



HIS 317
Introduction to Public History
Spring 2023

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30am-10:45pm

Classroom space: MHRA room. 1204 (Virtual class, if/when necessary)

Professor: Dr. Torren L. Gatson

office hours: virtual only, by appointment

office location: MHRA 2nd floor room 2119

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Course Description:

This course explores the professional field of public history and examines the place of public history within the discipline as a whole. The course also provides a forum to discuss critical and enduring issues in the practice of public history. By the end of the semester, students should be able to explain and discuss the origins and development of the field of public history; discuss a range of critical issues in public history and their implications for reflective practice in the field; and demonstrate an understanding of the intellectual foundations of public history.

This course also invites students to explore history's place in contemporary life, to discover the power of the past in unexpected places. You will pursue this theme by following two strands. The first, briefly traces the history of the popular past through the creation of the accepted pillars of public history in America since the nineteenth century, looking at moments when history was defined, shared, and, often, fought over in public settings beyond the university.

Running through this course is a central question: How does popular history shape a collective identity? Or, to put it another way: Do we have a shared past or many individual ones? Is American heritage—and America itself—viewed differently depending on the audience?

The second strand focuses on the work of public history professionals today and the tools they use to preserve share and examine the past. We will examine the foundational elements of public history. Topics include oral history, archives, historic sites, historic preservation, museum Studies, Historical architecture, and archeology.

To achieve this goal, we will have as well numerous in class visits from public history professionals and perhaps field study (field trips). Through these examples, you will learn about

the field of public history and the work of its practitioners. Then you'll be ready to try your hand at doing public history!

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. interpret primary sources (including material culture, visual images, oral history, landscapes and others) for cultural and historical meanings;
2. analyze written secondary sources thoughtfully, with attention to argument and point of view;
3. analyze public interpretations of the past—including exhibitions, historic sites, and monuments—with attention to argument, point of view, and historical context;
4. create original interpretations of the past that engage public audiences;
5. write clearly and persuasively; and
6. speak with passion, clarity, and respect over various historical themes.

Teaching Methods:

This course combines classroom lecture with regular opportunities for discussion and collective exploration. While primarily set in a lecture style, in addition to learning a body of historical content, we will be exploring how to “read” a variety of cultural texts to glean historical insights. In every class period, time will be reserved for group consideration of historical documents, photographic images, music, or video. Frequently, students will form smaller groups in the classroom to consider a question, an article excerpt, or a primary source.

As we return for spring 2023, please uphold UNCG’s culture of care to limit the spread of covid-19 and other airborne illnesses. These actions include, but are not limited to:

- Engaging in proper hand-washing hygiene
- Self-monitoring for symptoms of covid-19
- Staying home when ill
- Complying with directions from health care providers or public health officials to isolate if ill
- Completing a [self-report](#) when experiencing covid-19 symptoms or testing positive for covid-19
- Following the CDC's [exposure guidelines](#) when exposed to someone who has tested positive for covid-19
- Staying informed about the University's policies and announcements via the [covid-19](#) website

Assignments and Evaluation:

- **Reader responses: 10%** (due every Monday when class is scheduled to meet)
Each week, I will ask you to write a short response to the most recent readings, to assess reading comprehension and to ensure that each student is prepared to participate fully in our in-class discussions. (Learning outcomes #1, 2, and 5)
- **Class participation: 20%** (outcomes 1, 2, 3, 6)
Full participation involves advance completion of the required readings; attentiveness; engagement with in-class discussions; a willingness to ask questions and offer opinions. Although attendance is not taken verbally, I will record the unexcused absences of those without prior granted leave. **It is impossible to be a successful student and pass this course if you are not in attendance.**
- **Primary Source project (due February 28th): 10%**
you will select two runaway slave ads from a list of databases that will be provided to you. You will then compare and contrast the runaway ads and prepare a short reflection paper discussing how the two ads were similar or different. You will then go deeper and discuss the cultural, social, and economic tones of each ad. Finally, you will prepare a brief but concise and thought provoking (maximum 50 words) caption for both runaway ads that could be used as interpretation within a museum exhibition.
(Learning outcomes #s 1,3,4,5)
- **Review essay: The Public Past (due March 21st): 10%**
Choose a single public history product—an exhibition, historic site tour, memorial, commemoration, television episode, film, digital history product, etc. —and analyze and assess its form, content, and public impact: about 5 pages.
(Learning outcomes #s 3, 6)
- **Final exam (April 18th): 20%**
This in-class exam will measure your undertaking of information from the start of this course through the beginning of April. This exam can include various styles of questions including but not limited to short-answer, multiple choice, true- false questions and essay (in class).
(Learning outcomes #1, 3, and 5)
- **Final project: Select one of two options (presentations April 20th in class): 30%**
“Material Culture: Letting objects speak” Students will be given a photograph or historical image (newspaper, painting, etc.) Students must use this image to tell a historically accurate narrative based on their findings regarding this image. The purpose of this exercise is to uncover the layered history of its construction, uses, and the diversity of people using that object.

*Note: It is a known fact that situations will occur in life outside of our control. Understanding this fact, some absences will be excused provided the proper documentation is presented. Excused absences are on a case by case basis. *For this reason, PLEASE inform me as soon as you are notified of an emergency.* This applies even in the case of minor illnesses, outside activities, or conflicts with other classes, because **one cannot succeed in this course without attending the lectures and taking notes.**

In Short...If things go awry...it's your responsibility to tell me—right away. Please allow me the chance to help you!

