University Library Exhibit Program

PREPARATION AND INSTALLATION OF EXHIBITIONS

Researching, preparing, and installing a quality exhibition takes time. Planning for an exhibition depends in large measure on the complexity of the subject, level of publicity, space requirements, and limitations, and the type of audience you are trying to reach. Exhibitors should tour the Library's Exhibit Gallery for examples of professionally mounted library exhibits.

The following are guidelines for preparation and installation of exhibitions in the University Library:

1. **Choosing Exhibition Subjects:** Successful exhibitions are built around our institution, mission statement, and themes or subjects taught in CSUN's curriculum. Exhibitions should be chosen with educational and research value of the theme and displayed materials in mind, and the campus and/or community audience you are trying to reach. Priority should be given to those exhibitions that make "original" contributions to the subject field. Exhibition subjects may also be chosen for their promotional value to the university, school, department, program, course, or topic.

2. **Researching a Subject:** Once the topic of the exhibition is defined, the subject should be researched in depth using both primary and secondary sources in a manner similar to writing a research paper. Research will facilitate the final selection of items and aid in the writing of accurate and meaningful exhibition labels and contextualizing descriptive text. Research will also be helpful in writing exhibition catalogs, announcements, invitations and related publicity.

3. **Selecting Items:** Select display pieces that (a) provide informational content that supports the story your exhibition is sharing and (b) are visually stimulating. It is best to select at least two items of similar content that vary in impact, size, color, and imagery when designing installations. Select a good mixture of materials: artifacts, books, broadsides, certificates, diaries, documents, ephemera and memorabilia, photographs, posters, typescripts and three-dimensional objects.

   a) **Removal/Sign Out Forms:** When exhibiting items in library collections, check lists or sign-out forms should be created before items are removed from their original locations, collections or donors. It will be through these forms that items can be returned once the exhibition is over. Each form or card should include the following information:

      i. Name, Place and Dates of Exhibition
      ii. Name of Collection Item Came From
      iii. Description of Item
      iv. Date Removed/Borrowed
      v. Date Returned
      vi. Signature of Exhibition Curator
      vii. Comments on Display Design

b) **Loaned Materials:** Items loaned to the library for exhibition require fully executed Loan Agreement forms. Items on loan from off-campus individuals or organizations may require insurance. Generally, it is the responsibility of loaner of the item to add a rider on their homeowner or business insurance. When loaned items are returned to their owners, the exhibit lead is responsible for collecting fully executed Loan Receipt forms. The library will maintain copies of the executed forms in perpetuity.

4. **Conservation Needs:** No items should be displayed that are considered fragile, rare, or irreplaceable as display cases outside of the Exhibit Gallery are not fitted with security features beyond locks or environmental controls. It may be necessary to use photo-reproductions and facsimiles rather than original pieces. Other important factors determining conservation needs include exhibition site, lighting sources, temperature and humidity controls and packing techniques for traveling exhibitions. Consult with Special Collections/Archives staff for an estimate of the costs and time for completion of this work.

5. **Sources for Exhibits:** Display items important to the subject/theme may come from library resources, such as the University Library's general book collection, Special Collections/Archives, from private or personal collections, or from other institutions. Loan policies and procedures may vary from repository to repository. It is our policy to create a "loan" agreement for material that is not "owned" by the exhibitor or the University (see 3.b) above). Lending institutions often have their own forms.

6. **Preparing Items For Display:** Generally, all items on display will require minor conservation and mounting. Before conservation work begins, photographs should be taken of each item. Exhibition curators, staff and student interns should become familiar with these minimal conservation techniques:

   a. Cleaning and Mending - for documents
   b. Temporary Encapsulation - for documents
   c. Museum Board and Mylar Strip Supports - for books and pamphlets
   d. Support Mounts - for heavy items and exhibition design
   e. Framing and Mounting - for broadsides, maps, posters and wall hangings

7. **Case & Item Labels:** *Case labels* should be concise while still giving the audience a good background to theme, important events, and personalities represented or reflected by the items on display. Individual *item labels* should be written as a descriptor and bibliographic citation listing titles, dates, source and additional commentary where appropriate.

   Examples Item Labels:

   Handbill. **AMERICAN FIRST, LAST AND ALL THE TIME, ca. 1942.**
       Event sponsored by the Friends of Progress Committee, Los Angeles.

       [Courtesy of the California State Archives]

Typed Letter Signed. **J. EDGAR HOOVER to JOSEPH ROOS, 24 Jan 1942.**

[Community Relations Committee Collection, Urban Archives Center]

Photograph. **POLICE VIOLENCE, n.d.** (no date)
Young strike breaker being arrested by Kern County sheriffs.
Bob Fiche, photographer.

[Courtesy of UFWOC Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library]

8. **Design & Installation:** The design of the exhibition should convey the intended story of the subject, make it easy for the audience to become involved, coordinate the objects with visual themes, and encourage study and comparison. The design should be flexible enough to move items around or change them because of space limitations inside the cases. *Avoid* cramming exhibition cases with display items and remember to make room in the cases for identification labels. Archival exhibitions consist mostly of written, two-dimensional items. It is, therefore, necessary to design the exhibition so reading is relatively easy for *all* viewers. This can be achieved using clear and concise labels, angle mounts, overlays, highlight arrows and brackets, photographic enlargements, matting with colored board and background colors that highlight the pieces.

   Original documents or valuable pieces cannot be displayed on unsecured open wall space where theft would be a constant problem. *Never* display unprotected items.

9. **Marketing:** Library Administration will be happy to work with you on the marketing of your exhibit, including posting it on the Library's Exhibition and Events webpage, preparing a press release, co-marketing with campus, and lobby posters. Submit this form to Request a Library Event or Service Promotion.