

## HIST 3468: Public History, Memory, and Interpretation



**Spring 2020**  
**Mondays from 4:30 – 7:25pm in Chapman 242**

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**Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:30-1pm 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 Museum curators and other public history practitioners use these objects along with historical documents to tell important stories about our collective past and our current culture.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 will have demonstrated the ability to:

- Identify and use the elements of effective oral and visual communication
- Create and deliver effectively structured oral presentations using language correctly and appropriately, as well as using visual media that are effective, appropriate, and well-integrated into the presentation
- Analyze and critique oral and visual components of presentations, as well as respond effectively to questions and comments from audience members
- 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
- 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 a 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 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 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. Students will give formal presentations of their critiques in class. **Due Date: March 23.**

**Group Digital Exhibit:** For the final project, students will work as in small groups to design a class-wide digital exhibit using materials from the Trinity University Special Collections and Archives. This project will require teamwork and significant work outside of class. Students will work together to develop the exhibit, write exhibit text, and select artifacts to display digitally using Omeka. Students will give formal presentations on their parts of the exhibit at a public exhibition opening, which will be held on **May 11**.

## **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
- be submitted in .doc (preferred) or .pdf format on TLEARN

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

Citations. All sources **MUST** be cited according to Chicago Notes-Bibliography style 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 papers will be penalized 2 grades per day (e.g. A- to B, B to C+). If you think you will not be able to turn in an assignment on time, talk to me as soon as possible so that we can arrange an extension if appropriate. Extensions are granted at my discretion; requests made within 48 hours of the due date will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. In **ALL** cases, late work is a better option than plagiarism, which will be considered a violation of the academic honor code.

## **GRADING**

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The final course grade will be determined as follows:

Participation:	30%	Exhibit Critique:	25%
Response papers:	15%	Final Project:	30%

## **ACADEMIC HONOR CODE**

All students are covered by a policy that prohibits dishonesty in academic work. Under the Honor Code, a faculty member will (or a student may) report an alleged violation to the Academic Honor Council. It is the task of the Council to investigate, adjudicate, and assign a punishment within certain guidelines if a violation has been verified. **Students 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.**

[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 assignments. 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 bring your accommodation letter to me early in the semester so we can discuss how I can best meet your needs. All discussions will remain confidential. If you have not already registered with Student Accessibility Services, contact the office at 999-7411 or SAS@trinity.edu. You must be registered with SAS before I can provide accommodation.

### *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.

### *Attendance:*

Attendance is mandatory. You must have a valid excuse for missing class (serious illness/injury, family emergency, etc.). **Absences will be excused only with a doctor's note or a letter from your dean or coach.** If you miss more than two classes or are consistently late, your final grade will be reduced (at my discretion). If you need to miss a class, please notify me. Absence from class does not excuse you from reading or writing assignments. You are responsible for getting notes from a classmate for any sessions that you miss.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

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- James and Lois Horton, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*
- Samant Chmelik, *Museum and Historic Site Management*
- 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 20: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday – \*\*\* NO CLASS \*\*\***

**January 27: 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
- Excerpt from Barbara Chivers, *A Student’s Guide to Presentations: Making your Presentations Count*

**February 3: Usable Histories**

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

**February 10: Memory and Identity**

- Horton and Horton, *Slavery and Public History*

**February 17: Local and Community History**

- Robert R. Weyeneth, “The Risks of Professionalizing Local History: The Campaign to Suppress My Book,” *Public History News* 24 (Fall 2003): 1-2.
- Robert R. Weyeneth, “History, He Wrote: Murder, Politics, and the Challenges of Public History in a Community with a Secret,” *The Public Historian* 16 (Spring 1994): 51-73.
- Leon Fink, “When Community Comes Home to Roost: The Southern Milltown as Lost Cause,” *The Journal of Social History* 40 (Fall 2006): 119-145.

### PART II: PUBLIC HISTORY SITES AND PRACTICES

**February 24: Historic Homes, Sites, and Monuments**

- Read one of the articles [your choice] from “Open House: Reimagining the Historic House Museum,” a Special Issue of *The Public Historian* 37, no. 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

**March 2: Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Management**

- Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*
- American Historical Association, “Historians in Historic Preservation” (Including the two profiles linked at the bottom of the page).

**March 9: SPRING BREAK – \*\*\* NO CLASS \*\*\***

**March 16: Libraries and Archives – \*\*\* CLASS WILL MEET IN COATES LIBRARY  
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES \*\*\***

- American Historical Association, “Historians in the Archives” (including the three profiles linked at the bottom of the page).
- 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”
- Marika Cifor, Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, and Noah Geraci, “What We Do Crossed over to Activism: The Politics and Practice of Community Archives,” *The Public Historian* 40, no. 2 (May 2018): 65-95.

**March 23: Historical Agencies, Museums, and Societies**

- American Historical Association, “Historians in Federal, State, and Local History” (including the profiles)
- American Historical Association, “Historians in Museums” (including profiles)
- Christopher Hommerding, “Queer Public History in Small-Town Wisconsin: The Pendarvis Historic Site and Interpreting the Queer Past,” *The Public Historian* 41, no. 2 (May 2019): 70-93.
- Robert Krim, “At the Corner of History and Innovation: Using Public History to Influence Public Policy,” *The Public Historian* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 62-81.

☞☞☞ **BRING CHMELIK BOOK TO CLASS** ☞☞☞

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

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

**March 30: Material Culture Studies**

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

**IN CLASS: OBJECT LAB PRACTICUM**

☞☞☞ **BRING CHMELIK BOOK TO CLASS** ☞☞☞

**April 6: 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 13: Digital History**

- Excerpt from Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*
- Anne Lindsay, “#VirtualTourist: Embracing Our Audience through Public History Web Experience,” *The Public Historian* 35, no. 1 (February 2013): 67-86.s
- “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**

☯☯ ☯ **BRING CHMELIK BOOK TO CLASS** ☯☯ ☯

**April 20: 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 27: 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**

☯☯ ☯ **BRING CHMELIK BOOK TO CLASS** ☯☯ ☯

**May 11: FINAL EXAM PERIOD - CLASS WILL MEET FROM 7-10PM FOR EXHIBIT OPENING – Location TBD**