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## Education and Interpretation in Museums

Welcome to the fascinating and sometimes frustrating world of museum education and interpretation. Museums put a premium on physical space and objects as the focus of their messages. These physical things, however, need additional interpretation or placing in context in order to tell their story. This becomes the job of museum curators and educators. They are charged with guiding museums and historic sites in the choosing of objects, crafting the stories the objects can tell, and determining the best means of communicating these stories and engaging the public. Recently, museums have also been called to reach beyond their objects and walls and become community sites and resources. Educators can play a crucial role in helping museums meet this call.

### Instructor Introduction (who the heck am I?)

I began my professional life as a professor of European History. I then saw the light and turned my attention to museums. I did graduate coursework in Public History/Museum Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and then held positions at the Staten Island Historical Society (Director of Research and Interpretation) and Roanoke Island Festival Park on the Outer Banks of N.C. (Manager of Education and Interpretation), after which I taught Museum Studies at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. Most recently I served as Education Curator for the El Paso Museum of Art. I have also done work for the Thomas Wolfe State Historic Site in N.C., the Asheville Art Museum, Historic Kenmore, and the Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center. I hold a BA in History from UNC-Greensboro and a PhD in European History from the University of Virginia. Okay, that's more than enough about me.

### Course Goals

This course serves as an **overview of the role of education and interpretation** in the museum, with a **focus on developing and implementing presentations and experiences** for a variety of audiences, including school groups, families, and adult learners. As you will notice (if you're paying attention, which I trust you are), the **syllabus is divided into a series of themes** to help identify the particular topics the class will cover, including both theoretical issues/approaches and practical knowledge. In order to ensure an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice (not to mention beefing up your resume, always a good thing) you will have the stimulating task of **developing your very own museum education program**.

### Class Expectations

You will be expected to **engage with the readings and participate in class discussions**. You should arrive in class with a **written list** (with pages noted) of the points/ideas you believe most

significant from the readings assigned for that day. **I reserve the right to collect these without prior notice.**

Discussions will be supplemented by **two short (4-5 page) papers** and a **semester long project**. For this project you will put theory into practice by developing your own museum education program for a real live museum. This must be a museum with which you are physically familiar, or with which you can become familiar. Along the way you will be required to give **progress reports** on the days specified in the syllabus. These reports are not optional. If you find yourself in trouble, let me know ASAP so we can fix the problem.

### Reading Assignments

The following book is available in the bookstore, and on the internet:

- Barry King and Barry Lord, eds. *The Manual of Museum Learning* (2016)

Plus...

Various articles on Blackboard from:

- Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons* (2006)
- *The Journal of Museum Education*, vol. 42, no.4, Dec. 2017
- *The Journal of Museum Education*, vol. 43, no. 4, Dec. 2018
- Jessica Foy Donnelly, ed. *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (2002)
- Juliette Fritsch, ed. *Museum Gallery Interpretation and Material Culture* (2014)
- Gail Anderson, ed. *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift* (2012)
- John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *Learning from Museums* (2000)

### Writing Assignments

The short papers should be written in essay form and well-organized, using proper grammar and spelling. Where necessary you should use end or footnotes, but you do not have to include a bibliography. The semester's education program project will take a different form and will require a bibliography. Details on the project format are given in a separate document and will be posted on Blackboard.

All assignments are due on the dates noted in the syllabus. **Late assignments will be penalized** (unless there is good reason about which you notify me).

### Grades

Grading will be broken down as follows:

Attendance and discussion 20%

Papers 40% (20% each)

Final Project 40%

And now for the course schedule (subject to change):

## **Introduction to Issues and Concepts**

Aug. 27: Intro: What is Museum Education and Interpretation?

