

HIS 626 – The Practice of Public History

Spring 2023, Wednesday, 5:30-8:20 p.m.

Public History Lab (primary) & MHRA 1211

Professor: Torren Gatson

office hours: Mondays 2:00-3:00 and by appointment:

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The true mark of a leader is the willingness to stick with a bold course of action — an unconventional business strategy, a unique product-development roadmap, a controversial marketing campaign — even as the rest of the world wonders why you’re not marching in step with the status quo. In other words, real leaders are happy to zig while others zag. They understand that in an era of hyper-competition and non-stop disruption, the only way to stand out from the crowd is to stand for something special.”

-Bill Taylor from article, [“Do You Pass the Leadership Test?”](#)

Course Description:

Everyone at every level of every organization is simultaneously a leader and a follower. This course explores the methods, means and techniques professionals use throughout the wide scope of public history. Revolving around the theories and practices involved in building relationships with community partners, connecting with audiences, and creating a sustainable team and institutional environment. This course closely examines how relationships and practices shape the trajectory of public history institutions and the projects that they create. Throughout this course students will consider the relevance of public history to today’s cultural landscape while building skills in writing, fundraising, working with colleagues, and creating institutional strategic plans.

The course starts from a few key premises:

- The day-to-day, nuts-and-bolts aspects 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—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—completion of a mission statement, creation of a marketing plan, and 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;
- **planning** thoughtfully and efficiently, with attentiveness to multiple stakeholders;
- **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 and to create rich public products.

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, community partners, and historical and professional “informants” revealed through a range of sources. You are expected to complete reading assignments before every class meeting and to arrive ready to share informed 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 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 continue to create the foundation and framework, collaboratively, a history project (to be explained in class) that will be practical, relevant, and engaging to real public institutions and audiences. This semester will focus on creating a multi-model digital project. You will collaborate with each other and with community and professional partners to create this project.

Assignments and Evaluation

You will be evaluated on

Class Participation—20%: attending class, doing the reading, writing thoughtful and on-time weekly responses to the reading (see below), responding promptly to ANY email from your professor, speaking up in discussions, and helping to foster a sense of shared exploration within the classroom

In Class Discussion Leader Assessment—20%:

students will be given presentation dates, one per week

Each student will be assigned to a week's collection of readings. You must write a 5-page review of the collected readings detailing through a in depth overview of the readings (which must be synthesized in one document) and discuss their strengths, weaknesses, and relevance when applicable to the group project. You will then lead discussion with classmates which we result in you asking a minimum of **3 high level questions** per article, book chapter etc.

Weekly responses: Each week, Only the STUDENT FACILITATOR, will submit a reaction to that week's readings (5 pages doubled spaced, with appropriate footnotes) This Paper will be turned in at the beginning of class. Only exceptions made prior to class and with the express agreement of the professor will be given any other exception.

Information Interview & Reflection Essay—20%: due in class Feb 22nd

You will conduct an interview with a museum professional, by phone or in person. Each student will give a 10-minute in-class presentation about this conversation to the class (presentations will be verbal only).

Required minimum questions for interview:

- 1) Describe you job title and role at your organization.
- 2) Please Discuss any other duties that you chose and/or are expected to do to enhance or complete your job that the public may not be aware of?
- 3) Can you speak to your toughest adversity faced in your current role?
- 4) What advice would you share for budding public historian entering your job?

Cohort Project—40% To be finished by April 19th

I will deliver more specific details in our first-class meeting.

Each student's grade for the collaborative project is a composition of their participation in said project and their consistent meeting of prescribed deadlines as set by me or their internal group along with a portion of the overall completion of task per their set group within the project. Students will be asked to assess the contributions of team members (including their own).

Our community partner, the BCDA, retains the right to access and potentially join our class and/or examine our finished product as well as offer critique or concern.

