

## Fall 2017 Art 3308

### 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  
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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.

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)

Sept. 12: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agenda and the ongoing debate (**On Blackboard** selections from Excellence and Equity; 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. 14: Discussion of Visitors and the Museum (From Reinventing “The Visitors’ Bill of Rights” Judy Rand; **On Blackboard**, “Staying Away: Why People Choose Not to Visit

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. 26: Discussion of Museums and Community (From Reinventing “The Museum’s Role in a Multicultural Society” Claudine K. Brown; “Embedding Civic Engagement in Museums” Graham Black). Bring in your own example of a museum working with its community—from web, newspaper, or personal experience.

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. 24: Interpretation in Historic House Museums (**On Blackboard** article by Barbara Levy) **Field trip to McGoffin House. Meet there.**

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”)

Oct. 31: The Role of Exhibit Design (From Reinventing “Do Museum Exhibitions Have a Future?” Kathleen Mclean; **On Blackboard** Chapters 1 & 14 from Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach, Beverly Serrell) **Field trip to El Paso Museum of History. Meet there.**

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](http://www.foundationcenter.org) )

Nov. 19: Museum Management: Qualities of Successful Leadership (From Reinventing “Emotional Intelligence, Passion and Museum Leadership; from Manual pp.59-62 on Blackboard)--**PR pamphlet exercise due**

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. 7: Museums of the Future, the Future of Museums: The National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of African American History and Culture (Reading TBA) **Review of final project guidelines**

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