University of Houston--Fall 2006
Readings in Public History 6381 Section 05565

Instructor: Dr. William H. Kellar
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Required Books

James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds. Public History: Essays from the Field
Phyllis K. Leffler and Joseph Brent, Public and Academic History: A Philosophy and a Paradigm
Martin V. Melosi and Philip V. Scarpino, eds. Public History and the Environment
Sanford Levinson, Written In Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies
Benson, Brier, and Rosenzweig, eds. Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public
Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, A Line in the Sand: The Alamo in Blood and Memory

Articles: I will assemble a packet that you may borrow to photocopy.

Learning Outcomes:

This course will provide an introduction to several aspects of Public History. We will explore the variety of professional opportunities open to public historians, the tension that sometimes develops between academe and public history, ethical issues, controversies, and practical application of public history skills. History has become “big business” in Hollywood, on PBS, the History Channel, Discovery, A&E as well as for network television, publishing companies and the tourist industry. Since few Americans actually learn much about our history in school, how do people acquire historical knowledge? How is “history” presented to the masses? Who “owns” our history? Why do “they” decide what is presented and how the stories are told? Where do public historians fit into all of this? What responsibilities do we, as public historians, have to our nation, our profession, our audience, and ourselves? We will examine the ways in which history is preserved and presented, along with the standards, motivating factors, and reasoning that dictates what is “told” in history and what is not.

Our theme for the semester is the exploring the issues in different areas of public history. We will explore many questions as we discuss this theme. The goal is not to find hard and fast answers but to examine the issues, read the ideas expressed by the experts in public history, and draw such conclusions as will prepare us for a future as both historians and consumers of history.

• Students will demonstrate mastery of a variety of historical skills
• Students will demonstrate knowledge of methodologies relevant to community needs different from those of public, private or higher education
• Students will demonstrate knowledge of a specific area of public history (oral, community, or corporate history, museums, archives, or related institutions)

Weekly Assignments:

Each week we will discuss the topics based upon the readings listed below. Each student should prepare a set of summary notes on the readings in which major and supporting themes are identified, as well as major issues, general author information, and critical comments. Each student will take the lead in the discussion of one article every week. Periodically, I will invite
speakers to discuss their public history activities with us. Clearly, the quality of each class depends upon the energy generated from well-prepared students who participate in the discussions.

Written Assignments (See Calendar for due dates):

- Weekly Readings Review—2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced
- 1 Lab/presentation (Visit/Evaluate two Houston-area History Museums)
- 1 Research Paper/presentation

**Weekly Readings Review:** Every week students will turn in a 2-3 page review of the articles assigned for the next week. The format should follow the book review model found in historical journals. Your reviews, however, should not be boring to read. Identify the thesis of the article, supporting information and the author’s conclusion/recommendation. Also comment on the nature of the problem(s) or controversies discussed by the author and explain how the article would be helpful to you as a public historian. I will call upon each student to lead the initial discussion of one article every week. This will take some organizing, which we will accomplish during the first class.

**Lab:** Visit and evaluate two Houston-area History Museums (See attached form for this exercise.)

**Research Paper:** Each student will write a paper of 20-25 pages, typed, double-spaced, (12 font) with title page and a bibliography in correct form. Our purpose is to explore the challenges facing historians who venture into the public arena. Our focus this semester will be a Community History based upon key people in the history of UH. Each student will choose one person in the “Coffee Can Lottery” as the subject of their biography/public history project and will design one “type” of public history presentation for the information. We will discuss details in class but your paper will have two parts, a biography of your UH person (chosen in the class lottery) and a detailed discussion of a public history issue; either the problems and pitfalls that you encountered in your research or a type of project that you will design to present the biographical information. Your discussion must include references to the issues related to public history, and the hazards, problems, and pitfalls, as well as the benefits of this “type” of public history as discussed in our semester readings. Your research for the biography will include material from newspapers, magazines, journals, books, oral history interviews, and any other available sources. Your paper should be scholarly but readable to the general public. One of our goals is to produce UH biographies that are publishable in the *Houston Review*. This is a different kind of research paper and provides an opportunity to get “into the shoes” of a public historian and apply the information from the readings. Each student will present a brief summary of her or his findings and conclusions to the class at the end of the semester, on November 30.

