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. 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 15: Introductions—Histories, Stories, Publics*

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

*January 22: Memory, Meaning, and Community*


**READING THE EVIDENCE**

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


**FOR WEDNESDAY JANUARY 30 LECTURE:**


*February 5: 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.

Work Group Presentation: Graphics

TELLING THE STORY
February 12: The Power of Interpretation; Interpretation as Power


[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


**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

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


**OPTIONAL:**


*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*


**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:**


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

Exhibition review due

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

**March 25: Exhibit Text**


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


*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


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