HIS/IAR 626 – The Practice of Public History
Spring 2012, Wednesdays, 3:30-6:20 p.m.
Classroom: MHRA 2204

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
  o an institution and its constituencies (“Reaching Audiences”)
  o an institution and other institutions (“Reaching Partners”)
  o 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 a public project that documents, interprets, and shares the history of the Terra Cotta community in Greensboro. You will collaborate with each other and with our community partner, the Terra Cotta Heritage Foundation, to write a “Large Grant” application to the North Carolina Humanities Council. We will submit the application with an eye toward implementing those plans and projects in fall 2012.

**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 Wednesday.*
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.

One-page project proposal—5%: due in class February 1
Write a plan for a project component that extends the class’s work on the history of the Terra Cotta community. In doing so, pay attention to how to describe the project in a clear, pithy, and yet inspiring way.

“Institutional Integration” Assessment—25%: due in class February 15
an analysis of the clarity and coherence of a local institution’s mission, brand, marketing, fund-raising, and interpretive program

Final project—25%:
• first full draft due Friday, March 2 (5:00 p.m.);
• revised full draft due March 16 (tentative);
• revised full draft due April 4
• final draft due to NC Humanities Council April 15

Note: 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 25, 10:00 a.m.

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**—read before first class

**January 11: Practicing Public History: What, Why, and How?**


**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 Audiences II
February 1: Getting on the Radar Screen
and marketing plans/branding


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 11: 247-272.

One-page project proposals due

Reaching Colleagues I
February 8: Working Collaboratively
and team dynamics


*Learning through Serving*, Chapter 4: 45-65.

Download and read the application form and instructions for Large Grants from the North Carolina Humanities Council: [http://www.nchumanities.org/content/large-grants](http://www.nchumanities.org/content/large-grants)

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

### Reaching Partners II

**February 15: Collaborating with Donors I—Stating Your Case and budgets and grant-writing**

Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 5: 91-119.


“No Blackboard posting

Institutional Integration essays due
Reaching Audiences II
February 22: 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.

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

Reaching Partners III
February 29: Pursuing Outreach vs. “In-Reach” and diversity hiring plans


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

+March 2: Full draft of grant application due

March 7: No class (spring break)

March 14: Collaborating with Donors II—Listening and development plans


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 6: 121-160.

+March 16 (tentative date; NCHC may require March 15): Revised draft of grant application due to Darrell Stover (NCHC)

March 21: Collaborating with Donors III—

**Guest speaker:** Darrell Stover, Program Director, North Carolina Humanities Council

_and sustaining the team process_


*Learning through Serving*, 105-109, 111.


+(March 24: NC History Day Regional, held at UNCG)

**Reaching Colleagues II**

March 28: Building a Vision

_and board management_


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


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

April 4: Managing Change  
and strategic planning


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

**Optional:** Norris, Linda. “Are County Historical Societies Dinosaurs?”  
[http://uncatalogedmuseum.blogspot.com/2010/09/are-county-historical-societies.html](http://uncatalogedmuseum.blogspot.com/2010/09/are-county-historical-societies.html) and “History Museums as Dinosaurs Take Two”  

**Turn in full draft of grant application to BF**

April 11: Work session

**April 15:** Turn in revised full draft grant application to Humanities Council
April 18: Leading from Below—**CLASS DATE WILL BE RESCHEDULED**
and human resources/personnel management and finding your niche


Genoways and Ireland, Chapter 7: 161-173.

April 25:  **Final papers due** (no final exam)

+ (April 28: *North Carolina History Day—State Finals, held at NC Museum of History, Raleigh*)