HIS/IAR 626 – The Practice of Public History
Spring 2011, Tuesdays, 3:30-6:20 p.m.
Classroom: Gatewood Studio Arts Center (STAC) 204

Professor Benjamin Filene
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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 stories associated with downtown Greensboro, with an eye toward implementing those plans and projects in fall 2011.

**Assignments and Evaluation**
You will be evaluated 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, 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 & Reflection Essay—5%: due in class; students sign up for presentation dates, one per week
After reading in Museum Careers (Schlatter) conduct an interview with a museum professional, by phone or in person. Then write a short reflection piece about the interview and give a 5-8-minute in-class presentation about it to the class.

“Institutional Integration” Assessment——25%: due February 22
an analysis of the clarity and coherence of a local institution’s mission, brand, marketing, fund-raising, and interpretive program

Downtown Greensboro project—30%:
• small-group grant application due Sunday, March 27 (5:00 p.m.);
• whole-class grant application due April 19;
• in-class presentation April 19 (tentative)

Note: Each student’s grade for the collaborative grant application will be determined by the quality of the product and final 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 they themselves) made to the project and to the collaborative process.

Final paper—25%:
Reflection essay on the final project—due April 28

Grading scale:
A=93-100; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B=83-86; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; F=72 and below

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


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

Introduction


Reaching Audiences I
January 18: Making Public Institutions Matter and mission statements


Reaching Partners I
January 25: Collaborating with Communities and civic engagement strategies


No Blackboard posting. In class: report on community case studies

**Reaching Colleagues I**
*February 1: Working Collaboratively and team dynamics*


“The Process: What You Can Expect” [BF will distribute]
**Reaching Audiences II**

**February 8: Getting on the Radar Screen**

*and marketing plans/branding*


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 11: 247-272.

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**February 15: Preserving (and Deserving) the Public’s Trust**

*and ethics and collections management policies*


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 10: 223-245.

**Optional:** Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 8: 175-195.
One-page project proposals due

Reaching Partners II
February 22: Pursuing Outreach vs. “In-Reach”
and diversity hiring plans
Extra class meeting: MSHP Career Forum, February 22, 6:30-8:00 p.m.
MHRA faculty lounge (3rd floor)


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

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

March 1: Collaborating with Donors I—Stating Your Case
and budgets and grant-writing

Guest speaker: Darrell Stover, Program Officer and Statewide Coordinator for Museum on Main Street, North Carolina Humanities Council


“Five Steps to Easier Proposal Writing”: 2-9. [BF will distribute]

Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 5: 91-119.

*No Blackboard posting: Come with a question for Darrell Stover.*

*Slogans/logos and solicitation letters due in class (each person chooses to do one or other).*

March 8: *No class* (spring break)

March 15: Collaborating with Donors II—Listening and development plans

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


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 6: 121-160.

*Draft of small-group grant application due*

Reaching Colleagues II
March 22: Building a Vision
and board management


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


Sunday, March 27: Final small-group grant application due

March 29: Managing Change
and strategic planning


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 4: 75-90; and 313-355.

April 5: Early class meeting: Work session, 2:30-3:45
Guest speaker: Sean Kelley, Program Director, Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site (Philadelphia):
Public talk 4:00-5:00; session with class 5:00-6:00

Draft of whole-class grant application due

April 12: Leading from Below
and human resources/personnel management and finding your niche


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 7: 161-173.

April 19: Last class meeting: In-class final project presentations
Whole-class grant application completed

April 21: Whole-class grant application submitted to NC Humanities Council

April 28: Final papers due (no final exam)