

Towards Addressing the Skills Gap in the Heritage Sector: Institutions of Higher Learning

In March the Archival Platform started a conversation about skills development and challenges facing the heritage sector in this regard. In April, a learner Siphokazi Nhanhana shared with us her experiences as a learner in a Heritage Practice learnership at National Qualification Level (NQF) 4, she also gave an illustration of the vocational components that were completed at the Red Location museum. The following month, Juanita Pastor, the director of Birthright Heritage Practitioners, an accredited heritage training provider, wrote about the challenges facing SMMEs in implementing learnerships. This month, we shift our focus to higher education, and this is done by engaging with four institutions of higher learning regarding courses that they offer in heritage and/or museum studies. These courses are placed in varying departments and some tend to be multi-disciplinary in their approach.

Cynthia Kros, the head of the [Arts, Culture, Heritage and Management Division](#) in the School of Arts at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) illustrates the structure that Wits is currently offering. Wits offers a postgraduate programme with two streams. A student may want to focus on the Arts, Culture and Heritage stream that will equip her/him with specialised skills in the relevant fields of policy, leadership, management, proposal writing, law and finance OR on the more theoretical aspects of heritage in terms of current academic debates about conservation and representation. There is also provision for a mix and match. It's a postgraduate programme (Diploma and Master level for Arts and Culture; Diploma, Honours and Master for Heritage) to which students are usually admitted on the basis of a good undergraduate degree in History, Anthropology, Political Studies, History of Art or one of the creative or performing Arts – they even had a student this year doing the bulk of her postgraduate degree in the School of Architecture and Planning. The university also has provision to recognise substantial experience in the field through recognition of prior learning procedures. Currently, there are five PhD (research) students registered under Heritage topics.

For the degree courses you have to do three courses listed in the relevant fields (there is a wide choice of electives) and a research component. The compulsory core course for the Heritage programme, which is called Public Culture is dynamic and flexible – no one year is ever the same as the last although the tendency is to start pretty invariably by interrogating the concepts 'public' and 'culture' with the help of Michael Warner and Jurgen Habermas and from there to explore the origins of the principal institutions of public culture. Kros points out that no escaping Tony Bennett's 'Origins of the Museum' and other conversations about reforming the museum. The course has sections on monuments and anti-monuments; the ethics of putting humans or human casts on display; the struggle to represent the history of the Bushman/San (?); heritage-led urban regeneration and debates about representing atrocity both here and abroad. Heritage degree students would do the Public Culture course and two courses listed in the field of Heritage and a research component,

they also go on an annual field trip. A Master only course on Archival Theory and Practice will also be available in the second semester of 2011.

Sven Ouzman, a lecturer at the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria (UP) gave us a description of the undergraduate course, the [Archaeologies of Archive](#) that UP offers. The course is presented during the final semester of the UP undergraduate Archaeology syllabus and is designed to equip students with practical and conceptual skills that will further archaeological careers but can also be transferred to other professions in the fields of museology, contract archaeology, object conservation, legislation and policy. Broadly, these skills include building career paths, finding funding; teaching, research and publishing; legislation and intellectual property; collections management; site management and museum display. The students that are registered for the course are expected to present a research project based on the curation of a sample of archaeological artefacts at the end of the course and also write a final examination.

According to Ouzman, Archaeologists and museum people make an impossible promise - to keep objects, knowledge, meta-data etc 'forever' or 'in perpetuity'. In addition to this, most archaeology (and related) programmes do not provide substantive courses on curation, collections management or how to conduct research on collections. This is more than just 'forgetting' - it is acknowledgement that the promise to keep stuff forever is unworkable. But we need to create a viable community of archive people - not in the dry, dusty and distant sense (to crib from James Elkins), but as researchers, activists and specialists who things about objects seriously, where they can get us and so on. Ouzman emphasises that undergraduate courses thus must have some training in this regard. At a larger level, universities need specialist collections people and policies (most do not). The archive should be a dwell point where the basic but essential question of 'what is heritage?' is posed and responded to by a variety of publics. Finally, he also states that we need to pay attention not just to the 'stuff', but the social and political contexts of how archives are generated - focusing also on what is not collected and why (for example, you can do metals, ceramic, material and wood conservation courses - but no course on conserving plastics - this year the Barbie doll turned 51!). So, what then will the archives of the future collect? Or is collecting just an extension of an extractive capitalist economy and we should think about not collecting?

The University of Western Cape (UWC) on the other hand offers the [African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies](#), collaboration between the Centre for Humanities Research at UWC and the Robben Island museum. According to the information provided by the Academic Coordinator of the programme, Olusegun Morakinyo, this is a post-graduate diploma course that is open to graduates of all disciplines or to the people with tertiary-level qualifications or to non-graduates who ideally should have at least five years of work experience, of which a significant proportion is in the museum and heritage sector. According to the UWC website, this qualification opens up vocational possibilities in the

heritage, museum and tourism sector. The principal aim of the Diploma is to ensure that students have the opportunity to explore a range of approaches to heritage and museum studies, while enabling one to combine electives in areas of particular interest. It provides students with intellectual training, at a fairly advanced level, in the key debates facing heritage in a transforming and democratising South Africa and elsewhere in Africa. At the same time it equips one with the necessary skills in managing heritage structures and institutions.

Another postgraduate programme that is available in the heritage sector is offered by the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and convened by Nick Shepherd. UCT offers an Honours degree with a specialisation in Heritage and Public Culture where students have to complete core courses, the African Studies Archive and Public Culture in Africa, two methodology focused courses may be chosen from one of the heritage disciplines and a research project. The Masters degree in Heritage and Public Culture comprises of a minor dissertation and a core course on Critical Issues in Heritage Studies. The emphasis of the Critical Issues in Heritage course is discussion, critique and reading of theory. Students engage with current debates in the field and the way in which those debates are taking place. The aim is to form informed positions as opposed to the formation of a single correct position. Case studies are used in taking students to the centre of set debates in the field. This year the course focuses on UCT as a heritage site and looks at self-representation and stylisation; the politics of memory and identity in post-apartheid South Africa are also explored as well as contested notions of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. In addition to this, students have to embark on a further two core courses that reside within the Built Environment Department, these are the Law of Conservation, Heritage Management and Development; and Researching and Assessing Heritage Resources. Students that register for this programme are varied in terms of their academic background and research interests, ranging from Visual Art to Archaeology and Anthropology.

The approaches that are taken by the four institutions vary in addressing the shortage of critical and scarce skills in the heritage sector. While UP's undergraduate course focuses practical skills of curation and archiving, Wits, UWC and UCT address heritage resources management. Wits also has course on archiving that is both theoretical and practical and UCT has recently embarked on the [Archives and Public Culture Research Initiative](#). All the institutions provide legal and research skills, while they engage students on current debates in the South African and also global heritage terrain. UWC's collaboration with the Robben Island museum enables the institution to also address tourism and the vocational aspects thereof. Many other institutions are engaged in training for heritage, however, it seems like there is still a long way to go before the skills gap is addressed. It may also be prudent to interrogate the way in which skills audits are conducted so as to ensure that education and training interventions are relevant for the needs of the sector. The Department of Arts and Culture has conducted skills audits on Library and Information Service as well as another on the Heritage sectors. Various Sector education and Training authorities (SETA) also produce

Sector Skills Plans (SSP)s that are drawn from workplace skills needs as determined by the Skills Development Act.