

Curator for Research, Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas

Application deadline: Jul 15, 2025

Celka Straughn

With Arts Research Integration (ARI), the Spencer Museum of Art (SMA) at the University of Kansas (KU) has established an active hub for collaborative, integrated arts research and a unique model for the academic art museum as a generative research partner. Using curatorial and artistic practice to develop shared questions and new theories, ARI connects the museum, artists, and advanced researchers in the sciences and humanities to promote interdisciplinary practices, generate effective dialogues about subjects that directly impact daily life, and involve the public in ideas and art. The ARI program recognizes that the creation of art is a research methodology in its own right, and one that is critical to the future of research in an academic environment. Research generated by the ARI program fosters reciprocal exchange and the production of knowledge driven by scholars from multiple disciplines. By working beyond the confines of any one particular discipline, scholars, artists, and curators can practice fluency and criticality in the context of their own subjects. Major recent collaborative projects include the interdisciplinary inquiry Collective Entanglements that used mathematical analytical tools to explore questions in physics and the composition of video installation, and here-ing, an environmentally embedded artwork by Janine Antoni commissioned by ARI in collaboration with the KU Field Station and School of Architecture and Design. Launched through support from the Mellon Foundation (2016-2024), ARI is now sustained by a growing endowment and challenge gift.

Curator for Research Position:

The Curator for Research is central to building a sustainable interdisciplinary arts research infrastructure that harnesses curatorial strengths and the possibilities of a vibrant campus art museum embedded in a research university. As a driver of innovative creative projects and serving as a research collaborator and facilitator, the curator initiates, guides, and supports ARI activities, fosters long-term partnerships between SMA academic staff and scholars from diverse disciplines, and disseminates research concepts and findings through a variety of formats. With specialized knowledge extending beyond the visual arts, the Curator for Research activates the collection and develops exhibitions and other platforms to engage campus and broader communities with ARI projects. Working within a team environment, this position promotes dialogue and collaboration within and beyond the Museum, serving as an important public intellectual voice in the fields of the arts, humanities, sciences, and technology.

This position provides intellectual and artistic leadership, direction, and facilitation for curatorial staff and ensures individual and collaborative projects successfully contribute to the Museum's mission, its many communities, as well as relevant academic and professional fields. As part of the Spencer Museum leadership team, the Curator for Research plays a central role in articulating

and implementing the overall scholarly and creative vision to present the SMA collection as a living archive that motivates interdisciplinary research, creative work, and transformative public dialogue.

With expertise in interdisciplinary research that integrates the arts, experience conducting research and collaborating with scholars from different professional backgrounds, the Curator for Research serves as an excellent facilitator, able to negotiate team relationships across departments and disciplines. Holding a PhD or equivalent, the Curator brings a solid foundation in curatorial practice, including collection development. The curator demonstrates strong leadership skills with the ability to guide and contribute to numerous simultaneous projects.

Spencer Museum of Art and University of Kansas:

The Spencer Museum of Art's vision is to stimulate creative thinking and spark new ideas through transformative art experiences. Interdisciplinary exploration at the intersection of art, ideas, and experience is central to the mission. With stewardship of a collection comprising more than 48,000 works of art created across a wide range of time periods, geographic locations, and cultural affiliations, the Spencer strengthens, supports and contributes to the academic research and teaching of the University of Kansas and is committed to serving communities of learners across Kansas and beyond.

The University of Kansas is located in the city of Lawrence, a thriving community 40 minutes from the Kansas City metropolitan area and 30 minutes from the state capital, Topeka. Lawrence is a progressive college town of 95,000, boasts a lively downtown with many cultural venues, award-winning restaurants, and a nationally celebrated independent bookstore among its many independently owned small businesses. Founded in 1865, KU is a designated Carnegie comprehensive doctoral and research university and is one of only 38 public members of the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU). The University enrolls more than 30,000 students representing all 50 states and 112 countries.

Culture and Community

KU's excellence is a result of the rich tapestry of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds of our faculty, staff, students, and colleagues from across our nation and the globe. At KU, we invest in continuous learning and growth by creating a climate where people engage in respectful dialogue and debate and support each other's success. We foster a culture of care where each person is seen, heard and valued. When people feel a true sense of belonging, we believe they are better able to reach their full potential and achieve remarkable things. The successful candidate must be eligible to work in the U.S. by the effective date of the appointment.

Position Duties:

Professional Performance and Research (55%)

- Lead, envision, orchestrate, and nurture ARI programs, such as inquiries, research convenings, and exhibitions, among other collaborative interdisciplinary projects that activate the Museum as a vital research partner and center for scholarly, creative endeavors.
- Cultivate research partners to identify, apply, and integrate diverse methodologies.
- Develop strategies to advance, support, and sustain collaborative and interdisciplinary research efforts across the museum and with academic staff colleagues.

