

**HIST 3392-1:  
History, Memory, and Interpretation: An Introduction to Public History**



**Spring 2016  
Mondays from 4:30 – 7:25pm in Chapman 240**

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**Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00am-noon, Wednesday 10:30am-12:30pm, and by appointment**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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Each year, American museums and historic sites welcome 850 million visitors—a number which is almost twice the annual attendance for major league sporting events and theme parks combined. These sites preserve, protect, and interpret over a billion objects. Through these activities, museums ensure that objects of “value” will be around for future generations to enjoy. Museum curators and other public history practitioners use these objects along with historical documents to tell important stories about our collective past and our current culture. In shaping these stories, they tell visitors what they should think about the artifacts on display, presenting them with a particular slant on history.

This course will serve as an introduction to public history, material and visual culture, and oral history methods by familiarizing students with the work historians do in museums, historic homes, archives, government agencies, private corporations, and the media. We will explore how public historians interpret the past and share their interpretations with the public. We will also learn about the history of museums in the United States in order to assess how and why museums have shaped contemporary culture at times became sites for civic engagement. Students will develop their oral and visual presentation skills while gaining hands-on experience in the field by developing their own exhibitions, using real world case studies to devise solutions to common challenges that museums and public history practitioners face, and assessing the effectiveness and components of existing museum exhibitions.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

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By the end of this course students should:

- Understand the principles and complexity of creating historical exhibitions in a public context and develop an awareness of the methods public historians use to plan and construct these exhibitions
- Understand how local, regional, and national values constrain and/or shape how public historians interpret the past and share those interpretations with the public
- Distinguish between a variety of presentation strategies used in exhibit settings, and be able to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses for attracting audiences
- Acquire an ability to evaluate the messages embedded in museum contexts
- Understand the historical evolution of museums and historic sites

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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**Participation:** This is reading and discussion intensive course that is organized around a series of hands-on practicums. Students are expected to participate actively in all class discussions and activities. The activities we do in class, such as creating condition reports for collection objects, composing exhibit displays and texts, devising wayfinding and visitor flow strategies, and incorporating materials such as oral history interviews and archival video into our interpretations of the past will count toward the participation grade.

**Reading Responses and Presentations:** Over the course of the semester, students will be expected to submit three short written responses to the assigned readings for class. These responses should be approximately 2-3 pages in length. Students will then use these responses as the basis for serving as discussion leaders in class. The response papers are opportunities for students to think critically about the course material, while the responsibility to serve as a discussion leader provides students the chance to practice oral presentation skills. Each student in class will be assigned specific readings to write and present on, and the due dates will be staggered throughout the semester so that everyone has a chance to serve as discussion leader for their readings three times throughout the course.

**Exhibition Critique:** Students will visit a historic site or museum of their choice and write a 5 page analysis/critique of the historical interpretation and visual presentation components they observe at the exhibit/home. If travel is a concern, students may also write a critique of an online exhibition, provided that they find an appropriate online exhibition to study in consultation with the professor. Students should ground their analysis in the course readings and class discussions.  
**Due Date: March 21.**

**Exhibit Proposal/Visualized Concept Study:** For the final project, students will design a museum exhibit on a topic that the student and professor will discuss and agree upon in advance. This project will include an exhibit proposal or a visualized concept study with a narrative walkthrough of the proposed exhibition, a framework for the interpretation and presentation of the topic, sample images and text, and a selection of potential artifacts, which the student will curate digitally using Omeka or WordPress. Students will present their exhibits on **May 9**.

## **Policies for Written Work**

*Formatting.* All written work must:

- be double-spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font
- have one-inch margins on each side
- include page numbers
- include a word count
- be stapled

If an assignment does not meet these formatting guidelines, it will not be collected, read, or graded.

*Citations.* All sources **MUST** be cited according to Chicago Author-Date guidelines. Citation guidelines are available at <http://lib.trinity.edu/lib2/cite.php>. You can also consult the 16th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style, available at Coates Library in the reference section and online through the library catalog.

*Late Work.* Late work will not be read or evaluated unless you have made arrangements with me in advance. If you think you will not be able to turn in an assignment on time, talk to me as soon as possible!

## **GRADING**

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The final course grade will be determined as follows:

Participation:	30%	Exhibit Critique:	20%
Response papers:	15%	Final Project:	35%

## **ACADEMIC HONOR CODE**

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All students are covered by a policy that prohibits dishonesty in academic work. Students who are under the Honor Code are required to pledge all written work that is submitted for a grade: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance on this work” and their signature. The pledge may be abbreviated ‘pledged; with a signature. The specifics of the Honor Code, its underlying philosophy, and the norms for sanctioning can all be found at: [http://www.trinity.edu/departments/academic\\_affairs/honor\\_code/index.htm](http://www.trinity.edu/departments/academic_affairs/honor_code/index.htm).

If you have any doubt about whether an action violates the Honor Code, please email me before submitting your essays or research project.

If you are struggling, overwhelmed, or confused please contact me! I am here to help you in the course and guide you through the material. I understand that personal circumstances or unforeseen events can sometimes interfere with your academic work; I will keep any concerns confidential and work with you to ensure your best possible performance in the course.

## **OTHER COURSE POLICIES**

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### Students With Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and will need accommodations in this class, please speak with me privately early in the semester. All discussions will remain confidential. In order to receive accommodations, you must be registered with Disability Services for Students. If you are not already registered with DSS, please contact their office at 999-7411 or dss@trinity.edu.

