



GLAM^x Lab Living Histories Digitisation Lab – engaging tertiary students with university archival collections

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Introduction

In 2016, the University of Newcastle's (UON) Auchmuty Library embarked on a new venture to promote and augment an established Work Integrated Learning (WIL) course in the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree course, and to provide for placements in Cultural Collections. One of the champions for the venture was Associate Professor Marguerite Johnson, who visited Cultural Collections with her 'Sex and Scandal' class in September 2016 and where they heard University Archivist Gionni Di Gravio's vision to establish a GLAM^x Lab (i.e. Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums to the power of 'x') training facility. In 2017 the GLAM^x Lab Living Histories Digitisation Lab was established for students in the UON's WIL programs across all faculties and disciplines.¹ The Lab provides a unique opportunity in the tertiary teaching and learning sphere for students to engage in practical education and learn the technical know-how to be able to transform any physical format into a digital object, and access to the entire gamut of GLAM professions across conservation and preservation, archival science, librarianship, digitisation, metadata and data management, curatorial, 3D scanning, Virtual Reality technologies and digital heritage skills. The primary collaborators are the Academic Division (University Library) and Faculty of Education and Arts, Resources Division, IT Services, the Innovation Team and School of Wollotuka also played a role in the establishment of the Lab, although to a lesser degree.

This project is a sector leader with only two other universities in Australia (Deakin University and the University of Melbourne) having similar programs engaging tertiary students with university archival collections. These two other universities presented a joint session at the 2017 Australian Society of Archivists Conference.²

University archives present a unique opportunity to challenge existing cultural, ethnic, racial, political, sexual and religious representation in the tertiary teaching and learning sphere. Four practitioners discussed developments at their campuses, highlighting successes and failures, surprises and roadblocks encountered to date, as well as presenting a brief overview of current research on archival teaching and learning programs in Australia's tertiary institutions. Although these new programs differ, they each support diversity. A real



Figure 1. Audiovisual Digitisation Lab housing the NBN Television archive (2018). Courtesy UON.



Figure 2. UON's Natural History Illustration student, Emma Heath, illustrating Indigenous Australian artefacts part of the Deep Time project.

strength is the inclusion of students from particular fields and how they are matched with specific collections and projects. Another strength is the support of Indigenous Australian volunteers and cadetships in the object-based learning environment. The following discussion outlines the project undertaken by the University of Newcastle.

GLAM^x Living Histories Digitisation Lab

The GLAM^x Lab is a sector-first initiative for the UON and provides opportunities for students to apply their knowledge to gain important practical experience. A space where students can learn digitisation and other cultural sector skills.

The GLAM^x Lab Digitisation Lab has three rooms. The GLAM^x Lab Living Histories Digitisation Lab is the main lab containing 10 work stations, each having computers and flatbed scanners. This Lab also has a Virtual Reality (VR) and Oculus Rift set up where VR and 3D projects can be viewed on a large screen. The large screen is also useful for group learning and sharing projects that WIL students have been working on. The Artefact Conservation Atelier is a smaller lab containing 3D scanning equipment, including a 3D scanner, reflective 3D scanning lightbox and turntable, and a laptop computer with Artec Studio software. Approximately 2.5 metres of shelving is available in this lab and used to hold artefacts in the interim for accessioning, ease of access for research and illustration. The digitisation of Indigenous Australian artefacts for VR simulation is also done in this lab, known as the Deep Time Project.³ The third space is the Audiovisual Digitisation Lab as shown in Figure 1 housing the NBN Television (regional commercial television station) archive and has specialised digitisation equipment providing for the various (at risk) film formats. The GLAM^x Lab operates all year round during weekdays (except official shut-down period).