Aug. 29: A Brief History of Museum Education (Lisa Roberts, "Changing Practices of Interpretation" from *Reinventing the Museum*; on Blackboard)

Sept. 3: Types of Museum Education (*Manual of Museum Learning*, Chapters 2 & 7)

## **Making a Difference: Museum Education/Interpretation and Society**

Sept. 5: Navigating Social Change (*Manual*, Chapter 4)

Sept. 10: Connecting with Communities (Heba Abd el Salam, Dawn McCormack and Brenden Martin, "Connecting People with Their Museum" and Emma Martell, "Engaging in the Community: Zoo Camp Goes to School" both from *Journal of Museum Education=JME*, vol. 42. No. 4, Dec. 2017)

Sept. 12: Bridging Communication Gaps (Sam Theriault and Beth Redmond Jones, "Constructing Knowledge Together: Collaborating with and Understanding Young Adults with Autism" and Meredith Lehman, Sabrina Phillips and Andrea Saenz Williams, "Empowering Identity Through Art: Bilingual Co-Teaching at the Blanton Museum of Art" both from *JME*, vol. 43, no. 4, Dec. 2018)

Sept. 17: Seeing Multiple Stories (Rex M. Ellis, "Interpreting the Whole House" from *Interpreting Historic House Museums*)

Sept. 19: Using Art to Alleviate Suffering: Programs for PTSD, Alzheimers, and Eating Disorders—guest speaker, David Hernandez, Program Director for the Alzheimer's Association, West Texas Chapter and former Education Curator, El Paso Museum of Art (Gwen Baddeley et al, "Body Talk: Examining a Collaborative Multi-Visit Program for Visitors with Eating Disorders" from *JME* vol. 42...)

## **Education within the Museum Structure**

Sept. 24: Re-visioning the Museum (*Manual* Chapter 8, pp.105-132) **Decision on project place deadline**

Sept. 26: Creating Spaces for Learning (*Manual* Chapter 8, pp.140-158) I have jury duty today (hopefully not afterwards) so we won't meet as a class. Your assignment is to create a written assessment of an El Paso museum's public spaces based on the recommendations made in the reading.

Oct. 1: Interpretation within Exhibit Development (Juliette Fritsch, "Education is a Department isn't it?" Perceptions of ..." from *Museum Gallery Interpretation and Material Culture and Manual*, Chapter 5)

Oct. 3: New Approaches to Docent Training: From Expert to Facilitator (*Manual*, Chapter 8, pp. 133-40; Andrew Palamara, "Practice First: Flipped Training for Gallery Educators" from *JME*, vol. 42, no. 4)

Oct. 8: Tales from the Field-Skype session with Rebecca Gavin, Director of Education Programming at the Connecticut Historical Society- **First paper due**

### **Educational Theory and Museums**

Oct. 10: Exploring Educational Theory (Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons*, Chapters 1-2)

Oct. 15: *Multiple Intelligences* continued (Chapters 6-7 and Chapter 8 pp.134-142)

Oct. 17: Theory and Practice in Museums, the Contexts (John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, Chapters 1 and 8)

Oct. 22: Individual and Group Learning (*Learning from Museums*, Chapters 5-6)

Oct. 24: **Field Trip!** We will be meeting at 5:00 at the Rubin Center to observe the ArtBeats! Program. If you are unable to meet at that time, please let me know.

Oct. 29: Tales from the Field-Skype session with Jackie Ly, Museum Engagement Manager, Morven Park-**Report on Semester Project**

### **The Nitty Gritty of Museum Education in Practice**

Oct. 31: Museums and Schools (*Manual*, Chapter 6)

Nov. 5: Planning Programs (*Manual* Chapter 10, pp. 189-209)- - **Second Paper Due**

Nov. 7: Planning for Audiences (*Manual* Chapter 9)

Nov. 12: Some Gallery Teaching Strategies (Sarah Sims, "Thinking About How We Think: Promoting Museum Literacy Skills with Metacognition" from *JME*, vol. 43, no. 4, Dec. 2018)

Nov. 14: Media and Museum Learning (*Manual* Chapter 10, pp. 223-243) **Final Update on Semester Project**

Nov. 21: Using Program Evaluation (Jason Porter and Sydney Garcia, "Learning from Doing: The Evolution of a Dialogue-Based Program About Race" from *JME*, vol. 43-see above)

Nov. 26: Promoting Self-Guided Interaction (Phillippa Pitts, "Visitor to Visitor Learning: Setting Up Open-Ended Inquiry in an Unstaffed Space" from JME, vol. 43...)

Nov. 28: Thanksgiving!!

Dec. 3: Making Connections with ESL Learners (Cathy Saunders and Samantha Hunter, "Immigration and Change in Rhode Island's Golden Age: A Program for English Language Learners" from JME, vol. 43...)

Dec. 5: **Project Presentations**

Dec. 12: Projects due to me by **5:00**