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### The making of an exhibit

Emma Bickerstaffe

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Features

# The making of an exhibit

February 3, 2020 • [Add Comment](#) • by [Emma Bickerstaffe](#)

Tucked deeply away within the halls of Old Library is room 102, where the seventeen students



of Dr. Michael Di Giovine’s Museum Exhibit Curation class work tirelessly to bring us the WCU Museum of Anthropology & Archaeology’s upcoming exhibit on Earth Day. It’s in this room where, for the past several years, the students of Anthropology 558 have planned, executed and co-curated the yearly exhibits found on the first floor of Old Library.



It wasn’t until 2013, with the hiring of Dr. Di Giovine, that the Museum of Anthropology & Archaeology began to have yearly exhibits. At the time of its first exhibit, “we had a very makeshift space and we didn’t call it the museum,” Dr. Di Giovine explains. “But we ended up having a really good exhibit on enculturation... and that kind of made momentum for other things.”

Since then, the museum has had six other exhibits, including Feasting and Food Ways, Rwanda Nziza: Beautiful Rwanda, The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America and Faces of the Berlin Wall (which is currently still up in the museum, and you can learn more at [www.wcupa.edu/museum](http://www.wcupa.edu/museum) or by visiting Old Library).

The big pinnacle for the museum came from the Latin America exhibit, which was the first time that an exhibit was created based on a large collection and a budget. “We were given \$1,000 to put on an exhibit for the Latin American Studies Conference. I wound up getting 11 students, and we were able to publish a museum catalog on the exhibit... We had the

students sourcing all of these artifacts and found objects from the Sonoran Desert,” said Dr. Di Giovine. “And now we’re at this one – Earth Day – where we want to make it a more interactive and bodily engaging exhibit. Every year we’re learning and changing.”

The students of ANT/558 have approximately two months to create the Earth Day exhibit, which will open on April 24, 2020, a process that takes bigger museums two to five years to complete. All of the museum’s exhibits are student co-curated, with the topics being solicited from the previous class based on milestone events. This year, not only is it the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, but it ties in with the university’s history of placing a large emphasis on sustainability and activism.

When it comes to how the class itself works, the students act as the co-curators and Dr. DiGiovine as the museum director. The class is designed to work from start to finish: the first few weeks are designated to talking about what museums are and what the exhibit topic is, then the students spend time researching both as a class and with the help of outside experts/professors.

From there, the big idea of the exhibit is decided upon, which will help orient the class on what the story of the exhibit is going to be. After that, the class is broken up into groups that create individual big ideas based on specific research. A catalogue copy is then written and created, the label and design process begins, students start sourcing artifacts and finally, they begin to install the exhibit about two weeks before the big opening.



By the time the exhibit goes up in April, not only will it be a beautiful end product created from hard work and dedication, but it will also be an incredibly rewarding experience for the students who participated. Second-time ANT/ 558 student Maria Fenner said that, “[I] genuinely enjoy the work we do, but it also directly relates to the future career I’m working towards in museum studies. It’s especially helpful because not only do we get hands-on experience but we get an official publication out of it. It feels great to put hard work in and get this amazing reward that becomes the finished product!”

In regards to the theme of Earth Day, third-time student Foster W. Krupp explained that he’s really excited to be supervising and working on the project: “I think it’s going to be bigger and better – every year we get more and more ambitious. This is going to be a really impressive exhibit, and it’s going to be very relevant to lots of different communities and people all over campus.”

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