

**HISTORY 214  
THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC HISTORY**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**

HIST 214 - The Practice of Public History (3 credit hours)

**Course Description:**

Introduction to the field of public history. Explores the challenges of portraying history in museums, parks, and other public history venues

**SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

Students taking *The Practice of Public History* develop skills for analyzing and interpreting primary source materials in the context of museum exhibits, historic sites, and other public history venues.

**ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**Upon successful completion of History 112, students will be able to:**

1. Use principles of historical thinking to understand human societies, specifically by examining how historical interpretation of the past is conveyed to the general public through informal settings.
2. Define and summarize historical methods and frameworks used by public historian for broad dissemination of research.
3. Recognize the differences between original historical source material (primary sources) and later scholarly interpretations of those sources (secondary sources).
4. Develop interpretive historical arguments integrating original source material and secondary sources.
5. Demonstrate basic skills in the comprehension and analysis of selected sources and their relevance in the context of historical knowledge.
6. Locate, appraise, and synthesize primary and secondary source materials, including written texts, audio/visual material, and objects/artifacts (material culture) in a final project suitable for a broad public audience.

**SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS**

1. *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* by Beverly Serrell. (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1996)
2. *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian* ed. by Amy Henderson and Adrienne L. Kaeppler (Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington, D.C., 1997)
3. *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology* by Lawrence Weschler (Vintage Books: New York, 1995)

4. *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* by David Glassberg (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 2001)
5. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* by Michel-Rolph Trouillot. (Beacon Press: Boston, 1995)

### **SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAM**

This course will assess student achievement through the evaluation of individual student writing assignments, a final group project, and a peer assessment of participation/contribution in the group project. The writing assignments are designed to emphasize different aspects of analyzing source material (both primary and secondary) and interpreting this material for specific audiences.

1. **Exhibit Review:** As opposed to book reviews or play critiques, there is not a standard format for reviewing a museum. Professionals are divided over what course a review should take. Should the review describe the exhibit in detail for people who will be unable to visit the museum? Should it compare the exhibit to similar exhibits at other museums? Is the review an opportunity to discuss museum theory and practice? For this assignment, students are to read several reviews in a relevant academic journal, visit an exhibit at a local museum, and write a review of 1,000-1,500 words. This assignment emphasizes writing critically.
2. **Project Proposal:** An exhibit proposal is a document used by museums for planning future exhibits, coordinating a collection plan, and approaching potential donors. The proposal should include a section-by-section breakdown of the exhibit. It should also include the themes the exhibit wishes to address and how the objects will be used to substantiate the themes. The proposal needs to argue why this exhibit is important to the museum and why donors should invest in it. Each student is allowed to pick a topic of his or her choice and propose a public history project. The proposal should be 7-10 pages in length and may be used as the foundation for the final project. Any substantial changes from the proposal to the final project must be discussed and approved by the instructor. This assignment emphasizes writing persuasively.
3. **Final Project Script:** An exhibit script includes all of the words in the exhibit: titles, headings, descriptions, and object labels. It also includes a list of all objects, images, and audio/visual components. Most introductory text descriptions can be no more than 150 words, section descriptions no more than 70 words, and object labels no more than 30 words. The entire script must be edited for consistency in formatting and style. The text of the exhibit script must complement the artifacts chosen for inclusion to create a coherent message for the visitor. Although public history projects are usually limited in the number of words, they are backed by a substantial amount of research. All projects should include a heavily annotated bibliography explaining all research in detail. This assignment emphasizes writing clearly and concisely.
  - a. Final projects are team projects that will be voted on by the class, based on the project proposals. After projects are chosen, the team leader will be the student who made the initial proposal. Students will then have to apply to work on a

particular project, and the leader will get to select who will be on his or her team. Teams will be 3-5 people. This assignment emphasizes working in teams and delegating responsibility. Teams will receive a group grade for the final project, but individuals will also receive a grade from their teammates.

4. **Peer Review:** One of the hallmarks of the professional history field is the process of peer review. This is usually done following a double-blind process where an editor facilitates the review of work by one or more experts in the field and neither the author nor the reviewer knows the identity of the other. This is your opportunity to evaluate your teammates anonymously. You must critique the final project and write up your assessment of the work. Assign a grade to each one of your teammates and write a one-paragraph explanation of the grade. This assignment emphasizes writing critically and constructively.
5. **Peer Evaluation** (the average of the grades your teammates give you)

## **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

### **Week 1**

**Class 1 – Introduction to class.**

**Class 2 – What do you know about history?**

Reading assignment: Michael Frisch. “American History and the Structure of Collective Memory” (available on JStor from any campus computer)

Reality check: Could you get into high school? Take the grammar and history sections of this quiz:

[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/quizzes/highschool\\_test.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/quizzes/highschool_test.cfm)

### **Week 2**

**Class 3 – How do Americans understand their past?**

Reading assignment: Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, pp. 15 – 36.

**Class 4 – What is the purpose of a museum?**

Stephen Weil’s thought experiments.

Class preparation: Come to class with a one-paragraph answer to the question: What is the purpose of a museum?

### **Week 3**

**Class 5 – Museum origins.**

Reading assignment: John Cotton Dana, “The Gloom of the Museum.”

**Class 6 – Introduction to exhibition development.**

Guest Lecture: Lana Burgess.

