Course Description

OVERVIEW

“Introduction to Public History” explores approaches to and applications of the historian’s craft outside classroom settings. What is public history? How and why has it changed over the past several decades? How have public historians related to the varying communities and events they have sought to explore? Where is the field going? To help us answer these questions, we will read criticism, policy, history, and theory, and closely examine a variety of public history projects. Class discussions and assignments will explore concepts of memory, heritage, place, and community, as well as current controversies, trends, and theories that continue to change the face of public history. Through guest speakers and on-site visits, students will gain a deeper understanding of the people, sites, and methods integral to public history. By the end of the term, students will have a new appreciation of the challenges and opportunities in this field, and will have developed more informed opinions about the philosophical, ethical, and practical aspects of applying the historian’s craft beyond the university.

COURSE SCHEDULE
Week One (9/6): Boston’s Public History.
Week Two (9/13): Documentary Film.
Week Three (9/20): Historic Preservation.
Week Four (9/27): Monuments and Memorials.
Week Five (10/4): Historic House Museums.
Week Six (10/11): Confederate Monuments.
Week Seven (10/18): Archives.
Week Nine (11/1): Exhibit Management.
Week Ten (11/8): Living History.
Week Eleven (11/15): Curation.
Week Twelve (11/22): THANKSGIVING. NO CLASS.
Week Thirteen (11/29): Bostonian Society exhibit case study.

Required Texts:

Assignments

• Each student should write during the semester one JAH (Journal of American History, published by the Organization of American Historians) style or one AHR (American Historical Review, published by the American Historian Association) style review of a book from the required texts listed above. These should be approximately 750 words. Please read some JAH and AHR reviews to get a sense of the style. You should present at the beginning the basic information of the book – author, title, publisher, year of publication, total pages. You should convey the book’s main arguments, methods, sources, and assess the book’s effectiveness and contribution to the literature. Please note that your reviews are not about if you “liked” the book but rather provide a descriptive and evaluative discussion of a book’s scholarly contribution. These should be provided to the instructor in hard copy. This will be due November 1.

• Each student should write one JAH style or The Public Historian (published by the National Council on Public History) style exhibition review of at least 800 words. Please read some JAH and The Public Historian reviews to get a sense of the style. You should present at the beginning the basic information – title of the exhibition, location of the venue, and curator. You should summarize the exhibition and then comment on its quality in terms of presentation, content, clarity, argument. You could review the Frederick Douglass exhibition at the Museum of African American History, Through the Keyhole exhibition at the Bostonian Society, an exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts, in particular, Collecting Stories – Native American Art, or another, an exhibit at the Peabody Museum in Cambridge, the Old South Meeting House exhibit, Charlestown Navy Yard Visitor Center, the Battle of Bunker Hill Museum, or you are welcome to select another option. Just please be sure to get the instructor’s prior approval for another option. This will be due November 15.

• Each student will prepare a public history project prospectus. You could propose a new museum, physical or online exhibit, a documentary film, a memorial, an oral history project, an addition to the National Park Service. Your prospectus, which should be three to five pages, should include the type of project, what subject(s) it will address, why is it needed, what audience(s) will it serve, where it would be located (if applicable), who might provide funding, how you imagine it could be sustained over time. This will be due Thursday, December 6.

Course Assessment
Grades will be based on the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibition review.</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Book review.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project prospectus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation.</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Course Policies and Expectations

To succeed in this class you will need to keep up with the reading, participate actively in class discussions, and complete all assignments. If at any time you are having difficulties with the material or the assignments, or just need to talk, please feel free to come see me during office hours or make an appointment for another time.

Attendance and participation in discussions are critical and required and class discourse will be an important learning experience for all students. There are occasionally good reasons to miss class, like religious holidays, medical issues, family, or emergencies, but if you must miss something please contact me to make arrangements, preferably prior to missing class.

Participation consists of being on time for class, having completed all assignments prior to the beginning of class, and being an active member in discussions. You do us all a disservice by coming to class unprepared. The success of any seminar is directly proportionate to the effort by its members to create a lively, provocative discussion that investigates the week’s topic with energy. If anyone comes unprepared, the experience of everyone suffers as a result. Also, it is a signal to the rest of the room that you are content to coast on their time and effort, which is something no public historian wants to do.

Most class periods will be split between some lectures/presentations and class discussions based on readings/assignments. The instructor will suggest one or two main topics for discussion to give focus to your weekly reading assignment. Your response to that issue or issues and your ability to raise other questions based on the assignment will be the bases of evaluation of your class participation. Each of you should be prepared to make a brief presentation on the topic of the class as a way of starting each session.

