

## **HIS 341: Introduction to Public History Methods and Practice**

*Credits: 3*

*Prerequisites: 2 semesters of introductory-level History courses*

**Dr. Jennifer M. Black**

### **Course Description:**

*From the University Catalog:* This course provides a general introduction to the field of public history, its methodologies, its primary sources, and some challenges to the practice. Class meetings will digest readings from current scholarship in the field, some problems related to interpretation and display, and important analytical and research strategies. Students in the course will hone their research and critical thinking skills through written assignments, research projects, and / or presentations.

### *Introduction*

Public History in the United States is a fast growing field with many museum educators, independent scholars, and historians claiming part of its scholarship. This course introduces the student to the practice of public history, its central sources, and some problems of the field. Students will interact with local curators and collections managers, and will develop an appreciation for the purpose of local history. Readings and assignments provide students with methodological models for interpreting objects, images, personal histories, places, and music; and will give students the opportunity to evaluate the public presentation of history through digital media. Through the research project, students will critically examine objects and other sources, and apply what they've learned through directed readings in public history and material culture to create their own public history project or exhibit. This service-learning course thus acts as a two-fold introduction to the field of public history: through the readings and class discussion, students will gain an understanding of the methodologies, sources, and challenges for the field, while the research project assesses students' ability to translate this foundational knowledge into practice.

### **Course Objectives**

University Goals: This course addresses the following University goals:

2. Contribute to their communities through service and leadership.
3. Consider ethical issues and values and make reasoned judgments about them.
4. Think independently and creatively, analyze information critically, and solve problems.
5. Respect and understand cultural differences.
7. Communicate and interact effectively.

Program Goals: This course addresses the following Program Goals:

1. Broaden perspectives on local, national, and international issues.
3. Provide a critical approach to looking at historical and current events.
4. Cultivate writing and oral communication skills.
5. Foster cultural understanding.

Course Objectives: Upon successful completion of this course, a student will be able to:

1. Identify the primary methodologies for analyzing a range of historical evidence, including images, objects, documents, oral histories, maps, the built environment, and the landscape
2. Identify some key issues in the field of public history, including the challenges that face curators and educators in presenting potentially controversial topics
3. Identify primary modes of conveying information to and educating the public
4. Effectively analyze various primary source materials using disciplinary methodologies, in written, visual, and verbal presentations geared toward a public (i.e. non-academic) audience

\*These goals will be assessed through written assignments, projects, and in-class presentations.

### **Required Texts**

David Kyvig and Myron Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Altamira Press, 2010).

Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.)

Teresa Bergman, *Exhibiting Patriotism: Creating and Contesting Interpretations of American Historic Sites* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013).

### **Course Assignments & Evaluation**

This service-learning course requires 10-12 service hours, which will be spent conducting and transcribing one oral history with a member of the local community. Participation in the Oral History project is required, as is your attendance at scheduled oral history days (see calendar below). We have partnered with the Greater Pittston Historical Society to identify interviewees and collect their stories. As part of the service learning experience, students are required to complete a one-page reflection paper. Students will also be assessed through a mid-term exam, weekly discussions, and a final research paper. The final course grade will be calculated as follows:

Reflection Paper	5%
Oral History collection & Transcription	15%
Mid-Term Exam	25%
Participation / Discussion Posts	25%
Final Research Paper	30%

Participation / Discussion: In this course, you will be graded on your active participation to class discussions and the online discussion board. This includes coming to class on-time and prepared (with readings, notes, etc.), ready to ask questions, analyze images / objects, and digest the authors' arguments. Students will also be required to post an object (or other media item) to the online discussion board twice during the semester. A sign-up sheet will circulate the first week. For this assignment, the designated student will research and find one primary source related to the week's readings / themes (i.e. an oral history for "oral histories" week, a statue or monument for "public monuments" week, etc.). The student will then post the source (with citation / attribution), with comment or a question designed to encourage discussion, to the week's

discussion board by Monday at 12pm. Detailed instructions on where to find these sources will be given the first week of class. Students may not reproduce a source from lecture or from the course readings as part of their post. The remaining students in the class are required to post a response to one of the images before Tuesday's class each week. Failure to regularly participate on a weekly basis, and / or missing more than two class meetings will negatively affect your grade in the course.