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

Note* Failure to turn in any assignment (without prior exception) carries the penalty of a loss of a final letter grade. (i.e. If you turned in all work successfully with the exception of one assignment, there is no possibility of a “A” in the course. The highest you would receive is an A- provided all other requirements were met.) Furthermore, each student is solely responsible for submitting his or her own work. I will not accept work turned in for any other student unless I have corresponded with that student prior to class.

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

LATENESS POLICY:

It is important to turn in assignments on time so as to be fair to other students and to ensure timely grading. I am receptive to *advance* notice if an emergency arises (they will be given the ability to turn in work) However, if an assignment is turned in late, It will NOT be accepted and thus receive a zero on that assignment.

If things go awry...

...it’s your responsibility to tell me—right away. If your role or deliverable of project is dead-ending or your peer collaboration imploding, I need to hear about it so that I can help resolve the issues! If you fail to notify me, then you will receive a grade based of the projects assessment.

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.

Special Needs

If you require accommodations for special learning needs or other challenges, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services, located within the Elliot University Center (336/334-5440; <https://ods.uncg.edu>)! I will be very receptive to any steps to help make your learning experience healthier and more successful!

Required readings

Note The readings of the class will consist of a host of chapters from books, articles, and published columns on the field of historical administration. The required readings for this course will be provided to you or accessible through Jackson Library.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

January 11th

Introduction— A thorough course overview and review of the syllabus followed by a discussion of how museums fundamentally operate.

Practicing Public History: What, Why, and How?

Kelley, Robert. “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects.” *Public Historian* 1 (Autumn 1978): 16-28.

Conard, Rebecca. “Facepaint History in the Season of Introspection.” *Public Historian* 25 (Autumn, 2003): 9-24.

Meringolo, Denise D. “A New Kind of Technician: In Search of the Culture of Public History.” In *Museums Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (2012): xiii-xxv and part 3

Reaching Audiences

January 18: No Class (Students must still read articles)

Making Public Institutions Matter *and* mission statements

Weil, Stephen E. “From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum.” In Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (2002 [1999]): 28-52.

Read the History Relevance campaign’s “value statement”—

<http://www.historyrelevance.com/value-statement> —and explore its website.

Simon, Nina. *The Art of Relevance*: 20-156, 179-183.

<http://www.artofrelevance.org/read-online/>

Workplace Pedagogy

January 25: Working Collaboratively and team dynamics

Tanga, Martina. “Let’s Imagine a New Museum Staff Structure” *The Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*.

Kristina Von Tish. “The Museum as Workspace Part I” *Museum Next*

Kristina Von Tish. “The Museum as Workspace Part II” *Museum Next*

Fisher, Roger and Alan Sharp. “Lateral Leadership.” In *Getting It Done: How to Lead When You’re Not in Charge* (1998): 14-34.

Deep Roots

February 1: Collaborating with Communities *and* civic engagement strategies

Krmpotich, Cara and Laura Peers. *Haida Material Heritage and Changing Museums Practice*, 2013. Chapters 1,5, & 6.

“Michelle Obama, ‘Activism,’ and Museum Employment,” **Part I and Part II**. The Inluseum (May 12, 2015 *and* June 5, 2015): 16 pp.
<https://inluseum.com/2015/05/12/michelle-obama-activism-and-museum-employment-part-i/> *and* <https://inluseum.com/2015/06/05/michelle-obama-activism-and-museum-employment-part-ii/>

Moore, Porchia. The Danger of the ‘D’ Word: Museums and Diversity.” The Inluseum (January 20, 2014): 7 pp. <https://inluseum.com/2014/01/20/the-danger-of-the-d-word-museums-and-diversity/>

A Sellers Market

February 8: Selling: History, an experience, or a concoction of Both? Marketing plans and branding in the new age of museums

Pine, B. Joseph II and James H. Gilmore. “Welcome to the Experience Economy.” *Harvard Business Review* (July 1998): 97-105.
<https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy>

