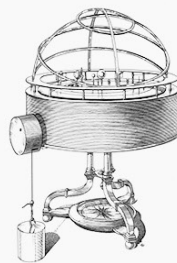


Harvard University
Collection of Historical
Scientific Instruments



Strategic Plan

Summer 2024 - Spring 2028



Leading the Field with a Teaching Collection

After a period of transition, we are delighted to introduce our new leadership team at the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments and to share our Strategic Plan for the coming three years.

Professor Hannah Marcus has served as the Associate Faculty Director and Interim Faculty Director at the collection and steps into her new role as Faculty Director on July 1, 2024. Dr. Joshua Gorman joined the CHSI team in March 2024 after eight years at the National Museum of American History and is eager to center access and use in our stewardship of the collection. Together, we are pioneering a co-leadership model at CHSI that will capitalize on our complementary areas of expertise and our shared commitment to teaching, research, and serving our communities.

We believe that the greatest value of the Collection is in activating it for teaching and research. This plan lays the foundation for reframing the notion of a “Teaching Collection” from something that is peripheral to the collecting mission and instead is the central purpose of all that we do. We have the opportunity to use the Collection to redefine pathways for radical access and use as a model in our field.

As historians, we are always planning for the future with an eye to our past. Harvard has been collecting scientific instruments for teaching and research since the 1670s. Our current decade marks a century since the collection’s founder, David P. Wheatland, began identifying and preserving many of the instruments that we steward today. This year also marks a turning point for CHSI as we congratulate our long-serving David P. Wheatland Curator, Dr. Sara Schechner, on her retirement and thank her profoundly for her decades of service to CHSI.

Looking toward the coming decade, we identify teaching with the Collection as our highest priority. We will reconnect faculty, students, researchers, and community members with our collection and integrate these essential stakeholders into all functional areas of our work and outreach. This three-year plan lays the foundation for an innovative approach to university museum management that will center field-defining research and teaching in all aspects of our work.

Hannah Marcus

Joshua M. Gorman

Mission

The Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments at Harvard connects scholars and community members to nearly 25,000 historical scientific instruments to enhance an understanding of the human history of scientific education, practice, and discovery.

CHSI advances the educational and research needs of the Harvard community and beyond, engaging visitors through guided access to collections, experimental exhibitions, and innovative programming.

Vision

From within the hub of Harvard's Science Center, the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments challenges you to join us in exploring what we know and how we came to understand it.

Core Values

CHSI seeks to bring Innovation, Teamwork, Compassion, and Integrity to all we do in service of our stakeholder communities.



Our Plan

The starting point for all that we do at CHSI will be identifying how we include, teach, and entrust aspects of all projects to the students we invite into our spaces. While we can draw upon best practices in museums to frame our work with historical collections in the public sphere, we will develop how to lead as a teaching collection through the integration and involvement of these stakeholders in the university community. Our three-part plan involves reconnecting with the faculty and student communities at Harvard and beyond, building museum practice that fundamentally integrates teaching, and stabilizing our collections infrastructure with attention to histories of accumulation and use to meet the needs of current and future stakeholders.

Part 1: Reconnecting with Faculty and Students

Teaching has always been an essential part of our work at the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments. Over the next three years we are committed to integrating hands-on, collections-based study into the curriculum in the Department of the History of Science while continuing to strengthen our relationships with other faculty members and departments in the Harvard community and beyond.