Meet at McKissick Museum

Reading assignment: Thomas Schlereth, "Introduction to Museum Exhibition Reviews," *Journal of American History*, June 1989, pp. 192-195. (available online from a University networked computer on JStor)

**Class 7 – What is the relationship between history and memory and between individual memories, history, and the way a society remembers?**

Reading assignment: David Glassberg. "Sense of History" (Chapter 1)

**Week 4**

**Class 8 – How does a society recognize what's important in the past. How does the form of memorials and commemorations help societies remember?**

Reading assignment: Edward Linenthal, "We come here to Remember" (Chapter 5) *The Unfinished Bombing*. pp. 175-230.

**Class 9 – How are memorials and commemorations shaped by politics and history?**

Browsing assignment: <http://911digitalarchive.org/index.php>;  
<http://www.national911memorial.org/>; What other 9/11 sites are useful to historians? To the public?

Writing assignment due: Museum Review

**Class 10 – What can we learn from stuff? An introduction to material culture**

Class preparation: Bring to class 5 objects that describe yourself.

**Week 5**

**Class 11 – Why do museums collect objects?**

Reading assignment: Richard Kurin "Making a Museum Object" and Elaine Heumann Gurian "What is the Object of this Exercise? A Meandering Exploration of the Many Meanings of Objects in Museums"

**Class 12 – Field trip to Woodrow Wilson Family Home**

Reading assignment: "Visual Velcro: Hooking the Visitor" by Peter Samis. Available at <http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/visualvelcro.cfm>

**Class 13– Project Planning**

Class preparation: Come to class prepared to discuss your "Big Idea" for your proposal.

Reading assignment: *Exhibit Labels*, Chapters 1-5

## Week 6

### **Class 14 – What should go on display?**

Reading assignment: *Exhibiting Dilemmas*, Chapters 1-3

### **Class 15 – Reading assignment: *Exhibiting Dilemmas*, Chapters 4-6**

### **Class 16 -- Reading assignment: *Exhibiting Dilemmas*, Chapters 7-9**

## Week 7

### **Class 17 – Reading assignment: *Exhibiting Dilemmas*, Chapters 10-12**

Writing assignment due: Project Proposal due by noon.

### **Class 18 – What do you do with really big stuff?**

Reading assignment: Stephen Greenblatt “Wonder and Resonance”

### **Class 19 – Project Proposal Question and Answer**

Reading assignment: Read all of the posted project proposals. Come to class with critical questions for your peers so that you can evaluate the best projects.

Proposal voting – Peer assessment tool is available beginning after class. Complete your peer assessment of project proposals

## Week 8

### **Class 20 – Historic Preservation**

Guest lecture: Robert Weyeneth, Director of Public History

### **Class 21 – Historic Preservation**

Guest lecture: Robert Weyeneth, Director of Public History

Team assignments: Applications for team positions must be submitted to team leaders. Team leaders need to confirm their teams with me via email. Team allocations will be made in the order received.

## Week 9

### **Class 22 –What do you do with silences?**

Reading assignment: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, Chapters 103

### **Class 23 – Commemoration, Take II**

Reading assignment: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, remainder of book

### **Class 24 – Civic Boosterism.**

Reading assignment: David Glassberg. “Celebrating the City.” (Chapter 3)

## Week 10

### **Class 25 – What is Jurassic technology?**

Reading assignment: Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*. Parts I & II.

### **Class 26– How do you document Jurassic technology?**

Reading assignment: Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*. Notes, Acknowledgments and Sources. (Note that this should be active reading, meaning you go back to the referenced sections of the main text and perhaps follow up with further inquiry in the stated sources)

### **Class 27 – What good is a fake?**

Browsing assignment: Search the internet for fraud and forgeries (specific topic of your choice). How do you determine authenticity?

## Week 11

### **Class 28 – Writing things worth reading.**

Reading assignment: Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels*, Chapters 6-10.

### **Class 29 – Writing things worth reading.**

Reading assignment: Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels*, Chapters 11-14.

### **Class 30 – Thinking about place**

Reading assignment: David Glassberg. "Place and Placelessness in American History." (Chapter 5)

## Week 12

### **Class 31 – Historic sites.**

Reading assignment: David Glassberg. "Making Places in California." (Chapter 7)

### **Class 32 – Historic markers.**

Reading assignment: <http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/historic.htm>

### **Class 33 – Project Updates.**

## Week 13

### **Class 34 – Parks.**

Reading assignment: Bruce J. Noble, Jr. "At Historical Parks: Balancing a Multitude of Interests."

### **Class 35 – Thinking about monuments**

Reading assignment: David Glassberg. "Remembering a War." (Chapter 2)

**Class 36 – Watching a war**

Reading assignment: David Glassberg. “Watching *The Civil War*.” (Chapter 4)

Optional assignment: Consider attending the lunchtime seminar on “War Criminals and the Memory Question: The Politics of Trials” Gambrell 201, 12:00pm (noon)

**Week 14**

**Class 37 – Going digital. What is the future of history?**

Reading assignment: Robin Dowden and Scott Sayre, “The Whole World in Their Hands: The Promise and Peril of Visitor-Provided Mobile Devices”

**Class 38 – Beyond digitization. How are you interacting with history?**

Reading assignment: Matthew MacArthur, “Can Museums Allow Online Users to Become Participants?”

**Week 15**

**Class 39 – Final Project Presentations in class**

**Class 40 – Final Project Presentations in class**

Writing assignment due: Final projects must be submitted by 5:00 pm.

In lieu of exam – Writing assignment due: Peer Review due by 5:00 pm

**Day of exam according to university exam schedule**