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Scope Shift: Cultivating Opportunity and Building Constituencies: Forays in Copyright, Fellowships, and Internships

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Abstract

Visual Resource Centers have sustained dramatic change over the last decade. In the age of Google and internet image searches, image curators and other visual resource professionals have often found themselves in the uncomfortable position of defending their *raison d'etre*. Those arguments, persuasive and otherwise, impact the long-term, if not permanent, decision making that directly affects access to institutional support for individual research and pedagogy. This paper addresses specific strategies undertaken by the Visual Resource Collection (VRC) in the Department of Art History at the University of California, Riverside, that preempt the need for making such an argument. By cultivating mission transformative opportunities that both anticipate and embrace a shifting scope of work, the VRC has strengthened relationships with its existing core constituency while successfully broadening its service targets. The implementation of copyright research and image licensing workflows, the creation of a funded graduate fellowship, and the development of a credit-bearing undergraduate internship contribute to the understanding of the VRC as a unique resource that strives to provide added value to the department.

Author Bio & Acknowledgements

As the Visual Resources Curator for the department of Art History, at the University of California, Riverside, Sonja Sekely-Rowland directs the activities of the Visual Resources Collection. As an image professional, her work at her UCR is focused on supporting research and pedagogy through the evaluation and expansion of digital assets and analog image collections, improved accessibility to digital collections, development of new programming initiatives, community engagement and outreach, and copyright research and education. Before joining UCR in 2014, Sonja spent five years at Drew University as the Curator of Visual Resources. Prior to that, she spent over 15 years in advertising production where she was responsible for overseeing the commission, production, and reproduction of commercial art for global clients such as IBM, Philip Morris, Dow Jones, and M&M Mars among others. Her expertise includes worldwide negotiation and licensing of artwork across print and electronic media. Sonja holds a Masters degree in Art History from Brooklyn College where she specialized in nineteenth and early-twentieth photography. Her current areas of interest include issues surrounding intellectual property, metadata, and geospatial data.

Visual Resource Centers have sustained dramatic change over the last decade. In the age of Google and internet image searches, image curators and other visual resource professionals have often found themselves in the position of defending their *raison d'etre*. Those arguments, persuasive or otherwise, impact the long-term, if not permanent, decision making that directly affects access to institutional support for individual research and pedagogy. This paper addresses specific strategies undertaken by the Visual Resource Collection (VRC) in the Department of Art History at the University of California, Riverside, that preempt the need for making such an argument. By cultivating mission-transformative opportunities that both anticipate and embrace a shifting scope of work, the VRC has strengthened relationships with its existing core constituency while successfully broadening its service targets.

For as long as institutional memory serves, the Visual Resource Collection has enjoyed its role as a central service unit of the Department of Art History.[1] During that time, and under the careful stewardship of its previous curator of twenty-five years, the VRC was transitioned from a slide library to a fully functioning digital imaging center. Decades of hand-written records were transferred to a relational database, many thousands of slides representing the pedagogical priorities of the faculty were culled and commercially digitized, and lengths were taken to articulate the needs of an ever-changing digital workflow. Great strides had been made to keep current with changing technologies by addressing more than digitization; a large investment had also been made in providing the faculty with online access to the growing digitized collection.

Notwithstanding these milestone achievements, a number of flags were cause for concern. By early 2014, the VRC had been directed to deaccession nearly its entire slide collection.[2] As part of that process, fifty percent of the VRC's footprint was reallocated to create a graduate study lounge. The number of employees had been reduced to two full-time equivalents (FTEs), and hardware and software had both reached their lifespan. There was a worrisome lack of traffic in the physical space: weeks would quietly pass with only email communication or the occasional delivery of materials for scanning. As challenging as the situation proved, the greatest concern was that, of the ten full-time faculty in the department,[3] only two made consistent use of VRC services, with another five faculty making only the occasional request. Three faculty members rarely used, or had stopped using, VRC services altogether.