WIL student placements

The GLAM^x Lab offers opportunities for WIL students to gain valuable practical and professional skills and experiences. During 2017 the GLAM^x Lab accommodated 15 WIL students and the same number of student volunteers. WIL placements are usually 80 hours and they work alongside staff and mentors to learn a range of skills that will improve their employability. WIL placements are not course orientated, but are focused on multidisciplinary skills. Although BA students were the primary participants during 2017, students from other disciplines also undertook placements resulting in some quite diverse projects that are discussed further in this article. The Lab successfully supported students from a range of disciplines, including the Humanities, Communications, Education and the Arts, as well as IT and Creative Industries, to achieve new learning opportunities. All of the students were domestic, fee-paying students and none identified as Indigenous Australian or Torres Strait Islander. Only 3.7% of domestic enrolments at the UON in 2017 identified as Indigenous Australian or Torres Strait Islander.

Digitisation projects involving archival collections, objects and artefacts allow students to apply their own knowledge in a practical way and further document, research, interpret, curate and share digitised collections with the wider community.

One of the major issues for students entering the workforce after finishing university is often the need to demonstrate practical skills. The GLAM^x Lab provides a supportive environment for students to learn GLAM-sector skills. A coordinator of the GLAM^x Lab supervises student placements and oversees day-to-day operations of the Lab. Students work on a diversity of projects small and large, working either individually or on team projects. Some of the large archival projects have already been mentioned such as the Deep Time project and the NBN archive. Student tasks are usually tailored to their interests and they

work with staff in Cultural Collections to gain a better understanding of GLAM-sector professions, as well as acquiring digitisation and other new skills associated with the specific project they are working on. The student works alongside professional staff in Cultural Collections including an archivist, conservator and library technicians.

At the heart of the GLAM^x Lab is the community. WIL student/community engagement is a key part of the GLAM^x placement. It provides students the opportunity to engage with other communities and individuals external to the UON. Students are invited to present projects they have been working on to wider communities (via Hunter Living Histories monthly meetings).⁴ This is a multidisciplinary group and members come from a diversity of backgrounds and professions, often becoming valuable mentors and informants to students. Some students publish their work online and communicate their experiences via radio interviews, or share their work on behalf of Cultural Collections on Facebook and Twitter. Digitisation and publication of cultural sources, enabling greater access and use by the community (via the digital media platforms), is giving students a sense of accomplishment when they see the benefits of digitisation and access to the wider community. It also provides opportunities to work as a team and share experiences. Projects generated by students are changing how they and others perceive the 'archive'. GLAM^x projects count as work experience and develop skills that students can include on their résumé. Networking via the wider community also provides opportunities for future collaborations, applying for community grants or gaining further work or experience with other organisations. WIL students have successfully built some strong relationships with leaders and members of the Newcastle community.

The Lab provides students with access to cultural sources that have a strong association with the region and the world. Several projects relate to Indigenous Australian culture and artefacts and students develop awareness of cultural sensitivities and the need to consult with communities about the proposed uses of their cultural heritage. An ethos of respect is embedded in all projects associated with Indigenous Australian culture, with any work conducted respectfully honouring the First Australian People, the Aboriginal people of this land. A safe working and learning environment for Indigenous Australian students (who, while not taking part in the WIL scheme, have volunteered on projects concerning Indigenous Australian culture and artefacts), non-student volunteers and members of the community is promoted and they can opt out of engaging with artefacts at any time if they wish.

WIL projects

Because the establishment of the GLAM^x Lab occurred quite expeditiously, there was minimal time to plan a work schedule for the first intake of WIL students. Students were interviewed to find out about their academic studies, skills and areas of interest about which they wanted to learn. Often it was the latter that led to a particular archive and collection being coupled with the students. For example, one student was initially interested in the personal library of a former academic at the University of Newcastle, Emeritus Professor Godfrey Tanner (1927–2002). He then decided to focus his attention on an examination of the scholar's life and career, using his applied discipline knowledge from the Bachelor of Arts and his particular interest in the Classics to create a project titled 'Emeritus Professor Godfrey Tanner & Collected Papers'.⁵ This project involved the digitisation of Tanner's extant published works, digital editing, research, community/media engagement and writing

content. He applied various forms of media, including radio and social media platforms, to promote and share this digitised collection. The student made a significant contribution whilst on practicum and successfully became the Industry award recipient of the inaugural WIL Student of the Year 2017.⁶