### Class Conduct

Respect your fellow students and instructor. Do not be disruptive. Turn off phones and do not text in class. If you text during class, I will ask you to leave and your participation grade for the semester will go down. If you text during another student's presentation, your final grade for the course will go down a full letter grade. You may use laptops for taking notes, but if you use them for activities not related to class, you will not be able to use them at all in class. If you are late, please come in quietly. Consistent lateness will result in a lowered course grade, as will violations of any of the above mentioned aspects of class conduct.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

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- James and Lois Horton, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*
- Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City*
- James B. Gardner and Peter LaPaglia, *Public History: Essays from the Field*
- Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*
- Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities*

All of the required texts will be available for purchase or rental at the bookstore as well as from online retailers. All other course readings will be made available on TLEARN.

## **SCHEDULE OF WEEKLY MEETINGS**

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### **PART I: WHAT IS PUBLIC HISTORY?**

**January 18: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday – \*\*\* NO CLASS \*\*\***

**January 25: Introduction to Public History**

- David Glassberg, "Sense of History"
- Ronald J. Grele, "Whose History? Whose Public? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?" *Public Historian* (Winter 1981), pp. 40-48

### **February 1: Usable Histories**

- Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*

### **February 8: Memory and Identity**

- Horton and Horton, *Slavery and Public History*

### **February 15: Local and Community History**

- Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment*

## **PART II: PUBLIC HISTORY SITES AND PRACTICES**

### **February 22: Historic Homes, Sites, and Monuments**

- “Open House: Reimagining the Historic House Museum,” selected articles from Special Issue of *The Public Historian* (37:2, May 2015)
- Patricia West, “Gender Politics and the Orchard House Museum” in *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America’s House Museums* (Smithsonian Press, 1999)
- John Patterson, “From Battle Ground to Pleasure Ground: Gettysburg as a Historic Site,” in Leon and Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States*, 128-157

### **February 29: Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Management**

- Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*
- Antoinette J. Lee, “Historic Preservationists and Cultural Resources Managers: Preserving America’s Historic Places,” in Gardner and LaPaglia, *Public History*

### **March 7: Libraries and Archives – \*\*\* CLASS WILL MEET IN COATES LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES \*\*\***

- The following chapters in Gardner and LaPaglia, *Public History*:
  - Roy Tryon, “Archivists and Records Managers”
  - Charles D’Aniello, “Librarians and Bibliographers”
  - Debra Newman Ham, “Manuscript Curators and Specialists”
- Karen Engle, “The Boondoggle: Lee Miller and the Vicissitudes of Private Archives,” *Photographies* 8, no. 1 (February 2015): 85-104.
- Laura Schmidt, “Using Archives: A Guide to Effective Research”

### **March 14: SPRING BREAK – \*\*\* NO CLASS \*\*\***

## **March 21: Historical Agencies, Museums, and Societies**

- The following chapters in Gardner and LaPaglia, *Public History*:
  - Anne Woodhouse, “Museum Curators”
  - Mark Howell, “Interpreters and Museum Educators: Beyond the Blue Hairs”
  - Bruce Noble, Jr., “At Historical Parks: Balancing a Multitude of Interests”
  - Barbara Franco, “In Local Historical Agencies, Museums, and Societies”
  - Charles Bryan, Jr., “In State Historical Agencies, Museums, and Societies: a Constant State of Change”
  - Lonnie Bunch III, “In Museums at the National Level: Fighting the Good Fight”
  - Jesse H. Stiller, “In Federal History Programs: Ensuring the Future”

**\*\*\* DUE IN CLASS: EXHIBITION CRITIQUE \*\*\***

## **PART III: PUBLIC HISTORY METHODS: INTERPRETATION AND REPRESENTATION**

### **March 28: Material Culture Studies**

- Excerpt from Jules Prown, *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*
- Excerpt from Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*

**IN CLASS: OBJECT LAB PRACTICUM**

### **April 4: Developing Exhibitions and Displays**

- Excerpt from Kathleen McLean, *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*
- Excerpt from Ames, Franco, and Frye, *Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretive History Exhibits*

**IN CLASS: EXHIBITION DESIGN CASE STUDY AND PRACTICUM**

### **April 11: Digital History**

- Excerpt from Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*
- “Film and Media Producers: Taking History off the Page and Putting it on the Screen,” in Gardner and LaPaglia, *Public History*

**IN CLASS: DIGITAL HISTORY CASE STUDY AND PRACTICUM**

### **April 18: Oral History Methods**

- Excerpts from Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*
- Excerpts from Perks & Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*
- Rose T. Diaz, “Oral historians: Community Oral History and the Cooperative Ideal,” in

Gardner and LaPaglia, *Public History*

**IN CLASS: ORAL HISTORY CASE STUDY AND PRACTICUM**

**April 25: Museum Management, Registration, and Collections Care**

- Excerpts from Lord and Lord, *The Manual of Museum Management*
- Gulliford, “Curation and Repatriation of Sacred Tribal Objects”

**IN CLASS: MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY AND ACCESSIONS POLICY PRACTICUM**

**May 9: FINAL EXAM PERIOD - CLASS WILL MEET FROM 7-10PM**

**\*\*\* DUE IN CLASS: EXHIBIT PROPOSAL/VISUALIZED CONCEPT STUDY\*\*\***

We will meet during our final exam period. In lieu of a written final exam, we will use the time to hold formal presentations of the final projects. During these presentations, students will share their exhibition proposals with the class and discuss how they incorporated the concepts and issues from our course readings in their exhibition design.