

## **HIS 627/IAR627—Museum and Historic Site Interpretation: Principles and Practice**

Tuesdays 3:30-6:20

MHRA 2207

### **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 a collaboration with the Greensboro Historical Museum and the Senior Center at Senior Resources of Guilford. With these institutional partners, class-members will work together to create an original exhibit, program, and publication—student-researched, student-designed, and student-fabricated with community informants, community collaborators, and community audiences.

### **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 open mind to new ideas
- **honing your eye and ear to recognize a good story**—in sound, image, object, or text
- **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—20%:**

a close reading of a single object or image—*due February 19*

**Exhibition Review—25%:**

an analytical assessment of an exhibition of your choice—*due March 18*

**Final Project and Presentation/Program—40%:**

a completed museum exhibition, publication, and public program—opening *May 5!*

**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](http://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**

Falk, John H. and Lynn D. Dierking. *The Museum Experience*, 1992.

Ritchie, Donald. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2003.

Schwartz, Marjorie. *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*, 2006.

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

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 1995.

## CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

### SETTING THE STAGE

#### **January 15: Introductions—Histories, Stories, Publics**

--*In class activity: public documents as evidence; public documents as stories*

#### **January 22: Memory, Meaning, and Community**

Cronon, William. "Why the Past Matters." *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 84 (autumn 2000): 3-13.

Corbett, Katharine T. and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry," *The Public Historian* 28 (winter 2006): 15-38.

Archibald, Robert. "Common Ground." In *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (1999): 87-108.

Weil, Stephen E. "From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum." In Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (2002): 28-52.

Filene, Benjamin. "Searching for Florence." *Minnesota History* 57 (fall 2000): 130-139.

### READING THE EVIDENCE

#### **January 29: Oral History—GUESTS: Chuck Bolton and Cat McDowell**

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. "The View from the Bottom Rail: Oral History and the Freedmen's Point of View." In *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (2005 [Fifth Edition]): 177-209.

Portelli, Alessandro. "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event." In *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (1991): 1-26.

Ritchie, Donald. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2003.

#### **FOR WEDNESDAY JANUARY 30 LECTURE:**

Sevcenko, Liz. "The Power of Place: How Historic Sites Can Engage Citizens in Human Rights Issues" (The Center for Victims of Torture, Tactical Notebook Series): 17 pp.

#### **February 5: Objects and Images**

Prown, Jules David. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," 1982. In *Material Life in America, 1600-1680*, Robert Blair St. George, ed. (1988): 17-37.

Hebdige, Dick. "Subculture and Style." In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, 2002 [1979]: 1-19.

Corrin, Lisa G. "Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves." In *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, Lisa G. Corrin, ed. (1994): 1-22.

Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. "The Mirror with a Memory: Photographic Evidence and the Urban Scene." In *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (2005 [Fifth Edition]): 210-233.

Schwartzter, Marjorie. "The Collection." In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (2006): 69-119.

**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.

### **Work Group Presentation: Graphics**

## **TELLING THE STORY**

### **February 12: The Power of Interpretation; Interpretation as Power**

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 1995: pp. xvii-ix, 1-30, 108-153.

Wallace, Mike. "Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World," In *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (1996): 133-157.

Kingsolver, Barbara. "The Spaces Between." In *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now or Never* (1996 [1995]): 146-157.

Thelen, David. "Individual Experience and Big Picture History." *History News* 55 (winter 2000): 10-13.

Schwartzter, Marjorie. "Introduction." In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (2006): 1-27.

[In class: writing exercise]

### **Work Group Presentation: Floor Plan**

**Project Work: Identify some promising audio passages for Audio Editing Work Group**

**February 19: Exhibiting History**

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions* (2005 [1993]): v-xi; 1-67.

Luke, Timothy. "Politics at the Exhibition: Aesthetics, History, and Nationality in the Culture Wars." In *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (2002): 1-4.

Luke, Timothy. "Memorializing Mass Murder: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum." In *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (2002): 37-64.

Engelhardt, Tom and Edward T. Linenthal. "History Under Siege." In *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*: pp. 1-7.

Schwartz, Marjorie. "The Exhibition." In *Riches, Rivals, and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (2006): 121-169.