For any business enterprise, not meeting the needs of thirty percent of a customer base shows significant underperformance. To better understand the forces driving behavior, in-person interviews were conducted across department faculty. These interviews provided key insights into imaging habits and the dwindling collaboration with the VRC. Of particular interest were the responses of the three department members who chose not to make use of VRC services citing: already possessing all of the images needed; a lack of support for video; and the use of personal photography coupled with materials found on the internet. Other respondents cited lengthy turnaround times; even the most robust users of VRC services cited the availability of high quality images on the internet as a main reason for bypassing the unit.

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[1] The Citrus Experiment Station, the forebear of the University of California, Riverside, first opened in 1907. Legislation was passed in 1948 authorizing the UC to open a Riverside campus. Ground was broken in 1952 with classes being first offered in 1954. It is believed that the earliest donation of visual materials was received in or around 1954, thus establishing the VRC. <www.ucr.edu/about/timeline.html>

[2] At its largest, the VRC's slide collection surpassed 150,000 assets, perhaps nearing 200,000. By 2014, the majority of the collection had been deaccessioned reducing the number of slide assets to roughly 9000 images of Asian art and architecture.

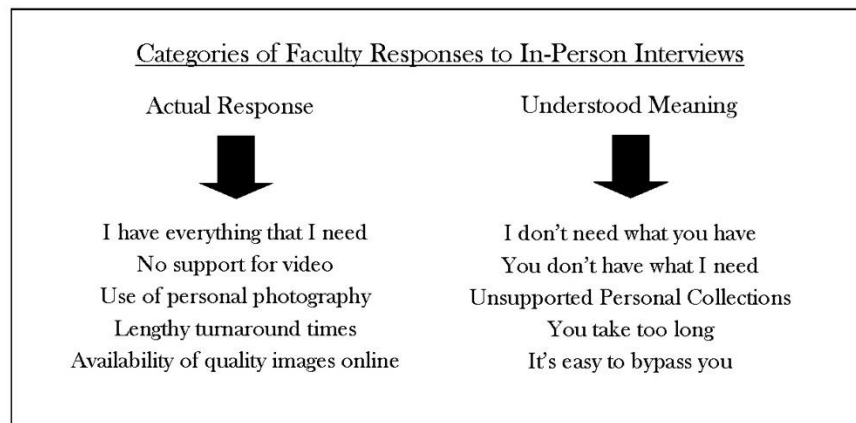[3] The number of department faculty has since grown to twelve.

Fig. 1: Results from in-person interviews with department faculty conducting during the fall of 2014.

The responses were troubling and indicated that many in the department did not consider themselves beneficiaries of a resource dedicated to providing them direct support. The results confirmed that the VRC needed to change its priorities. Historically the predominant focus of, and investment in, the VRC had been the production of images in support of pedagogy. By 2014 that focus had organically begun to expand. However, areas of expansion were reactionary in nature and lacked a comprehensive strategy that addressed protecting the resources of the department[4] against obsolescence, perceived or real.

As a service center, it was imperative that the VRC be re-conceptualized such to (re)build equity among its core constituents through the development of initiatives intended to support the faculty in entirely new ways. A second imperative included re-focusing outreach with the goal of encompassing a broader constituency by cultivating meaningful engagement with all members of the department, students and staff included, and by building connections with the larger campus community and beyond. An important first step in meeting these goals was accepting that the demand for traditional image production and acquisition was forever changed through online image search. Rather than adopting a defensive position that laments the pitfalls of internet image search while advocating for greater visual literacy, the VRC would embrace a growth mindset channeling its newly found freedom to pursue opportunities that were mission transformative.

A comprehensive self-study in the form of a SWOT analysis[5] was prepared and formally presented to the department. The SWOT analysis allowed the whole of the department to share an understanding of how leveraging the strengths and individual expertise within the unit could produce a re-envisioned support center. Attention was paid to a variety of possible new services that augmented benefits across the faculty with particular care dedicated to identifying and developing opportunities to engage with those who were most underserved by the VRC. Strategically coordinating the development of new initiatives to target the thirty percent of faculty who were least engaged was an important demonstration of the determination to reach those who had become disconnected from the existing

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[4] A loose consideration of department resources includes FTEs, square footage, physical collections, digital collections including corresponding databases and associated metadata, and continued access to existing digital collections.

