HIS/IAR 626 – The Practice of Public History
Fall 2009, Tuesdays, 3:30-6:20 p.m.
Classroom: MHRA 1304

Professor Benjamin Filene
office hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:00 and by appointment: MHRA 2137
office phone: 336/334-5645
home phone: 919/932-7722 (don’t call after 10:00 p.m.)
bpfilene@uncg.edu

Course Description:
This course is not an instructional in how to claw your way to the top; rather it’s an introduction to what it is like to work to within a public history institution and what it takes to thrive in one.

“You gotta serve somebody,” croaks Bob Dylan. Everyone at every level of every organization is simultaneously a leader and a follower. This course is about understanding both sides of that relationship and how to do productive and fulfilling work from both ends.

The course starts from a few key premises:
- The day-to-day, nuts-and-bolts parts of an institution’s work take on life only when you understand the goals these practices were created to achieve. The policies, procedures, and programs that fill professional manuals and “how to” books exist to achieve big-picture goals for institutions.
- Fundamentally, these goals involve relationships—relationships between
  - an institution and its constituencies (“Reaching Audiences”)
  - an institution and other institutions (“Reaching Partners”)
  - an institution and its employees (“Reaching Colleagues”)

The course is structured around the theory and practice involved in building these three kinds of relationships. Throughout, the course links practical skills—writing a mission statement, creating a marketing plan, writing a budget—with discussion of the broader purposes these tools are intended to accomplish.

Student Learning Outcomes
Through a mix of classroom- and project-based work, you will gain:
- a richer understanding of the role of history in public life;
- a working knowledge of the processes and procedures that sustain public history institutions
- the ability to recognize the values underlying such processes and procedures;
- a richer understanding of how museums and sites establish sustainable niches in their communities; and
• an awareness of the dynamics involved in the interpersonal relationships that drive public work.

As well, you will hone a set of skills that you will need to thrive in the workplace:

• evaluating and analyzing primary and secondary sources thoughtfully, with attention to argument and point of view;
• speaking with passion, clarity, and respect;
• writing clearly and persuasively;
• collaborating with energy, sensitivity, and an awareness of how much you can learn from community members and your peers; and
• experimenting fearlessly to build your skills.

**Teaching Methods**

This seminar depends on active and engaged discussions that allow you and your classmates, individually and collectively, to wrestle with what it means to become a practicing public historian. The classroom will be a setting for engagement with multiple voices—not only the professor’s but those of the students, our community partners, and historical “informants” revealed through a range of sources. You are expected to complete reading assignments before every class meeting and to arrive ready to share personal opinions on the material. Class sessions will regularly involve informal full-group discussions, oral presentations, small-group conversations, and on-the-spot analyses of primary sources. As detailed below, class participation is a significant part of your grade. In addition, you will engage with the course content through formal and informal writing assignments that invite you to apply the approaches we are discussing to original work in your own voice.

Beyond regular readings, discussions, and writings, the best way to learn about public history work is to do some. You will be involved in designing, collaboratively, a history project that will be practical, relevant, and engaging to real local institutions and public audiences. This semester will focus on planning online projects that will document and share the stories of the mill villages that sustained the Cone Mills factories in Greensboro. Next semester (HIS/IAR 627) we’ll implement those plans and create these projects!

**Assignments and Evaluation**

You will be evaluated on

- **Class participation**—15%: attending class, doing the reading, completing the Information Interview assignment (see below), writing thoughtful and on-time weekly responses to the reading (see below), speaking up in discussions, and helping to foster a sense of shared exploration within the classroom.

  **Weekly responses:** Each week, short, informal reactions to that week’s readings (roughly a couple of paragraphs) will be due. These must be posted on our class’s Blackboard Discussion Board by 8:00 a.m. each Tuesday.
**Information interview**: After reading in *Museum Careers* (Schlatter) conduct an interview with a museum professional and then give a 10-minute in-class presentation about it to the class: students sign up for dates—September 9–November 11

**Assignment #1—10%:**
- **Website review**—due September 22:
  an evaluation of sites that could serve as instructive models for your online mill village projects

**Assignment #2—20%:**
- **“Institutional Personality Assessment”**—due October 20:
  an analysis of the clarity and coherence of a local institution’s mission, brand, marketing, fund-raising, and interpretive program

**Final Project and Presentation—30%:**
- **Grant application for mill villages project**—due December 3

*Note*: Each student’s grade for the collaborative final project will be determined by the quality of the product and presentation and, as well, by each individual’s contributions to the project. Each student will be asked to assess the contributions that each team member (including themselves) made to the project and to the collaborative process.