Handout: "The Process: What You Can Expect" [**BF will distribute**]

**Optional:** online exhibit: *The Raid on Deerfield: The Many Stories of 1704*:  
<http://www.1704.deerfield.history.museum/>

**5-page artifact/image essays due****February 26: Learning in the Museum**

Falk, John H. and Lynn D. Dierking. *The Museum Experience*, 1992.

Introduction (pp. 1-7); Chapter 5-7 (67-114); pp. 123-125; Chapters 9-10 (pp.129-150).

Hein, George. "The Constructivist Museum." *GEM News* [Group for Education in Museums] 1995: 6 pp.

Ansbacher, Ted. "What Are We Learning? Outcomes of the Museum Experience." *The Informal Learning Review* 53 (March-April 2002): 1, 4-7.

**OPTIONAL:-**

Russell, Bob. "Experience-Based Learning Theories." *The Informal Learning Review* 1999: 6 pp.

**Work Group Presentation: Publication****Project Work: Turn in interview transcripts and photocopies of photographs/objects****March 4: Exhibit Evaluation—Class meets at Greensboro Historical Museum**

Serrell, Beverly. *Judging Exhibitions: A Framework for Assessing Excellence* (2006): 3-6, 17-29, 41-49, 52-60, 91-109.

Chambers, Marlene. "Critiquing Exhibition Criticism." *Museum News* (September/October 1999): 31-37, 65.

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*: 68-80, 163-166.

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

**Work Group Presentation: Audio Editing**

**Project Work: "story-mining" session; brainstorm themes & sections**

**March 11—no class (spring break)**

**March 18:**

**Exhibit Design:**

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*: 92-102; 115-149.

Wagner, Sherry Kafka. "Telling Time: The Process of Communicating History Interpretation in Exhibits and Sites." New York Council for the Humanities conference paper (1984): 9 pp.

Braden, Donna, Ellen Rosenthal, and Daniel Spock. "What the Heck is Experience Design?" *Exhibitionist* 24 (fall 2005): 14-20.

Bruce Mau Design. "An Incomplete Manifesto for Growth" (1998): 6 pp.  
[BF will distribute]

**Project Work: In-class design session; sketch out floor plan**

**Exhibition review due**

**Thursday March 20: Meeting with Exhibition Advisors?**

**March 25: Exhibit Text**

Serrell, Beverly. *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, 1996: pp. ix-xv; 1-49; 65-130; 189-206.

McLean, Kathy. *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*: 103-114.

***Project Work:***

*Floor Plan Work Group shares floor plan in class*

*Drafts of initial panels due*

*Audio Editing Work Group shares audio*

**April 1: In-class work session***Project Work:*

*Drafts of remaining panels due;  
All materials shared with Senior Resources partners*

**April 8: Historic Sites: Living History**

Gable, Eric and Richard Handler, "Colonialist Anthropology at Colonial Williamsburg." *Museum Anthropology* 17 (October 1993): 26-31.

Cary Carson. "Lost in the Fun House: A Commentary on Anthropologists' First Contact with History Museums." *Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 137-150.

Stanton, Cathy. "Performing the Postindustrial: The Limits of Radical History in Lowell, MA." *Radical History Review* 98 (spring 2007): 81-96.

Carson, Cary. "The End of History Museums: What is Plan B?" Paper delivered at conference: New Audiences for Old Houses: Building a Future with the Past, Boston University (September 28, 2007): 25 pp.

Thompson, Ginger. "Reaping What Was Sown on the Old Plantation." *New York Times* (June 22, 2000, section A, p. 1): 17 pp.

*Project Work: Revised versions of all remaining materials due*

**April 15: In-class work session: Public Program Planning***Project Work:*

*Graphics Work Group sends graphics package to University Graphics  
Publication Group sends files to printer*

**April 22: Historic Sites: Historic Houses**

Butler, Patrick H. "Past, Present, and Future: The Place of the House Museum in the Museum Community." In Jessica Foy, *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (2002): 18-42.

Reid, Debra A. "Making Gender Matter: Interpreting Male and Female Roles in Historic House Museums." In Jessica Foy, *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (2002): 81-110.

Moe, Richard. "Are There Too Many House Museums?" *Forum Journal* 16 (2002): 1-?.

**Monday, April 28: *Floor Plan Work Group (?) delivers panels to Gbo Historical Museum  
Exhibit Installation begins?***



**April 29: Exhibit Installation and Program Planning**

**May 5: Evening Exhibit Opening**