Concrete actions:

1.1 Reconnecting Faculty with the Collection (AY24-25)

- Robust discussion of CHSI strategic plan at faculty retreat
- 3 new exhibitions curated by graduate students and undergraduates in the entrance to the history of science department
- Object-based presentations at monthly DHS faculty meetings accompanied by thematic resources for faculty
- Faculty Director and Executive Director fall listening tour, individual meetings with all faculty and lecturers in the department
- Host a series of events that celebrate and support faculty research with the collection
- Circulate strategic plan and annual reports to targeted faculty at Harvard and Greater Boston area colleges / universities
- Faculty Director serves on DHS Curriculum Committee
- As we better understand faculty priorities, work to collaborate on grants and other funded research proposals of mutual benefit



1.2 Centering CHSI in the Graduate Education Experience (AY25-26)

- Faculty Director serves on DHS Curriculum Committee
- Faculty Director and Executive Director host two Aramont trips, one will focus on museum practice and the other will promote experiential learning in the field with historical scientific instruments
- Executive Director works with faculty teaching graduate historiography seminar to design a session on material history with readings and hands-on component
- Faculty Director teaches HS2110 “Science Before Science” which includes object-based teaching in CHSI and other collections on campus
- Continue to fundraise for and offer paid research and professionalization opportunities for graduate students at CHSI

1.3 Integrating CHSI in our Undergraduate Curricula (AY26-27)

- Faculty Director serves on DHS Curriculum Committee
- Plan and implement complementary and scaffolded units in HS100, sophomore tutorial, and junior tutorial
- Faculty Director will redesign and teach “Nature on Display” lecture course (Fall 2026)
- Recruit a department faculty member to teach an additional department seminar integrated with the collection in Spring 2027
- Continue to offer summer and term-time paid internships and research opportunities for undergraduate students

Part 2: Building museum practice that integrates teaching use of the collection in all that we do.

Becoming a radically accessible teaching collection will require us to innovate our practice of stewardship. We will transform our practice to engage students and researchers in every space we work and on every task we complete. As we collaborate with our academic partners our colleagues from HMSC, our collaborators at the Harvard Libraries, and peer collections around the world, we will redefine how a collection intended for direct use by faculty, researchers, and students is to be cared for, shared, and developed.

Concrete Actions:

2.1 Hosting students and scholars as collections peers in our spaces

- Host inaugural cohort of Du Bois Scholars to support exhibitions and practice, continue this partnership every year moving forward (AY25-27)
- Welcome undergraduate research fellows from the BLISS and SHARP programs to imagine and effect student-integrated practice at CHSI (AY25-27)
- Expand access to collections by inviting Pforzheimer graduate library fellows to innovate how we describe and connect our collections (AY26-27)
- Create and support professionalizing experiences for graduate students in the Department of the History of Science, for example:
AY24—Aaron Gluck-Thaler, Caroline Bailyn, Matt Goerzen exhibition
AY24 – Samira Daneshvar exhibition
AY24—Beatrice Steinert documentation of Zeiss Ultraphot III microscope
AY24—Anna Riley supporting RMS1 object move focusing on glass collection

2.2 Leverage Harvard Museums of Science & Culture (HMSC) partnership to support exhibitions, programs, and audience development

- With the HMSC exhibitions department: develop a collaborative process for imagining, budgeting, planning, developing, and executing CHSI exhibits (AY25)

- With HMSC educators: invite volunteers to the Putnam gallery to engage casual visitors and expand offerings for educational trips. (AY25)
- With HMSC student tour guides: Leverage the AY24 work of Aditi Kona ('26) to bring monthly student-led tours to the Putnam Gallery. Include Aditi in the cohort of HMSC student tour guides and instantiate future student opportunities. (AY25)
- Invite HMSC educators and programmers to CHSI spaces for Measuring Difference (AY25), the Putnam Gallery (AY26), and to include pK-12 educational goals in the development of Evelyn Hammonds's exhibit (AY27)
- Address accessibility of CHSI spaces through the development of visitor communication and infrastructure (lockers) (AY25-26)
- Develop a visitor engagement strategy to understand our visitors' desires and motivations in our spaces (AY26)
- Work with HMSC to establish audience goals for the future redevelopment of the Putnam Gallery, the CHSI library, and for future changing exhibitions (AY27)



2.3 Hire the new David P. Wheatland Curator

- Recruit widely to ensure a robust and diverse pool of applicants
- New curator will bring expertise in scientific collections to facilitate faculty engagement with the use and development of our holdings and student access to the Collection (AY25)

