

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

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Spring 2005  
Mon. 4:00 – 6:50 PM  
McIver Room 225

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### 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: 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 including exhibits, educational programs, and tours. Finally, the class will engage current debates about museums as cultural institutions and sites of identity and community. This course can't do everything, but it is intended to give students a solid overview of the history, best practices, and cultural debates in which museum interpretation is embedded.

### Learning Goals

1. Understand the historical development of museums and historic sites in 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 twentieth century. Understand the cultural debates currently influencing interpretive practice in museums.

### Required Books

- Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago, 1999).  
Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Smithsonian, 1999).  
Jessica Foy Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (Alta Mira, 2002).  
George E. Hein and Mary Alexander, *Museums Places of Learning* (AAM, 1998).  
Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (Alta Mira Press, 1996).  
Catherine H. Heinemann, *Museum Theatre: Communicating with Visitors Through Drama* (AAM, 1998).  
Steven Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (Columbia, 2001).  
David Carr, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions* (Alta Mira, 2003).

### Recommended

- Barbara Levy, *Great Tours!* (AltaMira 1995).  
Sara Dubberly, ed., *Exhibition Planning and Management: Reprints from NAME's Recent and Recommended*, AAM 2001.

### Web Sites

- 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**

Class participation 20% (Attendance and discussion)

2 Exhibit Reviews 40%

Public History Project 40% \* See final page of syllabus for general guidelines and sites.

You must choose two sites (a first choice and a backup by Jan. 24.)

## **Course Schedule**

### **January 10 - Introduction**

### **January 17 - MLK Holiday**

### **History of Museums**

#### **January 24 - Museum Legacies: Constructions of the Past**

Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum," and Thomas J. Schlereth, "Collecting Ideas and Artifacts," in *Museum Studies* (2004) E-Reserves.

Visit the Legacies Website: [www.smithsonianlegacies.si.edu](http://www.smithsonianlegacies.si.edu)

Question: How has the representation of history changed at the Smithsonian over time?

Answer questions on handout.

→ *Choose Class Projects and make appointments to meet with site contacts.*

### **January 31 - History of Museums**

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

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

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

Michael Wallace, "History Museums in the United States," in Susan Porter Benson, *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (1986). E-Reserves.

### **February 7 - 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.

→ *Project Proposals and Calendars for Completion Due in Class*

### **Interpretive Methods**

#### **February 14 - Landscapes/House Museums**

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

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

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)

#### **February 21 - Museum Education**

George E. Hein and Mary Alexander, *Museums Places of Learning*, AAM, 1998.

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

Edward Alexander, "Anna Billings Gallup Popularizes the First Children's Museum," in *The Museum in America* (1997). E-Reserves.

David Carr, "Crafted Truths: Respecting Children in Museums," in *The Promise of Cultural Institutions*. E-Reserves.

Models: Museum education projects in class.

#### **February 28 - Exhibitions**

Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, Alta Mira Press, 1996.

Selections from Sara Dubberly, ed., *Exhibition Planning and Management: Reprints from NAME's Recent and Recommended*, AAM 2001.

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

Models: Abstract, Script, and Walkthrough from "America on the Move," National Museum of American History.

→ *Exhibit Review 1 -- Due in Class*

### **March 7 - Spring Break**

#### **March 14 - Museum Theater**

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

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

### **March 21 - TRIP TO NC MUSEUM OF HISTORY?**

#### **March 28 - Project Day**

Peer review of opening label text/tour text/theater text in class.

→ *Exhibit Review 2 – Due in Class*

#### **Intellectual Debates**

##### **April 4 - Culture Wars**

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

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

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

##### **April 11 - Future Promise**

Selected readings from David Carr, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions*.

Chapters 1, 3, and 4 on E-Reserves.

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

##### **April 18 - Project Day - No Class.**

Finish projects and write draft of final report.

##### **April 25 - Project Editing - In Class**

##### **May 2 - Class Presentations**

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### **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 18.

#### **To begin:**

\_\_\_ Select a first and second choice for the projects you'd like to work on and email your choices to Dr. Franz before January 24.

\_\_\_ 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. Franz but also to the contact person.

## **2005 Projects**

### **Old Salem, Inc.**

Contact : John Caramia, VP, Education and Interpretation, 336-721-7338.

Project team will create a self-guided school tour using the educational goals of Old Salem and the history standards for the State of North Carolina. (3-4 students). Content and themes of the tour will be decided in consultation with Mr. Caramia.

A second project team will create a museum theater piece or first-person interpretation for one of the houses on site. (2 students)

### **Tannenbaum Park**

Contact: Adrienne Byrd, Park Director, 545-5315

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)

### **Blandwood Mansion**

Contact: Ashley Poteat, Curator and Director, 272-5003.

Blandwood is the home of North Carolina Governor, railroad entrepreneur and advocate of women's education, John Motley Morehead. Project team will review and revise the docent manual for the site. This will include some fact checking as well as developing new resources for the docent manual. Team will also create at least one new tour for the site. Possible tours include an overview of women's life and experiences in the 19th Century at Blandwood (there are great sources on the oldest daughter of John Motley Morehead) and/or an overview of the Blandwood as a Civil War encampment. (3-6 students).

### **Loewenstein Architectural Tour**

Contact: Prof. Jo Leimenstol, IAR, 256-0303.

XX Loewenstein was one of the premier architects of mid-century modernism. UNCG and Preservation Greensboro, Inc. will co-host a symposium and tour of Modernist architecture in November 2005. Team will review Loewenstein homes in Greensboro (they've already been surveyed), create a tour and tour-guide resource packet. Team will consult with Prof. Leimenstol about the details of the fall symposium and goals for the tour, and will Prof. Franz for models of other good architectural walking tours in the U.S. (2-4 students)

### **University Archives/Women Veterans Project**

Contact: Beth Carmichael, Curator, 334-4045.

Team will work with Beth Carmichael and Archivist Betty Carter to create a concept booklet for an exhibit on the Women Veterans Oral History project. This project has already received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to bring in academic consultants. Now the archives staff wants to apply for an NEH planning grant and they need to develop the central themes, design, and outreach for an exhibit. Project will require research in the oral history and three-dimensional collections in the

archives. Students will script walk through and sample label text as well as design and layout the concept booklet. (2 students)