[5] SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. SWOT analyses are strategic tools used to identify internal strengths and weaknesses while understanding external opportunities and threats. As a strategic tool, the internal/external elements of the SWOT analysis were modified to better suit the business model of the VRC.

resource. The resulting message was clear: the VRC is actively developing programs to provide each member of the department with individualized support.
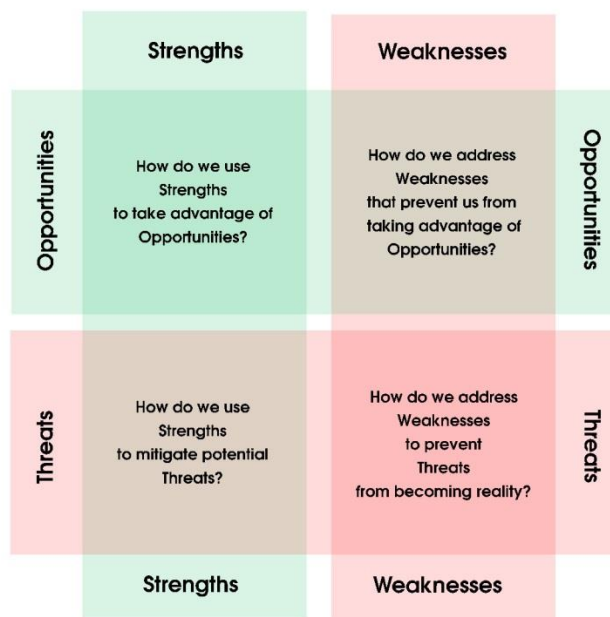

Fig. 2: Template for a SWOT Analysis modified to reflect the VRC model as a unit within an academic department.

Of equal concern was the need to guard against a second reallocation of resources. Though the 2014 reallocation maintained resources within art history, the decision to redirect staff salaries from the VRC clearly signaled that administrative leadership felt greater value could be realized elsewhere in the department. In his book, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*, Robert Dickeson provides strategies for institutions of higher learning to address competing demands for limited resources.[6] Dickeson makes the case for fiscal reform citing, in part, a "growing incongruence between the academic programs offered and the resources required to mount them", and that "the most likely source for needed resources is reallocation of existing resources, from weakest to strongest programs".[7] Ultimately, Dickeson suggests that academic programs be assessed and then ranked against each other with the weakest programs and units being slated for reduction, consolidation, or dissolution.[8] Taken at face value, it's not inconceivable to imagine a scenario whereby smaller departments or programs score more poorly based upon the number of majors they graduate, specific graduate outcomes, or number of credit hours generated per FTE.[9]

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[6] See: Dickeson, Robert C. and USA Group Foundation. Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance. San Francisco: Joss-Bass Publishers, 1999.

[7] Dickeson lists seven ''postulates'' for making the case for reform. The above citations reference nos. 4 and 6 respectively. For a comprehensive list, see Dickeson, p. 10.

[8] Ibid., p. 88.

[9] See Dickeson, Chapter 5: Selecting Appropriate Criteria. In particular, see: Criterion 5 and Criterion 6, pp. 66-68.