2.4 Create an endowed postdoctoral fellowship to support teaching and research in the collection and create a pipeline from the doctorate into museum careers

- Secure initial funding for a 3-year position for public social issues in museums (AY25- 27)
- Initial funding provides substantial support for undergraduate work and research opportunities to be developed by postdoctoral fellow (AY25-27)
- Assess the successes of the position and fundraise for durable, endowed postdoctoral fellowship with lessons learned (AY26-27)

2.5 Leverage the recommendations of the AY23 Pyzynski Archives Assessment to enhance access to and use of unique resources and information in the CHSI Library

- Explore the interest of external partners in enhancing the value and renown of this resource through a targeted project to integrate unique materials with Harvard Libraries, Archives, and Special Collections holdings (AY25-26)
- Host Pforzheimer library graduate fellows to innovate how we describe and connect our collections (AY26-27)
- Leverage the collaboration with Harvard Libraries to renovate collections descriptive metadata standards to align with Libraries standards facilitating global access to the collection (AY25-27)



Part 3: Stabilize our Collections Stewardship Infrastructure

As the Science Center enters a period of intense renovation and our Collections Management System has reached the end of life in its current configuration, we must urgently stabilize the spaces and systems that enable the care of and access to our collection. Centering our practice in the integration of teaching into all we do, this work must also address histories of accumulation and practice to ensure our holdings meet the needs of our stakeholders and can be sustainably held long into the future.

Concrete Actions:

3.1 Develop infrastructure for continued stakeholder engagement

- Work with development office to match our goals with philanthropic opportunities, creating a development strategy for complete integration with needs and projected operating costs (AY24-25)
- Create a student engagement committee (AY25)
- Create and convene an advisory board of museum stakeholders (AY26)
- Work with HMSC colleagues and Du Bois scholars to secure grant funding for upcoming exhibitions, expanding interpretation and programming use of our exhibitions (AY25)
- Explore and develop partnerships with Schools and departments within and beyond FAS to imagine opportunities for growing the collection, partnering with exhibitions, and centering CHSI in the next century of science at Harvard (AY26-27)
- Develop and implement updated plan for new Open Scholar website and work with HMSC to create strategy and templates for exhibit web presence (AY25)

3.2 Partnering with OPRP and FAS leadership to move CHSI collections to the Southborough Collections Campus (RMS-1 project – AY25-27)

- CHSI team creates comprehensive documentation of the move, drafting the policies, processes, and Standard Operating Procedures enabling the move, centering professional opportunities for students in the conduct of the work

- CHSI teams begin moving collections to rented storage space, clearing space in the Science Center to evaluate, document, and process materials for movement
- CHSI team develop the sequence for moving collections that enables the earliest opportunities for care and documentation of our collection, using all existing resources to stage items for RMS-1
- Develop standard operating procedure for stewardship practice that deemphasizes cleaning in the preparation for movement – focusing instead on access-oriented documentation to facilitate reconnecting with faculty and students
- Faculty and Executive Directors to mint a vision for RMS-1 that enables a rubric for selection and framing of how the second campus relates to our use of materials at the Science Center
- With OPRP, establish a comprehensive plan for movement of collection and ongoing operational use of RMS-1 that utilizes efficiencies of collaboration with Library and other Museum partners



- Establish criteria and engage in comprehensive collections assessment to invest only in the holdings consistent with our mission and strategic plan, finding appropriate repositories for items out of scope
- Document Collections for move (AY25-26)
- Prepare collections for move (AY25-26)
- Move collections (AY26-27)
- Decant collections at RMS1 (AY26-27)
- Provide collections access and support from RMS1 (AY27)



