HIS 627/IAR627—Museum and Historic Site Interpretation: Principles and Practice
Tuesdays 3:30-6:20
HHRA 2211

Professor Benjamin Filene
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Course Description:
This seminar explores the relationship between history and public audiences, focusing on the theory and practice of telling stories through museums and historic sites. It introduces you to the tools that public historians use, explores key dilemmas in public interpretation and community collaboration, and examines contemporary models for how best to reach audiences in ways that make history meaningful.

All of the course’s theoretical concepts you will try out in practice. The centerpiece of our work this semester will be an original exhibit project—student-researched, student-designed, and student-fabricated with community informants, community collaborators, and community audiences. In partnership with the Rosetta C. Baldwin Museum and the High Point Museum, class-members will work together to create an exhibit that will open in May 2006 for a three-month run at the High Point Museum and then will move for long-term installation at the Baldwin Chapel School. The exhibit will take a microcosmic approach to history, focusing on the lives of the school’s Class of 1963 as a way of illuminating the story of the Baldwin school and, more broadly, of African Americans in High Point.

How you’ll be evaluated
The skills that you need to succeed in this course are ones that you will need to thrive in the workplace:

- **reading and analyzing** thoughtfully and with an eye for new ideas
- **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
- **experimenting** fearlessly to build your skills and find the best ways to reach audiences

You will be graded on

**Class participation**—15%:
attending class, doing the reading, writing thoughtful and on-time weekly responses to the reading (see below), speaking up in discussions, representing the class and the school professionally in the wider community, pitching in on the group project, 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.
Analytical Essay #1—15%:
a close reading of a single object or image—due February 20

Narrative Biography and Compendium of Research Sources—15%:
a biography of one member of the Class of 1963 and appendices of primary source research materials—due February 27

Analytical Essay #2—15%:
an historical analysis of issues revealed by the class’s original research into the Class of 1963—due March 13

Exhibition Review—15%:
an analytical assessment of an exhibition of your choice—due March 27

Final Project and Presentation/Program—25%:
a completed museum exhibition and public program—public opening May 1!

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 peer collaboration imploding, I need to hear about it before it’s too late to resolve the issues.

LATE PAPERS:
No extensions on papers or projects will be granted without a dean's excuse. If a paper or project is late without an extension, I will deduct 1/2 a letter grade per day (e.g., from A to A-).

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!
Books to Buy


CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

SETTING THE STAGE

January 9: Introductions


January 16: Memory and Meaning, Story and Community


Filene, Benjamin, “Open House Journal” series:
“The Ones We Left Behind,” *Minnesota History* 60 (winter 2005-06): 335-339.
“Catching Up with ‘The Ones We Left Behind,’” *Minnesota History* 60 (summer 2006): 77-78.

READING THE EVIDENCE

Thursday, January 25: Public Documents—Class meets in High Point


“African American Gallery Guide.” High Point Museum. [BF will distribute]

“African American Heritage Guide,” High Point Convention and Visitors Bureau. [BF will distribute]

Chavis, Glenn. “Athletics History Told in Black and White.” High Point News and Record (October 1, 2006): 15, 26. [BF will distribute]

Chavis, Glenn. “Local Schools Once Offered Bible Study.” High Point News and Record (May 21, 2006): R1-2. [BF will distribute]

January 30: Oral History—Visit to University Graphics?


[In class: writing exercise]

February 6: Objects and Images


Assignment: After reading the above, find a photograph that interests you and bring it to class along with some ideas about how to “read” the image. You could try the library at around call # TR650, where books on photographic history are located.

TELLING THE STORY

February 13: The Power of Interpretation; Interpretation as Power


February 20: Exhibiting History


5-page artifact/image essays due

February 27: Taking a Stand? Controversies


Biographies of Class of 1963 (and appendices of research materials) due

March 6—no class (spring break)

March 13: Learning in the Museum


**AND**


Optional:

Analytical essay about Class of 1963 due

March 20: Exhibit Evaluation—Meet at Greensboro Historical Museum


Assignment: Fill out Serrell’s framework for Greensboro Historical Museum’s *Welcome to the Gate City*

March 27: Exhibit Design:


Braden, Donna, Ellen Rosenthal, and Daniel Spock. “What the Heck is Experience

**Exhibition review due**

**April 3: Exhibit Text**  

**April 10: Exhibit Text Work Session**  

No Blackboard postings this week.

**April 17: Historic Sites/Living History**  


**April 24: Exhibit Installation Session**

May 1—Final Tweaks

**Thursday, May 3—Evening Exhibit Opening/Program at High Point Museum**