

Course Information

Title: Exhibition Practices I: Introduction to Museum Studies

Online (Zoom and Blackboard)

TR 9:00-10:20

Credit: 3 hours

Museum Studies website <https://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/museum-studies/>

Instructor Contact Information

Dr. Elisabeth Sommer

Office location: 219 Kelly Hall

Office hours: Tuesday 3:00-5:00; Wednesday 11:00-12:00 via Zoom; **Please note: I will keep Zoom open all day M-F if you need to meet with me outside of office hours**

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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 Description

Welcome to the wonderful and often whacky world of museums. In this class, we will explore the intellectual issues museums face, and the practical (and sometimes tedious) considerations of daily administration. The big challenge, of course, is to try to reconcile these two things. Therefore, we will keep both in mind as we read and discuss a wide array of museum literature. This is an introductory class and so we will touch on several aspects of museum work in order to give students a general understanding of what goes into making and running a museum, and the roles they can play in society.

Course Style

Notice my use of the term "we." This class is not the Dr. Sommer show. While I will certainly steer the discussion and occasionally regale you with tales from the field, the true success of the class will depend on your ability to **keep up with the reading**

**assignments** and be prepared to **discuss them** on the date for which they are listed. Readings are listed in parentheses after the topic for each day. I strongly encourage you to think of ways your own experience, or something that you have seen on the web etc. ties into the readings under discussion. We will sometimes be holding discussions in smaller groups using Zoom's breakout rooms and then coming back together to discuss as a class.

In addition to discussion, you will have the opportunity to practice doing various things that are part of professional museum work. We will also be taking some virtual field trips and be hearing from guest speakers with experience in the field. You will also have the distinct privilege of getting a first-hand look at the new exhibits in the Rubin Center. The Director, Kerry Doyle, has agreed to arrange for you to visit in small masked groups (perhaps three groups of five—we'll see what works). You'll also be able to arrange to view the *Tiny Tunnels* exhibit at the Centennial. You will only be required to visit one exhibit and may choose which you'd prefer. **These visits will be the basis for the exhibit review referred to in the assignments section and will take place outside of class time.**

#### Course Goals and Structure

This class is intended to do the following:

- give you a **working acquaintance with museum functions** and roles within the context of newer museum ideals and challenges
- explore the **ways in which museums developed**
- explore the **changes museums have undergone in response to developments in society and culture**
- This semester we will be focusing in particular on the **challenges posed by systemic racism** and the harsh **realities of the COVID crisis**.

The writing assignments should **give you a taste of some of the activities of museum professionals**. These include the following:

- Critiquing an exhibit (required of all students)
- Cataloging an object
- Creating a PR piece (physical or web-based)
- Writing a grant request
- Creating an educational program

To accomplish the goals, **the course is divided into sections that address various aspects/roles that make up a museum.**

#### Class Expectations in the Age of COVID

The presence of the coronavirus has forced us to rethink both how we teach, and how we evaluate students. I realize that many of you may have found your lives upended with children attending class at home, job loss, extended work hours for those in

essential positions, and concern for older relatives. As a result, I've built in some flexibility into coursework and deadlines. That said, we still need to learn as a team to the degree that we're able.

To that end, you will be expected to **engage with the readings and participate in class discussions**. To assist with this, you'll be expected to respond to **discussion questions** posted on Blackboard. **These will be assigned points and count toward your discussion grade**. In order to earn the full number of points possible (5) you must post your responses before the online class meeting.

Please **enable your camera (via web or phone)** during our online sessions. It makes communication easier if we can all see each other. If there is a problem with enabling the camera, please let me know ahead of time. We'll communicate using both video and chat box, so if there's a problem with your microphone/audio, you can participate via chat. **All Zoom class sessions will be recorded and posted to Blackboard**. I will not share the recordings of your class activities outside of course participants, which include your fellow students and any guest faculty or community-based learning partners with whom we may engage during a class session. **You may not share recordings outside of this course**. If you are unable to attend a class meeting, let me know ahead of time if possible. You are responsible for reviewing the recorded session to see what you missed.

#### Reading Assignments

- Gail Anderson, ed. Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift (in the bookstore and on Amazon)-main text for course
- Various articles and book chapters that will be **available on Blackboard**.

#### Writing Assignments

Writing will play a significant role (as, in fact, it often does in museum work). Required written work consists of both analytical papers and practical exercises. You will be responsible for an **exhibit review**, and your choice of one of the following:

- Cataloging exercise
- Grant writing exercise
- PR pamphlet exercise
- Education programming exercise

**Please note that these exercises will be due on different days within the semester**.

Further details on each assignment will be given out separately and posted on Blackboard.

Ordinarily I also require a field trip report based on your individual visit to a museum. Given the circumstances caused by the coronavirus that wasn't possible this semester. Instead, I've posted on Blackboard **several articles and examples of programming that speak specifically to the issues museums are facing as a result of COVID** (referred to in

the syllabus/Blackboard as "Museums in 2020"). You'll choose one of these and write a brief analysis of the issue in question, including the efficacy of the museum or museums' response to the pandemic where relevant. Specific instructions will be posted on Blackboard.

