment, cultural authority, and as “contact zones” (James Clifford, 1997). As the theory informs our understanding of how museums have functioned - both in the past and in more contemporary examples - we will be better prepared to engage critically with our own work as museum practitioners. Historian Steven Conn has categorized museums “as places uniquely situated at the intersection of objects, ideas, and public space.” (Do Museums Still Need Objects? 2010) The exploration of theoretical approaches to museums in this course borrows this useful classification—exploring ideas (nation, race), issues of publicity, and the status of the object.

MSTD 6702. Museums and the Public: Exhibiting Culture. 3 Credits.
An introduction to the wide range of problems, possibilities, and choices that are part of the cultural landscape of how museums interact with their audiences through public programs. (Same as ANTH 6202).