

## HIS/IAR 627: Museum and Historic Site Interpretation

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Spring 2006  
Thursday 2-4:50  
McIver Room 229  
[emduffy@uncg.edu](mailto:emduffy@uncg.edu)

Dr. Eve M. Duffy  
Office: McIver 243  
4-5645;

### **Course summary**

This course introduces students to various aspects of interpreting the past in public venues such as museums and historic sites. The course is divided into three sections: the history of museums and historic sites, interpretive methods, and intellectual debates. The first section provides historical context for contemporary museum practice. The second section on interpretive methods gives students practical skills in formulating, organizing, and completing public history projects. The third section asks students to engage in current debates about museums as cultural institutions and sites of identity and community.

### **Learning goals**

1. Understand the historical development of museums and historic sites in Western Europe and the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
2. Build strategies and skills for interpreting history in a public setting using objects, graphics, text, media, and the built environment.
3. Cultivate an understanding of how museums have become cultural sites for the construction and contestation of history, identity, and memory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Understand the cultural debates currently influencing interpretative practice in museums.

### **Books**

1. Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago, 1999).
2. Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Smithsonian, 1999).
3. Jessica Foy Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (Alta Mira, 2002).
4. George E. Hein and Mary Alexander, *Museums Places of Learning* (AAM, 1998).
5. Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (Alta Mira Press, 1996).
6. Catherine H. Hughes, *Museum Theatre: Communicating with Visitors Through Drama* (AAM, 1998).
7. Steven Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (Columbia, 2001).
8. Ames, Kenneth, *Ideas and Images*. Alta Mira Press.
9. Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

10. David Boswell and Jessica Evans, *Representing the Nation: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Recommended:

1. Barbara Levy, *Great Tours!* (AltaMira 1995).

2. Dolores Hayden, *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*. Johns Hopkins, 2000.

### Websites

Smithsonian Legacies [www.smithsonianlegacies.si.edu](http://www.smithsonianlegacies.si.edu)

Teaching with Historic Places [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp)

### Assignments and Grading

Learning in this class depends on you, the student, and on your “owning” the class, by having a stake in making the class work for you and others. An essential component is therefore your attendance and active participation. Students should attend class, and come to class ready to discuss the materials. Students will also be asked to lead discussion on a weekly basis. If you miss more than one class, there will be a 3% reduction of your final grade for each absence. Beyond even this penalty, a student who neglects attendance and preparation risks failing the course.

Class participation: 30% (includes attendance, oral participation, leading discussion (once as main leader, twice as supporting by being responsible for additional articles))

Two Exhibit reviews: 40%

Final Project: 30%

### Class schedule and topics

#### 1. January 12<sup>th</sup>: Introduction; assignments

#### 2. January 19<sup>th</sup>: Museum legacies: constructions of the past

--Susan Crane, “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum” E-reserves.

--Thomas J. Schlereth, “Collecting Ideas and Artifacts,” in *Museum Studies* (2004)

--Spencer Crew, “Who Owns History? History in the Museum,” *The History Teacher* November 1996.

Visit the Smithsonian Legacies website and consider – How has the representation of history at the Smithsonian changed over time?

→ choose class projects and make appointments to meet with site contacts

### 3. January 26<sup>th</sup>: History of Museums

--Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1925* (1998).

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

--Gary Kulick, "Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present," In Leon and Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the US: A Critical Assessment* (1989). E-Reserves. \_\_\_\_\_

--Annie Coombes, "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities," in Preziosi and Farago, *Grasping the World* (2004) \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. February 2<sup>nd</sup>: House Museums

--Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (1999).

Presenters: \_\_\_\_\_

--Gaby Porter, "Seeing Through Solidity: A Feminist Perspective on Museums," in *Museum Studies* (2004). E-Reserves. \_\_\_\_\_

-- James Horton, "Presenting Slavery: The Perils of Telling America's Racial Story," *The Public Historian*, 2:4 (Fall 1999): 19-38. E-Reserves.

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→ Project Proposals and Calendars for Completion Due in Class

### 5. February 9<sup>th</sup>: Interpreting House Museums

Jessica Foy Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, Alta Mira Press, 2002.

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

Visit the Teaching With Historic Places Website

Read: CRM vol. 23, no. 8, 2000 [www.cr.nps.gov/crm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/crm) \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. February 16<sup>th</sup>: Interpretation -- Ideas and Images

Kenneth A. Ames, et. al. *Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretative History Exhibits*. Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

→ First exhibit review due in class

**7. February 23<sup>rd</sup>: Museum Education**

George F. Hein and Mary Alexander, *Museums Places of Learning*, AAM 1998. Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. March 2<sup>nd</sup>: Exhibitions**

Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, Alta Mira, 1996. Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. March 16<sup>th</sup> Project Research**

**10. March 23<sup>rd</sup>: Museum Theater**

Catherine Hughes Heinemann, *Museum Theatre: Communicating with Visitors Through Drama*, AAM, 1998. Presenter:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**11. March 30<sup>th</sup> Interpretation**

Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*.  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

→ Second exhibit review due by class time

**12. April 6<sup>th</sup>: Museums and National Identity**

Evans and Boswell, *Representing the Nation*. London 1999.  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. April 13<sup>th</sup> The Culture Wars**

Steven Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

Steven Lubar, "Exhibiting Memories," in *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian* (1997). E-Reserves.

**14. April 20<sup>th</sup>**

Class Presentations

**15. April 27**

Class Presentations

## Explanation of Assignments

### Lead Class Discussion (10% Class Participation Grade)

Each student must lead one class discussion.