There will also be an **open note midterm** and a **final paper** in which you will **create your own museum** and produce a portfolio of documents that reflect various facets of museum practice. These documents will be required to include references to the class readings.

All papers and exercises **must be clearly written** and follow the basic rules of grammar and spelling. In addition, papers (and midterm essays) must present a defined argument (where relevant to the assignment) and support it with specific examples. All outside sources should be cited in proper form (standard to be given later). A poorly written paper (incomplete sentences, multiple spelling errors, poor organization etc.) **will not receive higher than a "C"** (you've been warned). Use a writing handbook and the dictionary. The Writing Center is also a valuable tool. Assignments are **due on the date given on the syllabus** unless prior permission is given for an alternative due date. **Completed assignments should be uploaded to Blackboard by midnight on the due date.**

#### Paper Format

Papers are to be double-spaced with proper paragraphing. **All opinions that are not the result of your own analysis need to be notated, as do all quotations (even if it is only a phrase).** For notations you may use parenthetical style from MLA or Chicago Manual of Style. All papers should have a **clear introductory thesis paragraph** that establishes the argument to be made in the body of the paper. The body of the paper **should include specific examples** to support the points made.

#### The Danger Zone:

The following is a list of mistakes that make me scream and tear my hair out. While this might be very amusing for you, remember that I hold the power of the grade.

- Papers with no clear thesis
- Use of "would of" to mean "would have" and all other phonetic spelling silliness (what else would you call it? "Would of" simply makes no sense.)
- Incorrect use of "amount" and "number" ("number"=a group of individual objects, such as balls, houses, trees, cookies, etc. "amount"=water, flour, concrete etc.)
- Switching "their" and "there" (not interchangeable)
- Using commas for periods and vice versa
- Incomplete sentences (except in very rare occasions for emphasis)

- Incorrect use of apostrophes (only used to indicate possession or for a contraction, not in the case of plurals—I don't care what sign producers do)

## Grades

### General Guidelines:

The following is intended to give you a general idea of my grading standards. Be aware that there are lot of “gray areas” within these guidelines (I have not, for instance, specified pluses and minuses).

**A** = Paper is well organized, with a clear thesis and supporting evidence/examples. It contains no major spelling or grammatical errors (i.e. has been proofread). It also shows careful and thoughtful reading of the assignments and an understanding of the material from lectures and discussions where these are relevant to the topic.

**B** = Paper is generally well organized, with a minimum of structural errors. It shows a good grasp of the issues pertinent to the topic but may misinterpret them in some ways or fail to use the strongest examples to support the argument/analysis. **A “B” is a perfectly respectable grade.**

**C** = Paper is loosely organized, and focus is not immediately clear. It contains a fair number of structural errors (i.e. has not been proofread). It lacks sufficient solid examples to support the argument/analysis. It may be too subjective and/or does not clearly relate to the assigned readings where they are relevant to the topic.

**D** = Paper is basically unorganized, with glaring grammatical and spelling errors. It shows little understanding of the assigned readings or issues discussed in class, or it indicates a serious misunderstanding of the same. The author needs to come and see me.

### Grading Breakdown:

Discussion/Participation	10%
Exhibit Review	20%
Museums in 2020 response	15%
Practical Exercise	15%
Midterm	15%
Final Paper	25%

## COVID Procedures and Policies

Any day that you are planning to be on campus you must complete the questions on the UTEP screening website ([screening.utep.edu](http://screening.utep.edu)) prior to arriving. The website will verify if you are permitted to come to campus. If you think you or a family member might have COVID-19, don't come to campus and please arrange to get tested ASAP (Information on testing in El Paso is here <http://epstrong.org/testing.php>). If you test positive, have recent contact with someone who did, or have symptoms, the University urges you to

report this. Reports should be made at [screening.utep.edu](https://www.utep.edu/screening). Since COVID can be asymptomatic, please take advantage of campus testing. The information on testing is here <https://www.utep.edu/resuming-campus-operations/news/august/utep-coronavirus-proactive-testing-program.html>.

Also, please take care of yourself! I know this situation has been hard for me. Many of us are not made for isolation and not one of us is made for chronic stress. There are funds available from the CARES Act specifically set aside for student assistance. The link to information about these funds is here <https://www.utep.edu/resuming-campus-operations/faqs/index.html>.

### **And now for the important stuff...**

Aug. 25: Introduction to the course: what makes a museum and do they matter?

#### The Museum as a Changing Institution

Aug. 27: Defining Museums: Video *Riches, Rivals and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*. I'll post a link to the video on Blackboard, along with discussion questions. **You'll need to watch the video prior to our Zoom meeting.** It's about an hour long.

