

HIS 240/440 Public History: Theory and Practice

Spring 2020 Tu, 2-4:40, Morey 501

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Welcome to a hands-on exploration into Public History, a dynamic and exciting approach to communicating history that embraces collaborative work, creative design, and directly engages with the surrounding community. You already have a large experience as the audience of Public History. Have you ever watched a documentary, visited a museum, browsed a website, or listened to a podcast about historical events? In this course, you get to become the creator, making choices about which stories to tell and how to portray them. You will choose and reach out to your intended audience and you will get to see how an idea becomes a tangible creation within the course of a fifteen-week semester.



Students will work in groups to incrementally identify, design, build, promote and launch a Public History project representing Rochester's historic and diverse Corn Hill (Third Ward) neighborhood. This process will be done in collaboration with community partners, in particular with Jim DeVinney, the Corn Hill historian. The final project will be

available to the greater Rochester public and will inform, excite, and build community. Course readings and discussions will help students define Public History and best practices to follow in order to reach their intended audience and goals. Over the course of the semester, we will start with an introduction to Public History, defining what it is and considering where it occurs and who is involved. Then we will begin an in-depth study of Rochester's Third Ward so that students can develop and pitch individual exhibit proposals. After selecting a proposal, we will delve into the development phase and return to theoretical questions surrounding Public History. By the end of the course, students will have created, promoted and launched at least one project to showcase the Corn Hill neighborhood.

Required Books:

- Faye Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019)
- Blake McKelvey, *Rochester on the Genesee: The Growth of a City*, (New York: New York Classics, either edition)
- Lyon, Nix and Shrum, *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017)

Readings listed for a particular class should be completed by the start of that class. Besides the above books, there are numerous required articles, chapters, and excerpts for you to read on electronic reserve. Access these on an e-version of this syllabus on our my.rochester.edu/Blackboard course website.

Evaluation: Student grades will be based on active class participation (25%), a course journal (25%), an individual proposal and pitch (10%), and a final Public History project incorporating the best practices explored during the semester (40%).

Students taking HIS 440 (as a graduate-level course) will be expected to meet in additional breakout sessions and will write a final assessment paper (12-15 pages, double-spaced) situating the current state of Public History in either museums or the discipline of history, English, or archaeology (depending on your graduate program). This paper should incorporate additional, relevant readings. Papers may also assess how the “digital turn” has impacted the production, dissemination, and preservation of Public History. This paper is due on the last day of classes (Apr. 28) and should be revised and resubmitted by the final exam period.

Class Participation: You are expected to attend every class, read the assigned material, and come prepared to talk about what you have read. Since history classes are by nature usually

question-driven, you will be expected to think on your feet, frame historical questions, critically evaluate the works we will read, and engage with your fellow classmates. In contributing to discussion, quality is more appreciated than quantity. Be courteous and respectful to your peers. A history class is not a spectator sport: if you are silent, we will assume you are unprepared rather than brilliant but shy. Your class participation is worth twenty-five percent (25%) of your grade. Unexcused absences and poor participation will cause this grade to suffer.

Course journal: Experiencing and critically evaluating Public History will help you hone your abilities to produce a Public History project. At particular and strategic moments during the semester, you will be asked to complete a guided journal exercise that asks you to engage either with local museums, websites or other Public History mediums. Your completed assignments should be submitted to blackboard.

TECHNOLOGY TUTORING AND CONSULTATION

This course will involve a lot of self-teaching and peer-teaching that can span from digital platforms to physical creations. The course's recommended readings will serve as an important resource as you develop your project. For digital components, staff at the [Digital Scholarship Lab](#) can serve as key resources. The DSL is located in Rush Rhees Second Floor, next to the Humanities Center.

[UR Writing, Speaking, and Argument Center \(WSAP\)](#): Over the course of the semester while developing your reaction and research papers, you are allowed -- and very much encouraged -- to work with writing tutors and specialists in the College WSAP, located in Rush Rhees G-122. They will help you to improve your prose and organization and can serve as ideal readers/sounding boards as you develop your research projects. As a fortune cookie I once opened stated, "Good writing is clear thinking made visible." The writing center staff can help you to achieve this ideal -- if you work with them. **YOU MUST MAKE APPOINTMENTS IN ADVANCE** to work with writing tutors, so plan ahead.

iZone: Due to the collaborative nature of Public History, by week five we will divide into project teams to bring the Corn Hill exhibit to fruition by the end of the semester. The University of Rochester's Barbara J. Burger iZone offers ideal collaborative spaces and meeting rooms for this type of development. Access to these spaces, however, can only be guaranteed with a reservation. To find out more about the iZone project rooms, visit <https://izone.lib.rochester.edu/spaces>. You will need to email the iZone to reserve on of the project rooms.

Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSCP): The University of Rochester has a number of archival materials and items in their special collections related to the Corn Hill (Third Ward) neighborhood and to the city's history in general. We encourage you to explore these holdings as you think about the understanding the neighborhood's significance and designing a dynamic and exciting exhibit.

Credit Hours: The College's credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award four credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of three periods of fifty minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIS 240/440 are expected to devote at least one hour each week to identifying the main lines of argument in course readings, using online tutorials and software manuals to teach themselves digital techniques, conducting in depth research on their topics in local archives, and building their final projects.

Inclusion: The University of Rochester, this course and we are committed to inclusion and welcome students of all backgrounds and abilities. Services and reasonable accommodations are available to students with temporary and permanent disabilities, to students with DACA or undocumented status, to students facing mental health issues, other personal situations, and to students with other kinds of learning needs. Please let us know if there are circumstances affecting your ability to participate in class. Some resources that might be of use include:

- In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. (disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall)
- [Undocumented/DACA Student Support Contacts](#)
- [University of Rochester CARE Network](#)
- [University Health Center UCC \(University Counseling Center\)](#)
- [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning \(CETL\)](#)

Academic honesty: All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined at <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>. For a helpful discussion of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association's "[Defining Plagiarism](#)". While you are required to collaborate in this course, we will take into account your specific contributions and you must submit a number of assignments on an individual

basis. If you are ever unclear as to our expectations regarding academic honesty, please ask. In this course, we will cover specific challenges and best practices for citing and referencing within Public History.

A Note on Communication: It is your responsibility to get to class on time and to submit all your work on time or early in paper or electronic form. We check our email regularly during the work week and are usually good about responding to **correct and courteously worded** missives, but don't expect instant responses and do not assume we got your email. Informal and poorly punctuated/capitalized emails annoy us. Also, please communicate with BOTH of us, so we as co-instructors are both aware of your questions, needs or concerns. Finally, do not simply "disappear" if you find yourself overwhelmed or struggling: we can only work with you if we know this is happening, and an early timely intervention can do far more than damage control at semester's end.

**Video Tutorials and Links for Digital Platforms useful in Public History:
PLEASE USE GOOGLE TO IDENTIFY THE MOST CURRENT TUTORIALS!!!**



<http://www.sketchup.com/learn/videos/826>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2f3DII31-M>
<http://www.mastersketchup.com/sketchup-tutorials/>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLV7h-WLIx0>
<http://www.creativebloq.com/3d-tips/blender-tutorials-1232739>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiJmqidquM4>



Agisoft Photoscan/Metashape

http://www.agisoft.com/pdf/photoscan-pro_1_2_en.pdf
<http://www.creativebloq.com/3d-tips/blender-tutorials-1232739> (Begin, Intermediate,
and Tips and Tricks)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeU_2SHwhqI
<https://dinosaurpalaeo.wordpress.com/2013/10/31/photogrammetry-tutorial-1-equipment/> (12 tutorials of Photoscan for paleontology modeling of dinosaurs)



<https://unity3d.com/>
<https://unity3d.com/learn/tutorials>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9BdFZ2MCXc> (first in series)
<https://docs.unity3d.com/Manual/index.html> (manual)

CLASS SCHEDULE

1/21 (Tu) – Introductions

Getting to know Public History, Museum Exhibit Design, Corn Hill, and Each Other

What is Public History? Who is it for (intended audience)? Who creates it? How is it communicated? What role do historians play?

**** Questionnaire Due Before Class – come prepared to talk about your own background, interests, and talents**

Readings: Sayer, *Public History*, pp, 1-71; *Intro Public History*, 1-56.

Week II, 1/28 – Rochester and Corn Hill

MEET IN RARE BOOKS & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

FIRST HALF: What is distinctive and important about Rochester and its history? What do we know about Corn Hill/The Third Ward within Rochester? Whose histories does McKelvey tell? Who is left out? Why? How can we recover the stories of those missing or silenced?

