

## Crowdsourcing the classroom for collections management

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Collections-based learning has been at the foundation of many natural sciences such as geology and biology. Representative specimens in teaching collections provide learners with specimens to examine, describe, measure, and compare. Online collections databases of major international museums are important resources for paleontology research. By introducing students to the principles of collections care and how collections are organized, students gain an insight into the 'value' of collections for learning and future research.

The principles of collections management were integrated into the lab component of an Introduction to Paleontology class at Dalhousie University. As a lab activity, each of the forty-five undergraduate students was provided with one specimen from the teaching collection. The students were instructed on how to complete a prepared lab sheet with information related to their specimen. The students gathered the required information from labels that accompanied the specimen and looked up supplemental information (taxon, range) in reference books. After receiving a general introduction to photography, the students also photographed each specimen and scale bar with a digital camera that was set up in the room. The students noted the file number of their photo on the record sheet. As homework, the students had to enter their specimen information into an online record (Google Form). When submitted, the form automatically added their data into an online spreadsheet. The Google spreadsheet became the basis for a digital collections database. The instructor uploaded all the photographs to a server and linked the file locations to the spreadsheet data.

Students can learn collections management principles that involve specimen labelling, photography, database development, and record maintenance, which are all valuable scientific research skills. By developing labs that introduced the students to the principles of collection management they were involved in a learning activity that produced a useful product of a digital collection database. The process was easy to organize and a popular activity among the students.