Dickeson: Categories of Criteria Used in Program Evaluation

- History, Development, and Expectations of the Program
- External Demand for the Program
- Internal Demand for the Program
- Quality of Program Inputs and Processes
- Quality of Program Outcomes
- Size, Scope and Productivity of the Program
- Revenue and Other Resources Generated by the Program
- Costs and Other Expenses Associated with the Program
- Impact, Justification and Overall Essentiality of the Program
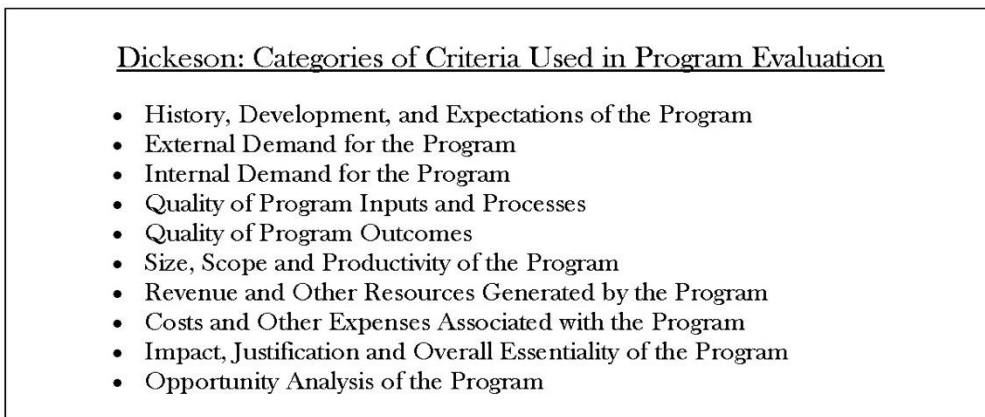- Opportunity Analysis of the Program

Fig 3: Categories of criteria proposed by Dickeson for the evaluation of academic programs and services. See: Dickeson, Robert C., and USA Group Foundation. Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance. San Francisco: Joss-Bass Publishers, 1999. p. 54.

With this in mind, the VRC reformulated much of the hypothetical assessment criteria offered by Dickeson into a basis for performing a critical evaluation of its own mission. Two questions were pivotal in developing internal criteria: First, how should the VRC define discrete programs internal to its own operation? Second, how should the VRC define the constituent groups responsible for generating external demand for its programs?[10] These exercises proved vital in visualizing the mission of the VRC where internal programs are understood as vertically aligned initiatives that interweave against a broad background of external constituencies.

Mission Evaluation: Protecting Against Reallocation

Critical Question #1

How to define discrete internal programs

Critical Question #2

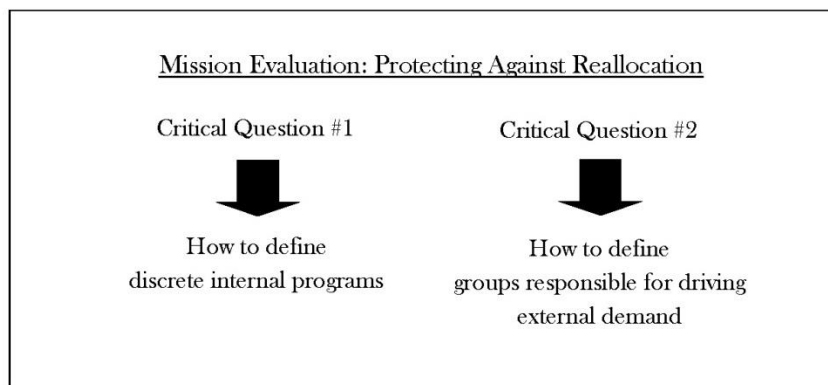How to define groups responsible for driving external demand

Fig. 4: Critical questions intended to define discrete internal programming and identify potential sources of external demand for VRC services.

The initial answers to the assessment questions were lackluster. Recalling that fifty percent of the department asked very little of the VRC with another thirty percent responsible for virtually no external demand, it was abundantly clear that defending two FTEs from future reallocation would become increasingly difficult. Indeed, there did appear a growing incongruence between the needs of the department and the resources allocated to the VRC.

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[10] See Dickeson, Chapter 5: Selecting Appropriate Criteria. In particular, see: Criterion 2 and Criterion 3, pp. 60-62.