Oral History Project: Students will be grouped into teams of two to prepare for and conduct two oral histories. This will include researching the local history of the area and preparing a short list of 5-6 questions to fuel discussion. Students will read about the process of conducting oral histories and undergo training sessions in class as part of the preparation. Participation in these training sessions / discussions is essential and required as part of the course grade. For our service project, the teams will interview members of the community (see calendar below for dates). Finally, students will each individually transcribe one oral history taken by their team. Transcriptions will be used in the final project, and will be turned over to the GPHS at the end of the semester.

Research Project: For the final project, students will choose three clips from their team's oral histories as the basis for a 7 to 10-page analytical essay. Ideally, clips should be related to one another but do not necessarily need to be from the same interviewee. Students will conduct secondary-source research to contextualize the information gleaned from the clips, giving adequate background information for the region / time period, and will situate the information alongside national trends in American history. Finally, students will point to the historical significance of the information gained from the oral history. These papers are to be composed individually by each student. Detailed instructions will follow.

Late Policy: Assignments submitted after the due date will incur a grade deduction of one third for each day late (i.e. if the original grade is a B+ and the paper was submitted one day late, it drops to a B), with a maximum penalty of two full letter grades. Make-up exams will not be permitted except in emergent situations, to be determined at my discretion.

Grading Scale for Course Grades:

A = 93-100%	B = 83-86%	C = 73-76%	F = 64% and below
A- = 90-92%	B- = 80-82%	C- = 70-72%	
B+ = 87-89%	C+ = 77-79%	D = 65-69%	

## Course Calendar: Readings and Topics

### **Week 1 (Sept 1, 3): Introduction**

*Readings:* Kyvig and Marty, *Nearby History*, chapters 1-3 (p1-60)

### **Week 2 (Sept 8, 10): Defining Public History**

*Readings:* Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, "Visiting the Past" p3-32, & "History of Historic Preservation in the US" p177-222

### **Week 3 (Sept 15, 17): Documents and Oral Histories**

*Readings:* W.E.B. DuBois, "The Sorrow Songs," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), 162-170. <http://www.bartleby.com/114/14.html>

Kyvig & Marty chapters 4-6 (p61-132)

*Guest speaker (9/17): Jessica Garner, MU Archives*

### **Week 4 (Sept 22, 24): Material Culture**

*Readings:* Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, chapter 1 "First Impressions" (7-43). **Available on Bb.**

Kyvig & Marty, chapter 8 (p159-176)

*Guest speaker (9/22): Meagan MacGregor, PSU-WB*

\*\*Oral History Day, 9/26/15

### **Week 5 (Sept 29, Oct 1): Visual Culture**

*Readings:* Kyvig & Marty, chapter 7 (p133-158)

Shawn Michelle Smith, "'Looking at One's Self through the Eyes of Others': W.E.B. Du Bois's Photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition," *African American Review* 34, no. 4 (2000): 581-599. **Available on Bb.**

Lessons in Looking, at Picturing U.S. History: "[For a Noble Man, a Prince](#)": [Images and Identity in Colonial America](#)

**Week 6 (Oct 6, 8):****The Challenges of Public Memory**

*Readings:* David W. Blight, "‘For Something beyond the Battlefield’: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (1989): 1156-1178. **Available on Bb.**

Thelen, David. "Roundtable Introduction: The *Enola Gay* Controversy," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 4 (1995): 1029-1035. **Available on Bb.**