Academic Integrity/Plagiarism

Employing ideas or phrases that are not your own without explicitly and sufficiently crediting their creator will not be tolerated. As a result, I urge you to err on the side of caution: take detailed notes, cite your sources carefully and consistently, and do not leave assignments to the last minute. If you plagiarize, the department’s chair will be notified and appropriate steps will be taken. To ensure that this does not occur, please review the University’s policy regarding academic integrity http://issuu.com/northeasternuniversity/docs/2014-15_academic_integrity_policy?e=2831976/8316945

Reasonable Accommodation:
Students with documented learning disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation in this class, in accordance with Northeastern University policy (https://www.northeastern.edu/policies/pdfs/Policy_on_Reasonable_Accommodation.pdf). If you have a learning disability, please see me so that we can work out the details. To contact and register with Northeastern’s Disability Resource Center, go to 20 Dodge Hall or http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/, or call 373-4428.
Title IX:
Northeastern’s Title IX Policy prohibits discrimination based on gender, which includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship or domestic violence, and stalking (for more information, see the website for the Office for University Equity and Compliance at https://www.northeastern.edu/ouec/). The Title IX Policy applies to the entire community, including male, female, transgender students, and faculty and staff. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, confidential support and guidance can be found through University Health and Counseling Services staff (http://www.northeastern.edu/uhcs/) and the Center for Spiritual Dialogue and Service clergy members (http://www.northeastern.edu/spirituallife/). By law, those employees are not required to report allegations of sex or gender-based discrimination to the University. Alleged violations can be reported non-confidentially to the Title IX Coordinator within The Office for Gender Equity and Compliance at: titleix@northeastern.edu and/or through NUPD (Emergency 617.373.3333; Non-Emergency 617.373.2121). Reporting Prohibited Offenses to NUPD does NOT commit the victim/affected party to future legal action.

SYLLABUS


REQUIRED

- View in class - Bunker Hill Monument Projection.
- Prior to this class, take a National Park Service Freedom Trail and/or Black Heritage Trail tour.

Discussion Questions:

- How do you define public history?
- What personal experience(s) do you have with public history and how does the field interest you?
- What are the major tensions in Boston’s public history?
Week Two. September 13. Documentary Film.
Guest speaker – Bestor Cram, Northern Light Productions.
Cram will focus on the notion of documentary as advocacy vs bearing witness. He will explore the role of the documentarian and the different boundaries that exist in narrative storytelling – do passionate beliefs clash with objective observation and what are the responsibilities of the storyteller/creator in the presentation of public history. Cram will show clips from several of his films.

REQUIRED
- View two documentaries, Unfinished Symphony and Birth of a Movement

Discussions questions:
- Should the documentarian strive for objectivity?
- What is the place for objectivity in the production of documentary films, exhibits, and books?
- Have you seen any episode(s) of the recent Ken Burns/Lynn Novick documentary series on the Vietnam War? If so, how do you evaluate their approach versus Unfinished Symphony?
- What is the difference in impact between feature and documentary films?

Guest speaker – Greg Galer – Boston Preservation Alliance.

REQUIRED
- Page, Why Preservation Matters
- Review the site - bostonpreservation.org
- Prior to this class, visit Faneuil Hall, Quincy Market, the Northern Avenue Bridge, or the Liberty Hotel. Be prepared to discuss what you saw.

Suggested:

Discussion Questions:
• How has historic preservation evolved from principally guarding the national heritage to a strong emphasis on restoration as a mechanism for the economic health of inner cities?
• What should be preserved and why?
• Is it asking too much of historic preservation to help create more economically vibrant and just communities?

Week Four. September 27. Monuments and Memorials.

REQUIRED
• Doss, *Memorial Mania*
• Prior to this class, visit a monument or memorial. Options include the Armenian Genocide Memorial on the Rose Kennedy Greenway, the Holocaust Memorial near Faneuil Hall, the Sean Collier Memorial at MIT. Be prepared to discuss the site you visited.

Discussion Questions:
• The terrorism memorials are among America’s top tourist attractions. Why do you think that is the case?
• Doss writes that memorial mania is overrun with references to heroism yet she argues that there is nothing heroic about being murdered in a terrorist bombing or aboard a hijacked plane. Do you agree or disagree?
• Doss argues that there are far too many memorials being built too quickly. What do you think of her critical perspective? Are you inclined to agree or do you view this as a positive development?

Guest speaker, Nina Zannieri, Paul Revere House.