In response, the VRC set forth to engineer transformative shifts in programming intended to drive external demand from a broader audience. Students, both graduate and undergraduate, are now considered independent groups requiring customized outreach. Likewise, the department as an administrative unit is considered a unique entity deserving active support. Department staff members have been included as a target group whom the VRC can collegially support through the sharing of expertise. Adjunct lecturers comprise an important newly targeted group with outreach intended to enhance their sense belonging within the department. Beyond the department, expanded constituencies include the campus-community at large, more broadly the UC system in general and, for the first time, acknowledgment of the general public as a unique constituent with whom the VRC should seek to independently engage**.**
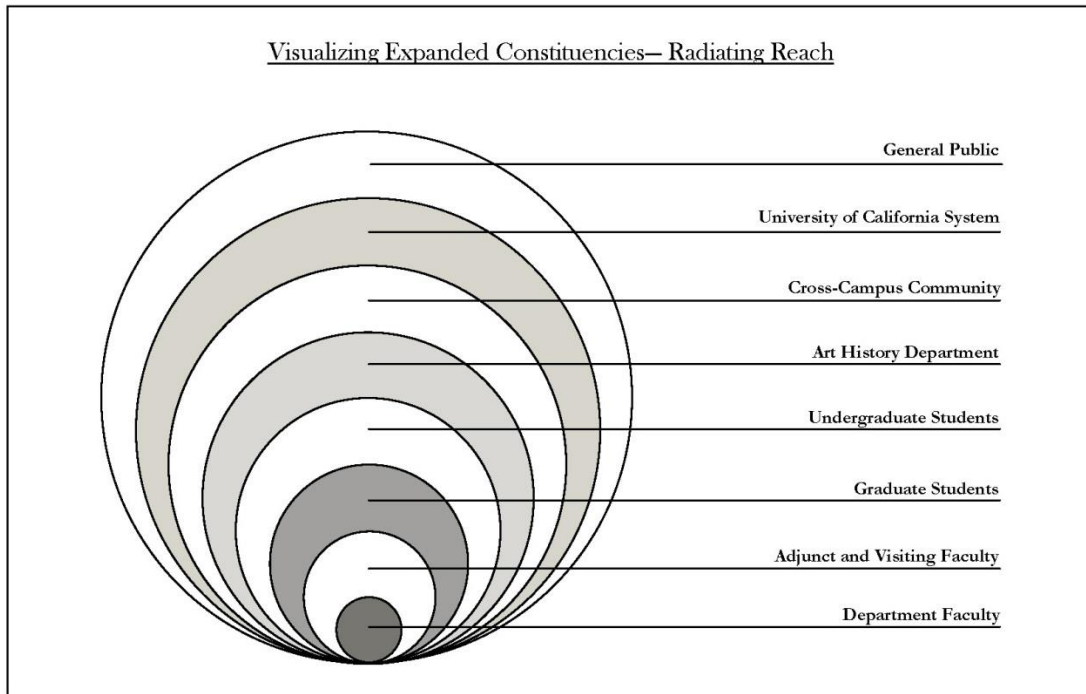

Fig. 5: Constituencies defined to achieve expanded reach with the expressed goal of developing new external demand.