Sept. 1: Discussion of Two Views (From Reinventing the Museum, "The Gloom of the Museum" John Cotton Dana; "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum" Duncan F. Cameron)

Sept. 3: Identifying Challenges (From Reinventing the Museum, "Museums in the Age of Deconstruction" Michael Ames)

Sept. 8: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agenda and the ongoing debate (From Reinventing, "Change and Complexity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum" Lois Silverman and Mark O'Neill)

#### The Museum as a Public Institution

Sept. 10: Discussion of Visitors and the Museum (**On Blackboard**, "From Being *About* Something to Being *For* Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum" Stephen Weil)

Sept. 15: Zoom session with Hannah Ridenour, Research Manager, Cleveland Museum of Art; Discussion of Museum Visit Experience (From Reinventing "The Visitors' Bill of Rights" Judy Rand)

Sept. 17: The Heart of the Museum: Its Mission and Vision (you'll need to look up the mission and vision of your favorite museum and be prepared to discuss whether it's relevant for today, and whether it's visible in the museum or its website)

Sept. 22: Discussion of Museums and Community (From Reinventing “Embedding Civic Engagement in Museums” Graham Black). Have your own example of a museum working with its community—from a website, news article, or personal experience.

Sept. 24: Opening Up the Museum (From Reinventing “Threshold Fear: Architecture Program Planning” Elaine Heumann Gurian).

Sept. 29: **Midterm** (open note on Blackboard; due by midnight) **No Zoom meeting**

### The Museum as a Collecting Institution

Oct. 1: Discussion of the Role of Objects in the Museum (**On Blackboard** from Reinventing 1<sup>st</sup> edition “What is the Object of This Exercise?” Elaine Hermann Gurian)

Oct. 6: Collections Management (From Reinventing “Collections Planning: Pinning Down a Strategy” James Gardner and Elizabeth Merritt). Virtual tour of updated collections storage area at the Centennial Museum (if the tech works out)

Oct. 8: Object Care and Handling (the basics) and Exploring Collections Software; possible Zoom session with Jordan Gao, Assistant Registrar, Gregg Museum of Art at North Carolina State University

Oct. 13: Issues in Acquisitions and Deaccessioning (From Reinventing “Deaccessioning: the American Perspective” Marie C. Malaro; “Sustainable Stewardship: Preventive Conservation in a Changing World” Jerry Podany).

### The Museum as an Educational Institution

Oct. 15: Changes in Attitude Toward and Within Museum Education (From Reinventing “Changing Practices of Interpretation” Lisa Roberts) **cataloguing exercise due by midnight**

Oct. 20: Interpretation in Historic House Museums (**On Blackboard** article by Barbara Levy) Virtual tour of Magoffin Home via Zoom (again, hopefully).

Oct. 22: Facing Race in Museums (From Reinventing “Mining the Museum: an Installation Confronting History” Lisa G. Corrin; **On Blackboard** from *Slate* “Museums Have a Docent Problem,” Sophie Hagney)

Oct. 27: The Role of Exhibit Design (**On Blackboard** Chapters 1 & 14 from Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach, Beverly Serrell)

Oct. 29: Creating Educational Programs in Different Museum Settings; Zoom session with Rebecca Gavin, Director of Education Programs, Connecticut Historical Society;

Nov. 3: Integrating Multiple Disciplines and Conversation in Museum Education. I'll post a Power Point on Blackboard with this content. **Attendance at the Zoom meeting is optional—VOTE; exhibit review due by midnight (required of all students)**

The Museum as a Financial/Bureaucratic Institution (well, you knew it was coming)

Nov 5: Museum Structure (From Reinventing "Creating a New Business Model" John Falk and Beverly Sheppard; **On Blackboard** from The Manual of Museum Management, pp.48-53)

Nov. 10: Critiquing Museum Websites (group exercise)—**museum education exercise due by midnight**

Nov. 12: Fundraising: Challenges and Approaches (**On Blackboard** selections from Museum Administration, Hugh Genoways and Lynne Ireland, eds.)

Nov. 17: Grant Writing 101 (explore these websites [www.foundationcenter.org](http://www.foundationcenter.org) and [www.imls.gov](http://www.imls.gov))

Nov. 19: Leadership in Museums: Tales from the field; Guest Speaker, Paul Kortenaar, Executive Director, the Ontario Science Center-- **PR pamphlet exercise due**

The Museum as an Institution of the Present and Future

Nov. 24: Discussion of Ways Museums can Matter (From Reinventing "The Mindful Museum" Robert R. Janes; "Principles of Participation" Nina Simon, pp. 330-342)

Nov. 26: **Happy Thanksgiving!** (give thanks that we're almost at the finish line)

Dec. 1: Museums and Technology: The Real Encounters the Virtual (From Reinventing "The Exploded Museum" Peter Samis) Zoom session with Arianna Drummond, Coordinating Producer, Cortina Productions--**grant-writing exercise due by midnight**

Dec. 3: Museums of the Future, the Future of Museums **Review of final project guidelines**

Dec. 8: **Final Exam/Paper due by midnight.**