

## **The Connecticut State Museum of Natural History and the Office of State Archaeology Academic Plan Statement, 2009-2014**

As a member of the UConn community, the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History and the Office of State Archaeology (OSA) are part of a long academic tradition. In the 1980s, CSMNH and OSA were created by acts of state legislation championed by UConn faculty with a strong vision of the contributions a state-mandated natural history museum could make within the state and on campus. The Museum was originally established as an independent unit on the Storrs campus, and line item on the state budget, but over the years our relationship to the University has evolved and refined—and today the CSMNH and OSA are part of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) at UConn. Since 2005, the Connecticut Archaeology Center (CAC) has been a dedicated unit within the Museum focused on public education services that support the work of OSA.

While located within a University school/college, our operational structure is more similar to a small public museum than a typical academic department. The Museum's mission is defined by three objectives common to museums: 1) to preserve our collections, 2) to promote research that benefits from our collections, and 3) to use our collections to teach people about the cultural and natural history of Connecticut. CSMNH/OSA is identified by law as the official repository for the state's collection of over 600,000 anthropological specimens, which represent the single largest repository of Connecticut Native American, colonial and industrial artifacts in existence. The materials housed at UConn document over 11,000 years of Connecticut's past. Many of the artifacts are one-of-a-kind, representing a last link to our early cultural heritage. We are also home to significant educational natural history collections, including the Henry S. Budney Collection of more than 115 high-quality vertebrate mounts, and the A. J. Carpenter Collection of moths and butterflies from around the world, among many others. CSMNH/OSA is charged with both the conservation of these collections, to ensure their continued physical preservation, and their curation, to make sure the information they contain is systematically organized and readily usable by researchers and educators at UConn and beyond.

In many ways, it is the differences in our mission and operation within a University school/college that allow us to make unique and important contributions to the University's Academic Plan. As our relationship with the University has deepened, our educational and administrative approach has evolved too, making the CSMNH and OSA a more integrated member of the UConn community.

### **Mission & Values**

UConn's current top ranking as a public university has been built from a combination of two important academic traditions. As a research institution, the University strives for excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship in order to build on the body of human knowledge. As a land and sea grant institution UConn strives to make that knowledge do work and improve the quality of life for the people of Connecticut and beyond. As the University strives to improve its performance in teaching, research, and service, in order to emerge as one of the top-20 public universities in the nation, it increasingly recognizes the importance of collaboration and an interdisciplinary approach to learning as one of the most powerful methods to generate new ways of understanding the world and improve people's quality of life.

CSMNH models its educational mission under the same ideals. We believe that concepts and facts of environmental science better contribute to real-world problem solving when they are communicated in a broader cultural context, where their social, economic, legal, and ethical implications can be considered. Stated more succinctly in the Museum's strategic plan, "CSMNH explores how the natural history of southern New England has shaped, and continues to shape the people who live here—and how, in turn, people have shaped natural history." In our exhibits and programming we have explored such themes as the natural history of health, the natural history of work, the natural history of food, and the natural history of shopping. We take this approach because: 1) it presents the facts of science in a way that raises pertinent questions in people's minds about their relationship to the environment; 2) it promotes critical thinking and allows people to be more effective participants in our civic democracy; 3) it allows the museum to better serve and support a much broader array of departments on campus than the approach of a traditional natural history museum.

## **Core Academic Goals & Museum Support Mechanisms**

### **Undergraduate, Graduate, & Professional Education**

- Between our permanent exhibits, our research anthropology collection, and our natural history teaching collections, we offer access to teaching resources for faculty, staff and students available nowhere else. Our facilities have been actively used by faculty from Agriculture and Natural Resources, Anthropology, Chemistry, Cooperative Extension, Dodd Research Center, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Education, Fine Arts, Geography, History, Plant Science, and others.
- The State Archaeologist serves as an adjunct faculty member in the Anthropology Department, and teaches large introductory survey courses, independent studies, and serves on graduate committees.
- The Director is involved in a variety of student service activities, and has taught First Year Experience courses on University Collections and Museums with Directors at the Dodd and Benton Museums.
- As a complete functional unit, the Museum manages its own marketing, membership services, collections management, program development, and exhibit design and production-- all in-house. We have served as an ideal hands-on, real-world learning laboratory for hundreds of students, representing almost every college and school in the University system. Opportunities to learn at the Museum include independent studies, internships, student employment, work-study, and volunteer experiences.
- The Museum funds and houses numerous endowments designed to offer undergraduate and graduate students small grants to further their research in the environmental sciences.
- As K-12 outreach is a significant sector of our audience, the Museum is an important first conduit for young students to the university experience. Through Museum sponsored programs such as Kids are Scientist Too and the State Archaeologist High School Mentoring program we offer prospective students the opportunity to encounter and imagine first-hand the possibilities of a college education.
- Off campus, CSMNH/OSA has offered professional development courses for a variety of audiences. Examples include high school teacher training in the environmental sciences, crime scene forensic techniques for Connecticut State Police, and underwater archaeological field techniques for professional and avocational divers.