Some other individual student-led projects included geology of the Hunter Region, Scott Sisters of Ash Island, radio 2NUR FM recordings, Indigenous Australian education conference and Convocation Lectures, all having components of learning practical and technical skills to transform any physical format into a digital object. Students use innovative, technological solutions to expand the use and accessibility of archival sources. Projects were curated on social platforms and shared with a global audience and can be viewed on the Hunter Living Histories website.⁷ Students were encouraged to think critically about their projects and the collections and archives from which they derived.

The focus in Semester 2, 2017 was Indigenous Australian rock art and Indigenous heritage and the University's archival holdings in Cultural Collections. One of the pilot projects was the Deep Time project, a 3D digitisation project working on a collection of Indigenous Australian artefacts retrieved from an Indigenous tool-making site with a 6500-year-old history, arguably one of the country's most significant heritage sites, in Newcastle West, identified as a site of high to exceptional cultural and scientific significance. Natural History Illustration student Emma Heath worked on the Deep Time project, illustrating hundreds of Indigenous Australian artefacts as shown in Figure 2. The project aims to 3D scan these artefacts for upload to VR Deep Time experience, however many of the artefacts are quite small and are best illustrated by the human hand. This is where Emma's skills are invaluable. She created a poster showing the sketched artefacts. Each artefact has also been sketched from three different aspects to capture the very fine detail of the artefact and these along with the 3D scans will be available on the Library's digital platform Livinghistories@UON.⁸

Challenges and barriers

An early challenge was to gain cross-unit collaboration and engagement (partnering with the Library) to establish the GLAM^x Lab. Collaborating on such an initiative that was likely to be permanent was quite an achievement for the Library as collaborations such as this do not typically happen. However, as mentioned earlier the idea to open a Lab was a good fit with the WIL course in the new BA and the timing was perfect with the proposed introduction of the WIL course.

Setting up the physical and digital space of the GLAM^x Lab had a few challenges. An opportunity arose when the space was available to set up the Lab in a room that was previously a student study area, large enough to accommodate 10 WIL students. This also meant there were 10 computers available and desks were assembled from other sections of the library. The student computers were re-assigned as 'staff' computers so they had a wider range of functionality including access to the digital storage drives, and this took some negotiating with IT Services because many of the computers were towards the end of their leases. There were many other IT issues to be resolved, such as organising student access to the Library's shared drive for storing digitised sources.

It was important that students were in a safe work environment. The Lab is situated on a different level of the Library to Cultural Collections and practicums and the coordinator was mindful to make sure students were familiar with the general work culture and protocols

of working in an archive – access to and use of archives also needed to be negotiated and managed. Each project provides opportunities for issues of privacy and confidentiality to be discussed and many of the students appreciated putting into practice knowledge about ethics, protocols and professional practice. WIL students were given an induction to the Library, introduced to staff and generally regarded as work colleagues, often invited to meetings and more informal occasions, such as morning teas.

Another issue that continues to be challenging is how to negotiate working across disciplines and faculties. As mentioned there have been many WIL students from Humanities, and it has been relatively straightforward organising projects for them. However, attempting to get academics from other disciplines, such as Communications, Science and Health as just a few examples, will take some time. One strategy is to network where possible to introduce key UON staff to the GLAM^x Lab and make links to their area of research and work.

A major challenge was creating an engaging logo for the GLAM^x Lab that was unique for this new initiative, and could be adopted through the University's marketing and brand. We wanted a logo that reflected a colourful and inviting GLAM persona bringing glamour to the usual historical 'black and white' of the past, adding the 'razzle dazzle' of something new and exciting. The UON changed its branding and identity in 2017 and we knew there would be significant challenges in getting the University's marketing department to approve a logo that was so far removed from that of the official brand. Our preferred GLAM^x Lab logo design was eventually adopted with support from the initiative's champions.