With discrete constituencies thus defined, each new program was then deliberately designed to maximize an interwoven connectedness. Three highly successful programming shifts for the VRC include the implementation of copyright research and image licensing workflows, the creation of a funded graduate fellowship, and the development of a credit-bearing undergraduate internship. Each of these initiatives maps to the established goals by satisfying the dual criteria of placing the VRC in direct service of expanded user groups through new, inventive means.
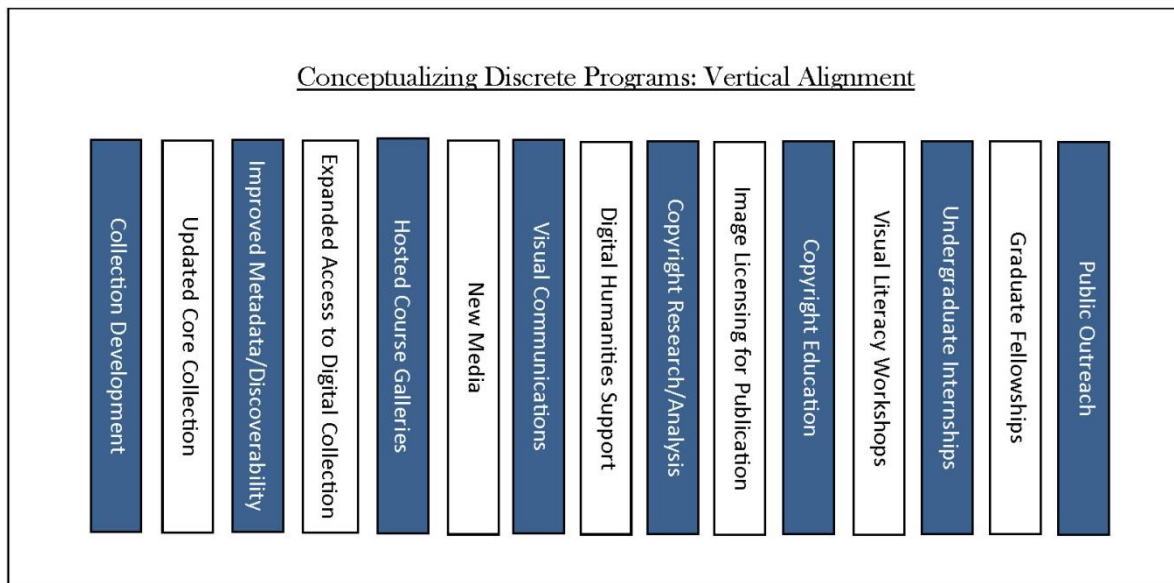
Fig. 6: Discrete programming visualized as vertically aligned.

As a service initiative, copyright research and image licensing has proven to be in high demand providing a steady stream of work throughout the academic year. The specificity of the support varies, reflecting the needs of the author and the nature of the publication. At its simplest, the VRC will locate vendors, negotiate licensing, commission new photography, and handle payments to licensors. Often the work is more complex and involves an evaluation of the rights status for each intended illustration. Where an image may be protected, the VRC will recommend on its use, conduct in-depth research to source alternate materials, and correspond with individual owners of intellectual property to clear rights. And while the VRC makes no warranty on the use of any material, where appropriate, the VRC will provide faculty with a written rationale detailing the framework analysis used in the determination of copyright status, and the steps taken to either clear an image or to claim its use as fair. As a matter of record keeping, the VRC will also provide faculty and publishers with copies of all documentation and pertinent correspondence related to clearing rights.

Since formalizing the service, the VRC has provided support to two-thirds of department faculty. Part of the success of the initiative resides in reaching that portion of the faculty who characterized their lack of engagement with the VRC by citing *"I don't need what you have."*[11] By interpreting that response as a direct challenge to craft programming that connects with the work of every faculty member, the VRC has improved its engagement percentages while strengthening individual relationships with department faculty.

The credit-bearing undergraduate internship in visual resources is, in fact, a re-inauguration of a long-overlooked opportunity already in the course catalog. After a seventeen-year hiatus, the reintroduction of a new avenue of department-sponsored pre-professional development was welcomed. One well-received variation of the practicum "relaunch" involves the re-imagined internship as a hybrid position that offers a dual purpose: expose the intern to the core concepts that surround the organization and management of digital collections, while providing an opportunity for the intern to work exclusively with the personal image collection of a faculty member whose area of scholarship reflects the interests of the student. The synthetic nature of the hybrid ''visual resources/research assistant" position benefits all

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[11] See Figure 1.

involved: student, faculty member, and VRC. The student receives academic credit, builds practical VR skills, and advances their study by performing research in their field of interest; the faculty member benefits through the processing of their personal collection, and by realizing a deeper engagement with an undergraduate student — one that is oftentimes difficult to foster in the classroom alone. The VRC benefits through a focused expansion of its collection, and through meeting its pre-stated goal of building and connecting new constituencies.