### **Research & Scholarship**

- CSMNH/OSA manages three one-of-a-kind resources that are used extensively by students, faculty, and professional researchers at UConn and from across the country: 1) The UConn Archaeology/Anthropology Collections are the single largest repository of Connecticut archaeological artifacts in existence, representing almost every town in the state. 2) The Archaeology Site Files & Maps document over 5,000 known archaeological sites existing in Connecticut. Much of the site data has been transferred to the computerized Geographical Information System (GIS), where it can be correlated with existing GIS topographic and environmental information including soil types, slope, proximity to water sources, exposed bedrock and vegetation patterns. 3) The Archaeology Library houses over 8,000 volumes including monographs, textbooks, journals, CRM reports, and newsletters. The Archaeology Library is a lending library and is part of the UConn Library system.
- OSA conducts ongoing research projects which include field excavations, laboratory analysis, document research, and the publishing and presentation of results. These projects are often done in collaboration with other departments on campus, local towns, non-profits, other Universities, and Native American communities in an effort to defray costs and expand the reach and impact of the research.
- OSA actively uses the state's growing body of archaeological data to help constituents solve real-world problems. These efforts include: consulting with private developers to review development projects and to make recommendations that help preserve archaeological sites; providing technical assistance to help municipal officials develop local laws to protect their cultural resources; assisting Native American communities to identify and preserve sacred sites, including burial grounds, and provides for proper handling of Native American skeletal remains, in keeping with native reburials traditions; working with private non-profit organizations, such as land trusts and local historical organizations, to identify and help preserve cultural resources under their charge; and consulting with State Medical Examiners Office and local and state law enforcement agencies to provide technical assistance with skeletal remains older than 50 years.

### **Diversity**

- CSMNH/OSA adds a unique perspective to the experience of human diversity on campus: we examine the variety of human culture *over time*. When looked at over thousands of years, the immense diversity of the human experience, even within the relatively small footprint of Connecticut, becomes a powerful tool for understanding the trajectory of our culture today, and allows us the opportunity to make more informed choices going into the future.

### **Public Engagement**

- Perhaps the most visible contribution CSMNH/OSA makes to UConn academics is as a powerful outlet for outreach and public engagement. The Museum is a substantial public education vehicle for CLAS faculty and the broader University. We have worked hard to create an educational context for the research and scholarship generated at UConn that helps make it relevant and useful to the people of Connecticut. We have crafted a multidisciplinary approach to our educational message that connects to academic objectives within every UConn school and college. Through our workshops, lectures, exhibits, media services, professional development and technical assistance programs we offer UConn faculty, staff and students venues that get their work out in front of the public. Through large public events, such as the internationally-recognized CT State BioBlitz, we have worked with UConn faculty and students to develop high-profile educational initiatives with long-lasting impact and use in communities all across the state.
- Our Director is a member of the Provost's Public Engagement Executive Committee, a committee chair for the University Public Engagement Forum, and has served on various committees working on UConn-wide Outreach and Engagement efforts, including the Academic Plan's Public Engagement working group.

### **Administrative Structure, Capital Infrastructure & Budgeting**

- CSMNH/OSA takes seriously the responsibility to be as financially self-sufficient as possible. Up to 20% of staff salaries and 100% of our operating expenses and student grant programs have been paid for through Museum program revenue and private fundraising. Our educational programming is designed to be revenue generating and increasingly self-sufficient. All of our permanent, temporary and traveling exhibits are produced and maintained through grants and/or private funding. Major building renovations costs have, at a minimum, been matched by Museum generated funds through private donations.

### **Conclusion**

As a small UConn unit, with a limited direct undergraduate teaching role and an operational structure not typical in an academic environment, our contribution to the University's Academic Plan is significant and notable. On campus we offer learning resources and opportunities than can be found nowhere else, that have served thousands of undergraduate and graduate students. Beyond campus, our ability to successfully engage the general public in the work of the University has a new quantitative value as the goals and metrics for public engagement are more fully integrated into the University's measures for advancement.