Introduction

The Linfield Anthropology Museum (LAM) is run by the SoAn department of Linfield College. It was created in the late 1980s, mainly by a group of dedicated students, with the help of Joel Marriott, a professor of Anthropology. This theme of being student-led has continued to this day, where students work to create exhibits, either for classes or as an honors thesis. It got its start from boxes of objects that had been donated to the college and has grown substantially to include collections of class artifacts and fully-fledged exhibit space that is open to the public.

How do small academic museums, like the Linfield Anthropology Museum, interact and engage with their community, and in what ways is the community impacted and benefitted by the museum? I used a chronological approach, examining how the community interacted with the museum over time. This is because the museum’s founding and development correspond with a shift in museum thought towards a more community-oriented perspective, and this change could have an impact on the LAM as well.

Continuity and Change: The Linfield Experience (1996) This exhibit created by students in 1996, was one of the early instances of community engagement. They traced how the school changed over time, from the rules and regulations that the students had to follow to the role of religious and organizations in their lives. Through this exhibit, the museum was trying to engage and unite the wider community of the college as a whole, by choosing a topic that they could relate to and that was relevant to their lives.

In 2000, the museum transitioned to a new location, moving from a small enclosed room to glass cases in the hallway and main entrance of the building. It was no longer behind a door where someone had to go looking for it to see the exhibits, now people would encounter it every day, no matter what. The International Programs office has a wall entirely made up of one of the cases, visible from both sides. Prospect's students use it when they come through on tours of campus, and the current students and staff pass by it every time they enter or leave the building. According to the people involved with the transition, there were some hesitations about the transition to a less centralized and contained space (Joel Marrant, interview, 27 September 2017), however, the outside community feels that this new space is much more open and that they can engage with it much more than before. The fact that prospective students see the museum as they go to tours of the campus is significant, as one student said that her decision to come to Linfield was highly influenced by seeing the museum when she went on a campus tour.

Conclusion

The Linfield Anthropology Museum, although it existed prior, really came into being in 1991, when a building renovation gave it its own exhibit space. Before this point, the community that the museum was involved with was mainly students and teachers involved in the Sociology and Anthropology department that were working with the objects. It was behind a solid door, in a small room with only a single window. The internal community of the museum really enjoyed having a space of its own, as it allowed them to completely transform the space into whatever they wanted and gave them a place to all work together to create something. However, it was also limiting. In this location, both the museum and its community were isolated. Thomas Love, a professor of Anthropology, said that Although there was signage and it was a public space, “you had to intentionally go into it, it wasn’t very public,ibly enough” (T. Love, Skype interview, 18 March 2018). The earliest exhibits created by the museum were not very focused on the museum, choosing rather to show the various collections that were a part of the museum.

The exhibits show the specific ways that the community and the museum have interacted over the years, through responses to questions asked by the museum and incorporated into exhibits in the case of the time capsule exhibit and the cube as “Unreasonably Human” and reminders of shared identity and history, as with “Continuity and Change” and “Donations and Discoveries.” This shared identity, which the museum can remind the community of through exhibits, has the potential to make the outside community more united, especially if the museum continues to follow the shift and focus on the community.