- Stimulate and guide museum scholarly publications, such as *The Register*, and identify new avenues to explore in academic publishing.
- Actively maintain an awareness of and contribute to scholarship on interdisciplinary collaborative initiatives across the arts, humanities, and sciences.
- Collaborate with Spencer Museum colleagues on research, documentation, interpretation and publication of SMA collection works.
- Conduct collection research, including acquisition research and proposals relating to ARI projects.
- Present ongoing research at scholarly conferences or other venues as appropriate.
- Foster a vibrant community of artists and scholars in support of the Museum's mission to encourage interdisciplinary exploration at the intersection of art, ideas, and experience.
- Select, organize, and guide ARI faculty and undergraduate research fellows, visiting artists, and external scholars.
- Initiate, collaborate on, and contribute to ARI-related grant proposals and funded project management.
- Contribute to digital projects, with special attention to ARI and curatorial web presence.

Supervision and Management (30%)

- Provide strategic vision and direction to collaborate with and guide the activities and ambitions of the Museum's curatorial team in alignment with larger institutional goals.
- Serve as member of the leadership team and work closely with the director on matters of overall curatorial, research, and artistic priorities and future directions.
- Advance and guide a dynamic, meaningful, and balanced curatorial program, including exhibitions, collection development, and publications.
- Encourage and support cross-functional and interdisciplinary curatorial collaborations.
- Provide guidance, motivate, and review activities for curatorial staff.
- Advise, mentor, and teach undergraduate and graduate students as appropriate, including supervising ARI graduate fellows.
- Contribute to the Museum's institutional vision by leading and organizing curatorial, acquisition, and exhibition planning meetings, and participating in bimonthly leadership meetings and other planning discussions.
- Provide direction and written narrative for curatorial grant applications.
- Participate in efforts to establish and build donor relations and contribute to or support other fund-raising activities.
- Oversee evaluation and assessment of ARI.
- Prepare annual budget for ARI and provide oversight to curatorial staff for respective budgets.

Professional Service (10%)

- Contribute to major initiatives across the museum and campus, with regional and state partners, and within the museum profession.
- Sustain and expand scholarly and professional collaborations across the University, the state of Kansas, and with national and international colleagues.
- Serve on University and professional committees.
- Represent the Museum at scholarly, professional, campus, public, and cultivation events.
- Establish and maintain active professional affiliations regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Other Duties as Assigned (5%)

- Participate in all staff meetings and other committee meetings as appropriate.
- Participate in museum- and campus-wide initiatives and trainings.
- Assist and participate in other initiatives as they arise and in concert with supervisor.

Required Qualifications:

1. PhD or terminal degree.
2. Twelve or more years of relevant arts, collections and/or museum experiences, including demonstrated leadership and supervisory experiences.
3. Demonstrated record of distinguished professional performance and accomplishments that would advance the goals of the Spencer Museum of Art, the University of Kansas, and the art museum profession.
4. Quality and quantity of research (scholarship and/or creative and innovative work) demonstrating a successfully developing career at a senior level as reflected in such factors as collaborative interdisciplinary projects, advancement with artistic research, longitudinal research projects with results that drive art and scholarship, and/or critically reflective and creative engagement with museum practices.
5. Demonstrated pattern of sustained and significant service to an institution; to the discipline or profession; and/or to the local, state, regional, national, or international communities.
6. Relevant professional experiences, including demonstrated experience with interdisciplinary research across the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences.
7. Record of working collaboratively and creatively on teams, including a job history demonstrating experience working openly and effectively with higher education collaborators and the public.
8. Experience working openly and effectively with community members, including students and artists, as evidenced by application materials.

Additional Candidate Instruction:

A complete online application includes:

1. Cover letter addressing how you meet the required and preferred qualifications.
2. Curriculum vitae.
3. Statement of research interests and future directions (approximately 500-1000 words)
4. Sample of written work (no longer than 5,000 words) or other scholarly product.
5. Names, email, and contact information for three professional references (including at least one previous or current supervisor).
6. Completion of the online application.

Application review begins July 16, 2025 and continues until a pool of qualified candidates has been collected.

Further information and application portal:
https://sjobs.brassring.com/TGnewUI/Search/home/HomeWithPreLoad?PageType=JobDetails&partnerid=25752&siteid=5539&jobid=5112529#jobDetails=5112529_5539

Reference:

JOB: Curator for Research, Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas. In: ArtHist.net, May 16, 2025

ArtHist.net

(accessed Apr 7, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/49266>>.