Jabali, Malaiki. “Plantation Weddings are Wrong. Why is it so hard for White Americans to admit that.” *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/11/plantation-weddings-are-wrong-why-is-it-so-hard-for-white-americans-to-admit-that>

Breakout exercise (Selling your dream Museum)

DEI in Our world

February 15: Practicing Outreach vs. “In-Reach”: Ideologies of a Paradigm on diversity in hiring plans

Thorpe, Angela. “Rethinking Diversity: Introduction.” History@Work (November 13, 2014): <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/rethinking-diversity-introduction/>

Thorpe, Angela. “Rethinking Diversity: Who Does History Belong To?” History@Work (January 8, 2015): <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/author/angela-thorpe/>

“Michelle Obama, ‘Activism,’ and Museum Employment: Part III.” The Inclusionum (November 6, 2015): <https://inclusionum.com/2015/11/06/michelle-obama-activism-museum-employment-part-iii/>

Taylor, Chris. “Announcing the Department of Inclusion and Community Engagement at the Minnesota Historical Society: Part II.” The Inclusionum: (April 22, 2015): <https://inclusionum.com/2015/04/22/announcing-the-department-of-inclusion-and-community-engagement-at-the-minnesota-historical-society-part-ii/>

Evan Stewart, Ph.D., Nazita Lajevardi, Ph.D., Roy Whitaker, Ph.D., Tarah Williams, Ph.D. “What does American Identity Mean? A Cultural Legacy of Pluralism and Exclusion.” <https://www.ppri.org/spotlight/what-does-american-identity-mean-a-cultural-legacy-of-pluralism-and-exclusion/>

Ethical Quandaries

February 22: Working through Ethical situations

(Student presentations on collected Oral interviews Information Interview & Reflection presentations)

Cara Chang, Isabella Cho and Tara Gilles, “Harvard Pledges to Return Human Remains of Enslaved People to Descendants.” *The Harvard Crimson*.

Jill Lepore, “When Black History Is Unearthed, Who Gets to Speak for the Dead?” *The New Yorker*, 2021.

Delande Junstinvil and Chip Colwell. “US museums hold the remains of thousands of Black people.” *The Conversation*, 2021.

Elizabeth Campbell, “The only way is ethics: US museums should not neglect provenance research in the funding crisis.” *The Art Newspaper*, 2020.

The Real Monopoly Board**March 1: Governance and Board involvement in you Professional Life**

Nadler, David. "Building Better Boards," *Harvard Business Review*, 2004.

Robin Pogrebin, Elizabeth A. Harris and Graham Bowley. "New Scrutiny of Museum Boards takes Aim at World of Wealth and Status," *New York Times*. 2019

Gibbs, Jenny "The Business Model of the Nonprofit Museum" Sotheby's Institute

March 8: No Class (Spring Break)**Earning is Growing****March 15: Fundraising Models**

Ciella Jr., Salvatore. *Fundraising for Small Museums*. 2011. Chapters 2,3, and 4

Simek, Jamie "Ten Fundraising To-Do's for Small Museums and Nonprofits," *American Association of State and Local History*.

Office of Policy and Analysis. "Fundraising Art Museums." *Smithsonian Institution*, 2001.

Museum Fundraising Plan Checklist (produced by ACME)

March 22: Guest Visitor to Class

The Leader Within You**March 29: Finding your Leadership Style and the Art of Negotiating**

Sobczak, Patricia. "Leadership and Leader Development: Perspectives from Museum and Academic Library Professionals." *Curator the Museum Journal* 2021.

Ackerson, Anne and Joan Baldwin. "Is Negotiating Not a Museum Thing?"

Leadership Matters (October 11, 2015): 3 pp.

<https://leadershipmatters1213.wordpress.com/2015/10/11/is-negotiating-not-a-museum-thing/> (also on e-reserve)

April 13: No Class (NCPH in Atlanta)**April 20: Last Class debrief on work completed this year**

****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 ****