Course Information
Title: Exhibition Practices I: Introduction to Museum Studies
301 Miner Hall
TR 9:00-10:20
Credit: 3 hours

Instructor Contact Information
Dr. Elisabeth Sommer
Office location TBD
Office hours by appointment
Phone 917-921-2642
Email TBD

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.

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 field trips
(yeah!) to local museums and be hearing from guest speakers with experience in the field.

Course Goals and Structure
This class is intended to give you a working acquaintance with museum functions and
roles within the context of newer museum ideals and challenges. This will include an
understanding of museum origins and development, as well as ways that museums
reflect cultural and social values. The writing assignments should give you a taste of
some of the activities of museum professionals. To accomplish the goals, the course is
divided into sections that address various aspects/roles that make up a museum.

Reading Assignments
• Gail Anderson, ed. Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the
  Paradigm Shift (in the bookstore)-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 a field trip report from a museum visit, an exhibit review, and your
choice of one of the following:
  • Cataloging exercise
  • Grant writing exercise
  • PR pamphlet exercise
  • Interpretive critique of new Kenmore tour (museum education 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.

There will also be a midterm and a final paper in which you may either create your own
museum or analyze a case study and reflect on the role of various facets of museum
practice in the success or failure of institutional visions.

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.

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, please use The Chicago Manual of Style for either footnotes or
endnotes. 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%
Field Trip Report 15%
Practical Exercise 15%
Midterm 15%
Final Paper 25%

And now for the important stuff...

Aug. 28: Introduction to the course: what makes a museum?

The Museum as a Changing Institution

Aug. 31: Defining Museums: Video Riches, Rivals and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America, discussion of video with exploration of some current museum practices

Sept. 5: 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. 7: Identifying Challenges (From Reinventing the Museum, “Museums in the Age of Deconstruction” Michael Ames, and “The Real Multiculturalism: A Struggle for Authority and Power” Amalia Mesa-Bains)


The Museum as a Public Institution

Museums” Marilyn Hood; “From Being About Something to Being For Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum” Stephen Weil

Sept. 19: Discussion of Museum Visit Experience—Visit Report due

Sept. 21: Art or History? A Case Study (On Blackboard, from Displays of Power “A Matter of Perspective: Revisionist History and The West as America” Steven Dubin)


Sept. 28: Opening Up the Museum (From Reinventing “Threshold Fear: Architecture Program Planning” Elaine Heumann Gurian)

Oct. 3: Midterm

The Museum as a Collecting Institution

Oct. 5: Discussion of the Role of Objects in the Museum (From Reinventing “What is the Object of This Exercise?” Elaine Hermann Gurian)

Oct. 10: The Non-Collecting Museum—also, sneak peek at the exhibition installation process! Field trip to the Rubin Center. Meet there.

Oct. 8: Collections Management (From Reinventing “Collections Planning: Pinning Down a Strategy” James Gardner and Elizabeth Merritt). Field trip to the Centennial Museum. Meet there.

Oct. 12: Issues in Acquisitions and Deaccessioning (From Reinventing “Deaccessioning: the American Perspective” Marie C. Malaro; “Legal and Ethical Considerations in Museum Acquisitions” Marilyn Phelan). Also, exploring collections software and object care and handling

Oct. 17: Guest Speaker--TBD cataloguing exercise due

The Museum as an Educational Institution

Oct. 19: Changes in Attitude Toward and Within Museum Education (From Reinventing “Changing Practices of Interpretation” Lisa Roberts; On Blackboard Introductory Chapter from Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning John Falk and Lynn Dierking)

Oct. 26: Discussion, Pushing the Envelope (From Reinventing “Mining the Museum: an Installation Confronting History” Lisa G. Corrin; On Blackboard from The Journal of Museum Education vol. 23, no.3, “An Interview with Fred Wilson”)


Nov. 2: Guest Speaker—TBD exhibit review due (required of all students)

Nov. 7: Integrating Multiple Disciplines in Museum Education. Field trip to El Paso Museum of Art to observe Art Beats program. Meet there.

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

Nov. 9: The Nitty Gritty of Museum Structure and Discussion of the Role of PR and Marketing (From Reinventing “New Ways of Experiencing Culture: The Role of Museums and Marketing Implications” Neil Kotler; On Blackboard from The Manual of Museum Management, pp.48-53) —museum education exercise due

Nov. 14: Critiquing Museum Brochures (group exercise)

Nov. 16: Fundraising: Challenges and Approaches (On Blackboard selections from Museum Administration, Hugh Genoways and Lynne Ireland, eds. Also explore this website www.foundationcenter.org )


Nov. 23: Happy Thanksgiving! (give thanks that we’re almost at the finish line)

Nov. 28: Guest Speaker—TBD, grant-writing exercise due

The Museum as an Institution of the Present and Future

Nov. 30: Discussion of the Potential for Museums to Matter (From Reinventing “The Mindful Museum” Robert R. Janes; “Principles of Participation” Nina Simon)
Dec. 5: Museums and Technology: The Real Encounters the Virtual (From Reinventing “The Exploded Museum” Peter Samis) Find a website or virtual exhibit that you think is particularly good at engaging web visitors and be prepared to discuss it.


Dec. 12: Final Exam/Paper due to me by 5:00! No Extensions (outside of unavoidable circumstances—should these occur, notify me ASAP)