3.3 TMS transition

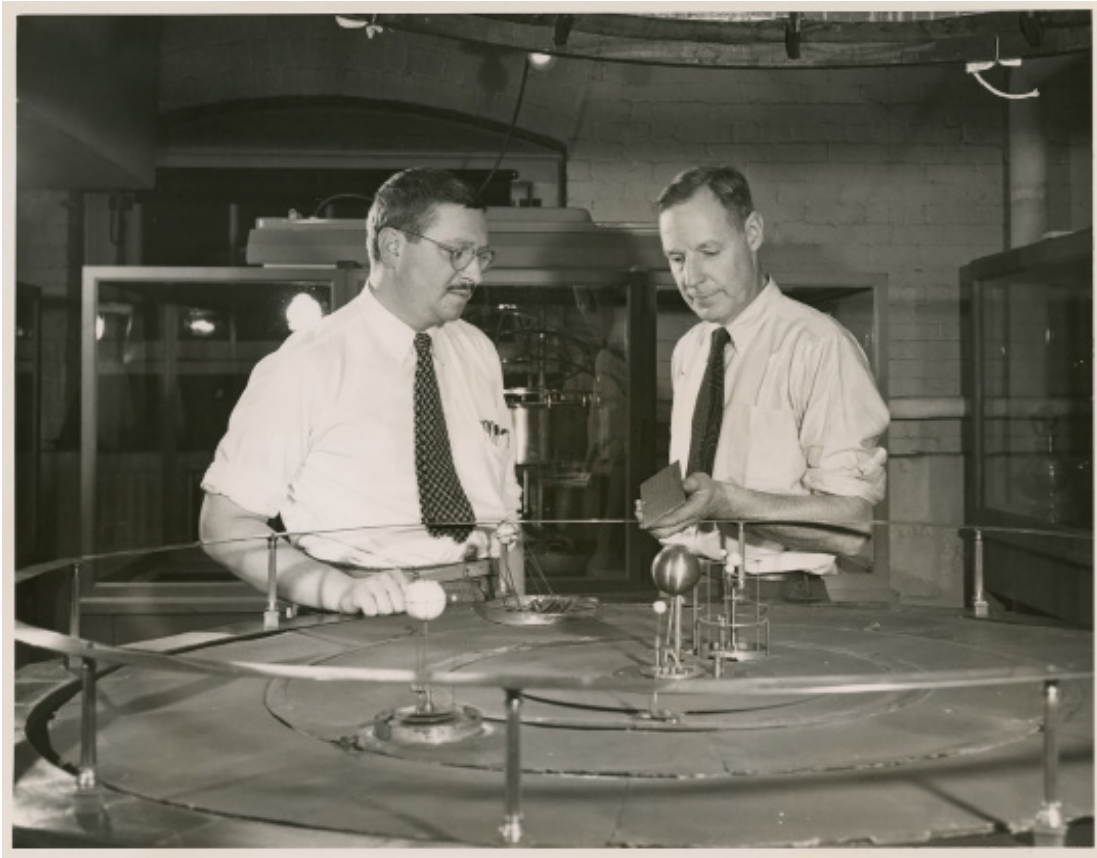
- Conduct an environmental study of Harvard museums and collections CMS use. Select our CMS for future use (AY24)
- Develop a roadmap for transition from the DoSS Research Computing servers (AY24-25)
- Move TMS to a modern database environment including integrated conservation, collections handling, and connected metadata standards to facilitate a successful RMS1 move and effective connection with faculty and students (AY25)
- Move Waywiser to a connected platform for collections discovery (AY25)
- Implement Open Data framework for collections data that establishes Intellectual Property understanding of catalogue data and shares all collections irrespective of completeness of documentation (AY25)
- Create and implement common metadata standards for access to University and global collections (AY26-27)



3.4 Collections Policy reframing

- Accessions policy and plan
- Deaccessions policy and process
- Collections Management Policy
- Collecting Plan (AY '26 with new curator on board and fuller faculty involvement)
- Work with students, faculty, and new curator to identify recent key innovations in science and technology and propose paths for collecting strategies (AY 25 - 27)





Collection Founder David P. Wheatland (right) and History of Science Professor I. Bernard Cohen examine a disassembled Pope Orrery in the basement of Jefferson Labs building, 1957.

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