\_\_\_ **Develop three to five questions** with which to begin discussion of the reading. Students may work in *groups* of two or three. You may also bring an example, such as an exhibit or tour, to class to illustrate the reading. You should plan to fill up the class time with your presentation and with discussion.

\_\_\_ **Meet with me** the week before you lead class to discuss your plans.

\_\_\_ **Write a short review** (2-3 pages) of the assigned reading. Each student must do this individually. The review should address the following : What is the author's

central question and thesis? Did s/he prove the argument to your satisfaction?

Why or

why not? What evidence was particularly effective? What evidence didn't work?

Why?

Use quotes and examples from the book to support your points. Does this book suggest

other possible research topics? If so, what?

### **2 Exhibit Reviews - 6-10 pages each (40%)**

Each student must write *two* exhibit reviews. You can review a history exhibit, a historic site, or an on-line history site. *AVOID ART MUSEUMS AND THE MESDA*

*COLLECTION*. Reviews must balance description and analysis. You must use the *course*

*readings* to help critique the exhibit or historic site. Cite course readings using *footnotes*.

(You may want to consult The Chicago Manual of Style for help with footnotes.)

If this

seems unclear, don't worry; we will discuss the elements of a good exhibit review in class.

\_\_\_ **Find models**. Read published exhibit reviews to use as models. You can find

scholarly reviews of exhibits in *Public Historian*, *American Quarterly*, and in Ken Ames, et.

al. *Ideas and Images* (1997). *Museum News* is a good place to find reviews written by

public history professionals.

\_\_\_ When you critique an exhibit, remember not to slam the interpretation.

Note what is useful about the interpretation, objects, and design as part of your critique. Suggest what could be changed to improve the interpretation.

## Public History Projects 2005

### *General Guidelines*

Class projects should take about 60-70 hours – 6 hours per week over 10-12 weeks.  
Class projects should begin no later than end of January and end by April 20

#### **To begin:**

\_\_\_Select a first and second choice for the projects you'd like to work on and inform Dr. Duffy by January 19<sup>th</sup>

\_\_\_After you are assigned a project, then you must contact the site supervisor or contact person by January 31 and meet with them to talk about expectations for the project and any reading material about the site.

\_\_\_Meet with the student team and plan a calendar for completion of the project and assign tasks. Who will complete each part of the project? When will you have certain parts, like secondary and primary research, done? How often will you meet? What are your goals for the project?

\_\_\_Write a prospectus for the project. Outline project goals, who will do what, and what historical issues or themes you will address. Include a beginning bibliography of secondary sources for the project.

At the end of the course, students will turn in the following:

\_\_\_The scripts for tours, web pages, and exhibits along with object and image lists. You must also turn in the final form of the project. TwHP projects should be mounted and accessible on the UNCG web space and those of you doing tours will need to give the tour as part of your final presentation.

\_\_\_A final report (8-10 pages). EACH STUDENT MUST TURN IN A SEPARATE FINAL REPORT. This will be an overview and analysis of the project. The report should be accompanied by a bibliography of 25 to 30 sources or 3-5 pages. Guidelines will be handed out in class.

\_\_\_An oral presentation. Students are required to give an oral presentation at the end of class.

Students will ask their supervisors to send a written evaluation of their work to the instructor.

\_\_\_THIS IS A PUBLIC PROJECT! That means that each team must create a clean, final product and give it to the host institution by the end of the semester. It is very important that you meet your obligations as public historians and turn in the final product not only to Dr. Duffy but also to the contact person.

## 2006 Projects

### **Tannenbaum Park –two possible projects**

Contact: Adrienne Byrd, Park Director, 545-5315

1) Project team will create a museum theater piece for the site to be performed on the 4th of July. Team will discuss content and form with Ms. Byrd and will draw upon primary historical evidence at the park. Team will script a one-act, 10 minute play involving no more than two or three characters. Dialog and themes will be drawn from secondary and primary sources and should bring some issue or aspect of the 18th Century backcountry to life. (2 students)

2) Project team will create an exhibit for the Bicentennial drawn from the museum's bicentennial collections. Students will consult with Adrienne Byrd and Brent Brackett. (2 students)

### **North Carolina Pottery Center –two possible projects**

Contact: Catherine Coulter, Education Coordinator / Collections Manager, 336-873-8430

catherine@atomic.net

The mission of the North Carolina Pottery Center is to promote public awareness and appreciation of the history, heritage, and ongoing tradition of pottery making in North Carolina through educational programs, public services, collection and preservation, and research and documentation.

1) Project team will revise a docent manual for the site. This will include some fact checking as well as developing resources for the docent manual. Team will also create at least one new tour for the site. (2-3 students)

2) Team will create self-guided tours and develop interactive elements for 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and home schoolers. (2-3 students)

### **High Point Museum**

Contact: Edith Brady

. (2-4 students)

### **University Archives, UNC-Chapel Hill –two possible projects**

Contact: Janis Holder, University Archivist

The Exhibit "Slavery and the Making of the University" explores the relationship between slavery and UNC-CH. The exhibit will run until the end of February.

1) Students will design a walking tour of campus that will draw from the exhibit, which will go online after the exhibit goes down at the end of Feb. Students will need to make sure to work closely with the exhibit and avoid overlap with an existing tour by Prof. McMillan. (2 students)

2) Students will design a traveling exhibit for K-12 students. (2 students)