Attendance policy: It is impossible to pass this course if you are not in attendance to receive vital instruction. Students need to attend all class meetings and are encouraged to meet individually with the instructor as needed. The course instructor is not responsible for informing you of classes you have missed and how that negatively impacts your grade.

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 <http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integrity-policy/>. Per university policy, you will be asked to sign a copy of the Academic Integrity Pledge for each major assignment in this class.

Grading scale:

A=93-100

A-=90-92

B+=87-89

B=83-86

B-=80-82

C+=77-79

C=73-76

C-=70-72

D+=67- 69

D=63-66

D-=60-62

F=59 and below

Lateness Policy:

I am receptive to *advance* requests for extensions. However, if an assignment is turned in late without an agreed-upon extension, **It is at my sole discretion to accept late work.** If late assignments are accepted there will be a deduction in grade value of at least of a letter grade per day (e.g., A to B+). ****NOTE**** In the event that appropriate documentation is presented (e.g., medical, counselor's, dean's) suitable work will be accepted and given full credit.

Special Needs

If you require accommodations for special learning needs, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services, located within the Elliot University Center (334-5440; <http://ods.uncg.edu>)! I will be very receptive to any steps to help make your learning experience healthier and more successful.

Required Texts:

Available at the UNCG bookstore:

Thomas Cauvin. *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*, Second Edition, 2022.

In addition to the required text, discussions for some class session will may also draw on required primary source readings and articles. All of those materials will be provided to you.

Semester Outline/ Calendar:

Week 1

January 10th Brief course overview and detailed review of syllabus

January 12th What is Public History?

Public History: A Textbook of Practice, Second Edition, chapter 1.

Thinking about the authors' definitions of public history, come prepared to share an experience you have had as a consumer of public history.

Week 2

January 17th MLK Day observance (No Class)

January 19th (NO Class)

Week 3

January 24rd Know your roots!: Understanding the historical foundation and creation of the field and study of public history. *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*, Second Edition, chapter 2.

January 26th Collaboration is Key: examining the realm of "Authority" in Public History. *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*, Second Edition, chapter 4.

Week 4

January 31st Understanding Museums: Their creation, collecting and sustainability

Public History: A Textbook of Practice, Second Edition, chapter 6.

Guest Speaker William Stollo, Curator of exhibition at Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Museum.

February 2nd Building Character... Brick by Brick... Examining Historic Preservation

Public History: A Textbook of Practice, Second Edition, chapter 8.

Week 5

February 7th Into the Vault of Recorded History: The Dynamic Realm of Archives

Public History: A Textbook of Practice, Second Edition, chapter 7.

Class visit to Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections (located in Jackson Library)

Guest speaker: Erin Lawrimore, UNCG University Archivist

February 9th Voices of the Past... Oral History in Practice and Pedagogy

Public History: A Textbook of Practice, Second Edition, chapter 9.

Week 6

February 14th Writing for Public Consumption

Public History: A Textbook of Practice, Second Edition, chapter 10.

February 16th Historical Cyborg: Digital Humanities & Public History

Guest Speaker Aleia Brown, Whichard Visiting Distinguished Associate Professor of History, East Carolina University.

Public History: A Textbook of Practice, Second Edition, chapter 5.

Week 7

February 21st Information, Misinformation, Disinformation, and the pressure to find Knowledge

Public History: A Textbook of Practice, Second Edition, chapter 17.

February 23rd Identifying, Recognizing & Classifying Source material; Overview of Primary Source Project Assignment

Week 8

February 28th Primary Source project (Due at time of class), class breakout exercise

March 2nd Material Culture “Letting Objects Speak,” objects and primary source material. Selected review of Henry Glassie and James Deetz.

Jules David Prown. “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and method,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1982), pp. 1-19.

Week 9

March 7th Laws, Ethics & Public History Procedures in Public History

March 9th Creating One narrative of Public Memory: Understanding 20th century African American Public History

Andrea Burns. *Storefront to Monument*, chapter 1 “When Civil Rights are not enough,” (2013): 1-26.

Week 10

March 14th Visiting Historic Places: Historic Sites, Interpreters, and Guides

Guest Speakers: Liz Melendez Torres, Assistant site manager at Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum.

March 16th Alone in a Field of Thousands: Independent Museum Erection
Guest Speaker: Natalie Pass Miller

Week 11

March 21st Review Essay in the Public Past (Due) Class will share experiences through break out exercise.

March 23rd Site Visit to the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) [Tentative]

Week 12

March 28th Detailed Final Project overview Selection of topics

March 30th Detailed Final Project overview

Week 13

April 4th Individual Student meetings to check in on Final presentations and projects

April 6th Individual Student meetings to check in on Final presentations and projects

Week 14

April 10th No Class (time to work on final presentation and study for final exam)

April 12th No Class (time to work on final presentation and study for final exam)

Week 15

April 18th Final Exam

April 20th Final Presentations & Review Essay: The Public Past (Due in class)
LAST DAY OF CLASS

****Note: Any details found within this syllabus excluding university policy are subject to change at any time at the full discretion of the professor of record ****

**** As UNC Greensboro continues to maneuver through the COVID- 19 pandemic, there remains the possibility for rapid unforewarned changes to this syllabus. Your patience is necessary and appreciated as we must remain flexible.**