REQUIRED:
• Prior to this class, visit the Paul Revere House, both the historic house itself and the new visitor center.
• West, Domesticating History

Discussion questions:
• How has the presentation of history at historic house museums changed over time?
• Many historic house museums face a crisis today with respect to budget and visitation. How has this come to be and what can be done to address these issues?

REQUIRED:

- Marty Blatt, Confederate Memorials – What Is To Be Done?

Discussion questions:

- Who developed and installed most Confederate monuments? What was their motivation? What are the different ways that these memorials can be confronted today?
- How did the white supremacist actions at Charlottesville change the discussion regarding these memorials and pubic history overall?

Week Seven. October 18. Archives.
Guest speaker – Stacey Chandler, Reference Archivist, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

REQUIRED:


Discussion questions:
How does an archive’s collecting policy influence what is understood to be the historical record?

What should be the role of social justice concerns in the practice of archivists?

Ramirez quotes Howard Zinn as saying that the archivist, in subtle ways, “...tends to perpetuate the political and economic status quo simply by going about his ordinary business.” Do you agree or disagree?

How does the digital world change the nature of archives?


Remembering and Memorializing New England’s Seventeenth Century Past
+ Frank Bremer, New England Beginnings
+ David Hall, Harvard, expert on Puritanism
+ Jean O’Brien, University of Minnesota, scholar of Native Americans
+ Marty Blatt

My presentation will focus on the need to memorialize King Philip’s War in Boston.

REQUIRED:
• Website of New England Beginnings.
• Marty Blatt, Public Memory of King Philip’s War blog post.

Discussion questions:
• Why do you think that the cultural landscape of Boston includes nothing about King Philip’s War?
• The 18th century public history narrative in Boston remains largely celebratory and focused on a fight against tyranny. The 17th century narrative, which receives less attention, is primarily a story of a city on a hill and the road that leads to the beginning of America. How do Indians not fit this narrative and hence are largely not treated?

Week Nine. November 1. Exhibit management.
Guest speaker – Michelle Jarvis, Design Project Manager

REQUIRED


Suggested:

Discussion Questions:
- What are the skills required to be successful at exhibit management? [The following questions pertain to the suggested reading]
- How has the interpretation of history changed at history museums in the U.S.?
- What are the challenges in trying to present interpretations of slavery in an exhibit?
- Regarding the exhibit The West As America, Betsy Broun, Director, National Museum of American Art, explains: “It was a learning experience for us to understand how much our audiences expect us to deliver some neatly packaged truth they can believe in.” What do you make of this comment?

Guest speaker – Daniel Berger Jones, Boston-based actor, producer, and entrepreneur. He is the founder of Cambridge Historical Tours, giving personalized, private costumed tours of the greater Boston area.

REQUIRED:
- Mark Twain, How To Tell A Story

Suggested:

Discussion Questions:
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of first person and third person interpretation?
- Is living history an effective way to share history with the public?

Week Eleven. November 15. Curation.
Guest speaker – Anne Bentley, Massachusetts Historical Society.

REQUIRED
Discussion Questions:

- What are the responsibilities of a curator? Do these vary from one public history organization to another?
- How are collections policies defined and how do they evolve, if indeed they do?

Week Twelve. November 22. THANKSGIVING. NO CLASS.

Week Thirteen. November 29. Exhibit case study.

REQUIRED:

- Visit the Bostonian Society at the Old State House and view the exhibit, “Through the Keyhole.” Also, view the 25 minute play created to accompany the exhibit, “Cato and Dolly.” The play runs through September 29 and can be seen Mon, Wed, & Sat, 11 am, 12:30 pm, and 2 pm.
- Cato and Dolly, script. Patrick Gabridge, playwright.
- Museums as Sites for Social Action: MASS Action, introduction and chapter one.

Discussion Questions:

- The most frequently asked question visitors pose after the play focuses on whether or not Cato was real. Why do you think that question is so central?
- Focusing an exhibit on the front door of the Hancock Mansion might have been limited and perhaps dull if the main approach was around historic preservation of the door itself. The exhibit does engage preservation issues but also many other concerns. Do you think that the exhibit works as a destination that serves to entertain and enlighten?


REQUIRED:

- Snyder, On Tyranny.
- Present five to ten minute summary of your public history project prospectus.

Discussion Questions:

- Snyder has written scholarly books related to Nazism, Communism, fascism. He wrote this book relatively quickly and deliberately kept it short and published in a format size that can be fit into many pockets. This is an example of public or applied humanities. It is pubic history in the sense that he is seeking to shed light on Trump’s election by a series of concise inquiries based on historical evidence that are relevant to today. Is the book effective for you?
Who are his intended audience(s)? Do you think the book is successful on Snyder's terms?