**Final paper—25%:**
- **Reflection essay on the final project**—due December 11

**Grading scale:**
A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-= 80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76

**If things go awry…**
…it’s your responsibility to tell me—right away. If papers are late without direct, prior approval from me, I deduct ½ a letter grade per day—no exceptions. If your project is dead-ending or your peer collaboration imploding, please do tell me before it’s too late to resolve the issues.
**Required Books**


**Recommended:**


**Academic Integrity Policy**
All students have a responsibility to uphold the standards of “Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect, and Responsibility” detailed in the Academic Integrity Policy. Instances of cheating, plagiarism, misuse of academic resources, falsification of information, and facilitating of academic dishonesty are treated with utmost seriousness by the history department and dealt with severely by the University administration. The full policy appears in the *Student Calendar/Handbook* and at academicintegrity.uncg.edu.

Per university policy, you will be asked to sign a copy of the Academic Integrity Pledge for each major assignment in this class.

**Special Needs**
If you require accommodations for special learning needs, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Disability Services, located within the Elliot University Center (334-5770)—and please let me know!
CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Whose History?  Who’s History?

August 25—Introductions

Before first class:
Read about the National Council on Public History’s debate about “What Is Public History” (including Cathy Stanton’s summary) at the NCPH website:

Read some of the actual Listserv postings about “What Is Public History” from May, June, and July 2007, archived here: http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lm&list=H-Public.

Come to class with two comments that interested you.


Guillory, Ferrel and Andrew Holton.  “We Ain’t What We Used to Be.”  Durham Herald-Sun (January 4, 2009): F1, F3. [BF will hand out]

September 1: Whose History?  Who’s History?

Guest speakers: Paul and Judith Sams, former mill village residents

Rosenzweig, Roy and David Thelen.  The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life (2000): Introduction, Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, and Afterthoughts (everything except Chapters 2-3).


Extra class meeting: mill village tour; Wednesday, September 2, 3:30-5:30, departing from MHRA

Reaching Colleagues I
September 8: Working Collaboratively
and team dynamics


Reaching Audiences
September 15: Making Public Institutions Matter
and mission statements


September 22: Getting on the Radar Screen and marketing plans/branding

Website review due


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 11: 247-272.


Extra class meeting: Internship presentations; Wednesday, September 30, 4:00-6:00 p.m., Petty Building, room 219

September 29: Preserving (and Deserving) the Public’s Trust and ethics and collections management policies

Carr, David. “Museums and Public Trust.” In The Promise of Cultural
Institutions (2003): 109-131


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 10: 223-245.

Optional: Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 8: 175-195.

Reaching Partners
October 6: Collaborating with Communities and civic engagement strategies

One-page project proposals due


October 13—no class (fall break)

*Extra class meeting: project advisors meeting, October 14, 15, or 16, tbd*

October 20: Pursuing Outreach vs. “In-Reach”

*and diversity hiring plans*

*“Institutional Personality Assessment” essay due*


“Seek and You Shall Find.” Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* (February 16, 2005): D1, D6. [*BF will hand out in class*]

October 27: Collaborating with Donors I—Listening

*and development plans*

*In class: 10-second and 1-minute project presentations*

*Guest speaker:* Fred Goss, Director, Greensboro Historical Museum


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 6: 121-160.


**November 3: Collaborating with Donors II—Stating Your Case and budgets and grant-writing**

- *Slogans/logos and solicitation letters due in class (each person chooses to do one or other).*
- *No Blackboard posting due this week. Come with a question for Dr. Gradin.*

**Guest speaker:** Dr. Harlan Gradin, Associate Director/Director of Programs & Community Development, North Carolina Humanities Council


*[BF will hand out in class]*


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 5: 91-119.

**Reaching Colleagues II**

**November 10: Building a Vision and board management**


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 3 (excerpt): 39-55.

**November 17: Managing Change and strategic planning**

*Full Draft of grant materials due*


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 4: 75-90.

**November 24: Leading from Below and human resources/personnel management and finding your niche**

*Receive comments on grant materials from BF*


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 7: 161-173.

December 1:
*In-class final project presentations; Celebration!*

Thursday, December 3: *Revised grant applications due*

December 8: *no class* (“Reading Day”)

Friday, December 11: *Final papers due* (no final exam)