

NEW DIRECTIONS

The Director Writes

The students who come to the Museum as the most distinguished cultural resource on Campus are welcome and fortunate, as I wrote last time. Those who work here, who take classes, work in laboratories, go to lectures, and pursue their research do so in an incomparable setting which brings them into daily contact with the achievements of those very cultures to which they are devoting part or all their working lives. Where else can a freshman, learning for the first time of the origins of civilized life, walk in moments from the classroom, as did my own Freshman Seminar a few days ago, to stand before the treasures of the royal tombs of Ur?

The University Museum's special responsibility towards its 'own' students provides a particular challenge. We are already working with a dozen different departments of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and the range of contacts is expanding. Yet we cannot claim we are really as well set up as we should be to accommodate research students working on our collections. The ideal is to have study rooms for each section, where objects can be brought by the collections staff, and where they can be examined in good light, in reasonable comfort, and with the essential books of reference immediately to hand.

Some of the laboratories already answer this description, although they tend to be fully used in processing recent (and not so recent) excavated materials. What is needed, in the context of which I am thinking here, is rather places where the reserve collections can be made readily, securely, and comfortably accessible—much as in the reading rooms of any great library or archive. By and large, people don't work in book stacks or archive vaults, nor should they work in the usually much more difficult conditions of museum reserve collections. Quite apart from the question of security and the need for constant supervision, such places, usually in attics and basements, are simply not the right places to work effectively and productively.

Plans are afoot in the Museum to provide study rooms for the large papyrus collection and for the important collection of ancient glass. This is only a start: the overall need to provide proper access to the Museum's huge reserve collections will be a major requirement in the master plan for renovation being developed.

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