The establishment of credit-bearing internship in visual resources is an important marker of the VRCs role within the department. Not only does the internship help the department meet the increasing demand to assist students in developing pre-professional skills, it also underscores the relevance of the VR practicum to numerous professional opportunities that exist in the cultural heritage institutions where our discipline hopes to place its graduates. More so, the offer of a credit-bearing internship aids the VRC in directly responding to one of Dickeson's assessment benchmarks (and perhaps the most elusive for a service unit): the number of credit hours generated per FTE.[12]

Similar to the undergraduate internship, yet broader in responsibility and autonomy, the graduate fellowship provides a unique opportunity to fully process an 'at-risk' collection of original slide material. Graciously funded by the Gluck Fellows Program of the Arts at UCR, the GluckGlobal Fellow works exclusively on a collaboration between UC Riverside, UC Santa Barbara, and the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) through the Color Film Emergency Project (CFEP).[13] The GluckGlobal Fellowship is a year-long appointment with highly structured goals set for each term that culminate with the publication of selected resources to SAHARA[14] and the publicly accessible Shared Shelf Commons. Throughout the year-long appointment, VRC staff works in consultation with the GluckGlobal Fellows to support best practices, provide technical support, and ensure that overarching program goals stipulated by the funding agreement are met.

Conceived with the expressed intent of placing the VRC in service of graduate art history students, the GluckGlobal fellowship reaches a remarkably wide range of constituents exemplifying the interwoven connectedness sought in the initial reconceptualization of the VRC. Beyond the connection forged with our graduate students, the fellowship engages the VRC cross-campus, across the UC system, to external agencies, with independent collection contributors and, through the publishing of open-content material, to the general public. From an assessment point of view, the graduate fellowship operates in a manner similar to the undergraduate internship insofar as it improves the hypothetical scoring in Dickeson's self-evaluation model. Though not awarding credit hours per se, the GluckGlobal Fellowship does provide financial aid and thus assists the art history department in supporting its current students while helping to attract prospective enrollments. Considered together, these two initiatives are strong drivers of external demand.

The successful implementation of the three initiatives discussed herein is owed to a number of factors. First, acceptance that traditional image production and acquisition is no longer a central function of the VRC, but rather resides alongside other vertical programming was a key acknowledgment. How image professionals characterize their relationship with traditional practices — expansive, reductive, or

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[12] The awarding of credit hours vis-à-vis the VRC internship also aids the department in increasing the overall number of credit hours awarded without placing additional demands on faculty teaching loads.

[13] Excerpted from Society of Architectural Historian's draft mission statement: "[The Color Film Emergency Project] emerged from the realization that numerous, valuable 35mm slide collections created and amassed by 20th century scholars, preservationists, design practitioners and photographers of the built environment are threatened with loss, destruction, and environmental damage. Some of the factors threatening these collections are the obsolescence of the medium for teaching; the advancing age, and retirement, of the creators; and lack of appropriate storage. The SAH, through the CFEP, recognizes the importance of this part of 20th century intellectual history and documentation, and aims to facilitate its preservation, digitization, and access."

[14] Society of Architectural Historians Architecture Resources Archive

otherwise — underpins how we value and respond to a shifting scope of work. Next, having clear vision of the unit's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) was a crucial step in developing an executable growth strategy and was paramount in the VRC's ability to cultivate relevant service opportunities that connect to broad constituencies. Additionally, the support of the faculty in the department of art history cannot be overstated. Their guidance, enthusiasm, and willingness to advocate on behalf of the VRC has been unwavering, and has provided a constant source of inspiration as the VRC overcame obstacles and jumped through many a hoop while piloting individual programs.

The implementation of copyright research and image-licensing workflows, the creation of a funded graduate fellowship, and the development of a credit-bearing undergraduate internship have each contributed to the understanding of the VRC as a unique resource that strives to provide added value to the department. Importantly, implementation of these new services offers the department new, innovative ways of quantifying the impact, and thereby justifying the overall essentiality, of its own internal resources. Moreover, the commitment to these new platforms for supporting scholarship and pedagogy assist the department in fulfilling its obligation of meeting many of the strategic goals set forth by the University, including advancement of academic excellence, enhancement of student opportunity, a strengthened sense of community, and creation of meaningful engagement. In all, the ability to demonstrate tangible connections between mission and outcomes serves as the foremost rationale for preserving current levels of institutional support while providing a highly persuasive argument for future increased investment.