It is important that students from all backgrounds feel encouraged and supported, a responsibility of all the staff in Cultural Collections, and particularly that of the coordinator. Our students come from a diverse range of socio-economic, cultural and disability backgrounds to gain new experiences and skills relevant to the GLAM sector. A challenge has been encouraging Indigenous Australian students to participate, ensuring that their WIL course coordinators are aware of the facility, its initiatives and scope, so that they can encourage their students to undertake practicums there. We have adopted a policy of introducing the Lab to all from the community, welcoming elders to visit, families, groups and individuals to come along and see it, experience it and participate. This process will need time to gain the trust of the elders and the wider community of which they form a part and guide.

Student feedback

Many students provided testimonials after their practicums, and 40% of them continued in the Lab as volunteers. Here is one student's testimonial.

Earlier this year I completed a work placement at UON's Cultural Collections as part of the HUMA3003 class. Undertaking the placement was a really rewarding experience. It was great to put the knowledge and skills I've been learning throughout my degree into practice. I also learnt a number of useful skills such as editing an oral history and uploading files to Sound Cloud and WordPress. It was great to build networks with others who have similar interests and to get an idea of the type of work I may be able to undertake once I have finished my degree. (May 2017) (B.S.)

Key factors for success

In summary, the key factors for success of the GLAM^x Lab to date are:

- flexibility for students;
- diverse experiences/skills;
- access to specialists and community leaders;
- projects are meaningful to students;
- collaboration to overcome organisational barriers to new initiatives.

Conclusion

The GLAM^x Lab is increasingly fostering cultural change within the UON Library, and across schools and faculties. Staff at the Library are showing interest in the work done in the Lab, with some volunteering in their own time to gain new skills. Many of the students who undertook practicums continue to volunteer. New students have also volunteered, bringing with them new sets of skills not usually seen in the GLAM sector. In late 2017 a geology student worked on the Deep Time project and his expertise has been invaluable in identifying geology types of the Indigenous Australian artefacts. This is crucial information and metadata that can be included about each artefact in the digital platform. These students from a wider range of disciplines are going back to their faculties and discussing the work they are doing in the GLAM^x Lab with colleagues and educators. This provides more people across the University with a better understanding of what the GLAM^x Lab is about and the opportunities that exist for students in terms of experiences that will enhance their employability.

Endnotes

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6. *Hunter Living Histories – University of Newcastle (Australia)*, 'Congratulations to Dr Ann Hardy and Peter Langton 2017 UON Industry Award Recipients', 16 November 2017, available at <<https://hunterlivinghistories.com/2017/11/16/2017-industry-awards/>>, accessed 15 January 2018.

7. Projects undertaken by WIL students in the GLAM^x Lab are available on the Hunter Living Histories – University of Newcastle (Australia) website, available at <https://hunterlivinghistories.com/category/glamx/>, accessed 31 January 2018.
8. University of Newcastle's Living Histories@UON digital platform, available at <http://livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au/>, accessed 31 January 2018.

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Notes on contributors

Gionni Di Gravio is University Archivist at the University of Newcastle, Chair of the Hunter Living Histories (formerly Coal River Working Party) and Councillor of the Australian Society of Archivists. Over the past 20 years he has used emerging and evolving technologies to connect people with historic records and archives, across time and space. He is very committed to forging links across more than 50,000 years of Aboriginal Australian culture and human expression in all its forms and formats, with the aim of creating a new meta-science merging Renaissance Western science with Aboriginal wisdom and connection to land, for a better future.

Ann Hardy is an Historian and Living Histories Co-ordinator at the University of Newcastle's Cultural Collections GLAM^x Lab. She has a strong commitment to historical and archival research, collaborating with communities and cultural groups to develop new knowledge. Her key research areas are Newcastle's 'Coal River', history of madness and asylums in Australia, and health and welfare history. She has an interest in Aboriginal culture, rock art and the association between cultural heritage and well-being.