**Grading:** Students must complete all requirements. I do not give “Incomplete” grades. Grades will be calculated as follows: Class Attendance/Participation/Weekly Reviews—300 points, Museum Lab Exercise—300 points, and Research Paper—400 points
Calendar

August 24: Introduction to Readings in Public History

Discuss syllabus, readings, and requirements.

August 31: Public History—An Overview

ALL Phyllis K. Leffler and Joseph Brent, Public and Academic History: A Philosophy and a Paradigm

1-Patricia Mooney-Melvin, “Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition” Public History, 3-22.


3-Gerald George, “The Perils of ‘Public History: An Imaginary Excursion into the Real World” (Handout)

September 7: Community History (*Also, one-page outline and bibliography of proposed research topics/ Identify the two museums you will visit)

4-Michael Frisch, “The Memory of History,” Presenting the Past, 5-17.


September 14: History Museums/Archival Management/Cultural Resources Management-Part 1


September 21: Archival Management/Cultural Resources Management-Part 2

Tour of John P. McGovern Historical Resource Center –Guest speaker: Elizabeth White. Class will meet at 5:30 P.M. at the HRC 8272 El Rio Dr., Suite 190
September 28: Historic Preservation


4- Mark Howell, “Interpreters and Museum Educators: Beyond the Blue Hairs,” Public History, 141-156.


ALL- Sanford Levinson, Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies and supplementary articles.

October 5: Museums—Lab Day—Class will not meet today

If you have not yet visited two of the local historical museums for this lab, please do so today.

October 12: *Museums—Artifacts and History
Also: Lab Evaluation Presentations*


October 19: Issues in Public History

Project Outlines Due Today
Media and Visual History, Part I


2- Eric Breitbart, “The Painted Mirror: Historical Re-creation from the Panorama to the Docudrama,” Presenting the Past, 103-117

3- Sonya Michel, “Feminism, Film, and Public History,” Presenting the Past, 293-304

October 26: Media and Visual History

Discuss project outlines


Each student will lead a brief discussion on one section of 154-348

View and discuss portions of *Davy Crockett*, John Wayne’s *The Alamo*, and *The Crossing*.

November 2: Historical Consulting/Corporate and Institutional History/ Professional Ethics


7-Philip L. Cantelon, “As a Business: Hired, Not Bought,” *Public History*, 385-396


November 9: Public Policy History--Environmental History

ALL: Martin V. Melosi and Philip V. Scarpino, eds. *Public History and the Environment* 10, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5


**Recommended:**


November 16: Independent Study--No Class Today

November 23: **Thanksgiving Holiday—No Class Today**

November 30: Last Day of Class--Papers/Presentations Due Today

**Readings and Discussion Leaders**

1-Adriana Broadway  
2-Julie Cohn  
3- Rebecca Debardelaben  
4- Bernice Heilbrunn

5- Ramona Hopkins  
6-Timothy Howard  
7- Victoria Myers  
8-Terrell Perry  
9-Brian Schaeffer  
10-Wilson Jon R.
Each student is to visit and evaluate two Houston area historical museums during the fall semester. Previous museum visits do not meet the requirements for this project. Suggested museums include:

- Bayou Bend Collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
- Buffalo Soldier Museum
- Holocaust Museum Houston
- Heritage Society
- Museum of Printing History
- Houston Fire Museum
- San Jacinto Museum of History
- Museum of Southern History
- Galveston County Historical Museum
- Texas Seaport Museum
- Ocean Star (Offshore Oil)
- Lone Star Flight Museum
- National Funeral Service Museum

Be sure to include the name and address of the museums that you visited as well as the names of guides, docents or museum officials. Also, did you take a guided or self-guided tour? What kind of aids did the museum offer (tape-recorded tour, guidebook, etc.)? Evaluations should be typed and based on criteria including, but not limited to the following:

1. Accessibility/First Impression of Museum

2. Intended Audience/Stated goals
3. Extent, variety, and appropriateness of objects displayed

4. Scholarly Content

5. Balance of images and ideas, objects and narrative

6. Function of design in the exhibit
7. Sources of funding/Major donors

8. Institutional support

9. Did the museum fulfill its stated purpose? Explain

10. Concluding Thoughts: Did you enjoy your visit? Would you recommend this museum to others? Whom? Why?