Kohn, Richard. "History and the Culture Wars: The Case of the Smithsonian Institution's *Enola Gay* Exhibit." *Journal of American History* 82, no. 4 (1995): 1036-1063. **Available on Bb.**

Peruse the online exhibit curated by Lehigh University, "[The Enola Gay Controversy](#)"

\*\*Oral History Day, 10/10/15

**Week 7 (Oct 13):****MID-TERM EXAM IN CLASS**

\*NO CLASS October 15 (Fall Break)

**Week 8 (Oct 20, 22):****Remembering Space, Highlighting Place**

*Readings:* "The Urban Icons Project," special issue of *Urban History* 33, no. 1 (2006): 5-125. Read the entire online supplement (all essays): [http://journals.cambridge.org/fulltext\\_content/supplementary/Urban\\_Icons/index.htm](http://journals.cambridge.org/fulltext_content/supplementary/Urban_Icons/index.htm)

Kyvig & Marty, chapter 9 (p177-192)

**Week 9 (Oct 27, 29):****Living History & Agro-Tourism**

*Readings:* Scott Magelssen, "Making History in the Second Person: Post-Touristic Considerations for Living Historical Interpretation," *Theatre Journal* 58, no. 2 (2006): 291-312. **Available on Bb.**

Roy Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Re-enacted," *TDR* 34, no. 4 (1990): 123-136. **Available on Bb.**

Edward A. Chappell, "Open-Air Museums: Architectural History for the Masses," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 3 (1999): 334-341. **Available on Bb.**

*Guest Speaker: Chester Kulesa, Anthracite Heritage Museum, and colleagues*

**Week 10 (Nov 3, 5): The Politics of Public Monuments**

*Readings:* Review Sources, in chronological order, on the recent Confederate Flag controversy, **On Blackboard.**

Bergman, *Exhibiting Patriotism*, 117-142 (on Lincoln Memorial)

**Week 11 (Nov 10, 12): The Challenges of Display**

*Readings:* Thomas Baumann, et. al, "Uncomfortable History at the Scott Joplin House," *The Public Historian* 33, no. 2 (2011): 37-66. **Available on Bb.**

Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, 115-132 "Museums and Controversy"

\*WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE: Nov. 16<sup>th</sup> —Last day to withdraw without academic penalty

**Week 12 (Nov 17, 19): Administration and Policies**

*Readings:* Catherine Lewis, "Building Successful Partnerships between Museums and Universities," *Perspectives on History* (Dec 2007). Available [online](#) and **on Bb.**

Bergman, intro & conclusion (p15-30, 173-184)

*Guest Speakers: Jennie Levine Knies, PSU-WB*  
*Chester Kulesa, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission*  
*Kate Totino, MU Grants Specialist*

\*\*Special Event, 11/17/15 at 7pm: Randall Miller (St. Joseph's University) on *Historians Against Slavery* and the Historian as Activist

**Week 13 (Nov 24): Preservation, Practice, and Narrative**

*Readings:* Kyvig & Marty, chapters 10-12 (p193-258)

*Guest Speaker (11/24): Jessica Garner (University Archives), on archival practice*

\*\*Oral History Transcriptions Due 11/24/15

\*NO CLASS November 26 (Thanksgiving Recess)

**Week 14 (Dec 1, 3): Revising Interpretations**

*Readings:* Bergman, *Exhibiting Patriotism*, p1-31 (on USS *Arizona* Memorial) and p143-172 (on Mt. Rushmore / Black Hills)

**Week 15 (Dec 8, 10):            Final Thoughts: The Future of the Field**

*Readings:*        Wallace, “Virtual Past,” p101-114, and “Mickey Mouse History” p133-158

*Guest Speakers:*

*Annie Johnson, Digital Humanities Post-Doc at Lehigh*

\*\* Reflection Papers Due 12/10/15

**Week 16:        Final Research Papers due on 12/14/15 by 3pm.  
Final Oral History Transcriptions due on 12/17/15 by 3pm.**