Readings: Blake McKelvey, *Rochester on the Genesee*, all.; Wolfard, "[Perspective on Art and Community](#)," *Rochester History* 65.3 **VIEW:** *July '64 (On Reserve, Art & Music Library)*.

SECOND HALF: RBSC Sources for Rochester and Corn Hill research.

KEY RESOURCE: Rochester Public Library Digital Collections:

<https://roccitylibrary.org/digital-collections/>

Assignment for next class: Visit an area museum: RMSC, Monroe County/Rundell Library, Memorial Art Gallery, High Falls Museum, Susan B. Anthony House, Strong Museum of Play, etc. Write a 3-5 pp. journal entry evaluating its content and effectiveness in addressing the questions from Week I (above) and at least one of its exhibits strengths and shortcomings.

Week III, 2/4 - History In Situ: Exploring Corn Hill

2-4pm WALKING/BUS Tour of Corn Hill, led by Corn Hill Historian Jim Devinney
4-4:30 – Debrief and discuss Corn Hill's history potential at Phyllis Wheatley Library and consider our exhibit space.

***** MUSEUM critique due**

Assignment for next class: write a journal entry identifying two subjects and periods of Corn Hill's history that most interest you and that you can imagine communicating through an exhibit.

Week IV, 2/11 – Possibilities

Ideation and Keeping Corn Hill in Corn Hill's History

FIRST HALF: Brainstorming Exhibit ideas as a class, discussion of museums and community inclusion/partnerships.

Readings: [Nina Simon](#), *The Participatory Museum*, [Ch. 1](#); Sayer, *Public History*, 137-169; *Intro Public History*, 33-56; **LISTEN** to at least one Rochester Voices <http://www.rochestervoices.org/collections/african-american-oral-histories/>

SECOND HALF: **Teen Empowerment** presentation of their ongoing documentary film production work & conversation.

Assignment for Monday Feb. 17, Electronic Submission: design your own individual exhibit prospectus and pitch to present to the class. The 2+ page, single-spaced prospectus should address **what** topic you're covering and what sources you'll use, **who** you want to engage, **when and how** (schedule, steps) you'll research, design, and make it, **and why** you think it's important for the public to know about this subject. Your 10 minute pitch should cover all this and win over the rest of the class to your idea.

Week V – 2/18 - Pitches

FIRST HALF: Individual Pitches for the Course Exhibit, with Q&A

Readings: Sayer, *Public History*, 45-71 (again); *Intro Public History*, ch. 5.

SECOND HALF: General class discussion of pitches and projects; divide into one or two project teams and develop/refine a collective prospectus for next class.

Week VI 2/25 – Deciding, Designing, Developing

What is our exhibit going to be? How are we going to make it? What is our timeline and work-flow? What components (physical, digital, participatory, material, visual, interactive) will it include? Who will lead and work on which aspects? How will it reach multiple imagined audiences? What useful past museums practices and readings can we draw upon?

Readings: John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited* (2012), [intro](#), [ch.1](#), [ch. 11](#); Sayer, *Public History*, 171-210.

Week VII – 3/3 – Public History Media

How do we communicate public history through media and public outreach? How does media impact how the public understands history? How large is the audience for historical films and documentaries? What historical subjects have particularly translated to film, video, and podcasts? Come to class with a list of at least FIVE of your favorite historical movies and documentaries and be prepared to talk about HOW they provided you with new insights or perspectives (think about their organization and rhetorical approaches).

Readings: Sayer, *Public History*, 73-110; Media Screening TBD.

Assignment for 3/17 class: Visit a digital history website for at least an hour and write a critical journal entry addressing 1) target audience, pedagogical goals, and sources used; 2) historic accuracy and effectiveness (user interface/design) in teaching and learning; 3) strengths and weaknesses/limitations of doing history with the chosen platform and subjects; 4) how the site was built (vision, funding, design and implementation team, specific hardware and software used, sustaining and updating the project); 5) personal engagement, interest, assessment of learning, and suggestions for improvement. To fully address the above, you will likely have to do additional research on the web and within project websites - perhaps even contact the designers yourself. The textbooks provide a fair number of websites and examples.

SUGGESTED: <https://www.museudofutebol.org.br/pagina/exposicoes-virtuais>

<http://dohistory.org/>

<http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/>

<https://slavevoyages.org/>

<http://www.sfmuseum.org/>

<http://collections.rmsc.org/>, especially the Albert Stone Photo Negative Collection (1904-1936) and its 13,000 digitized images.

Week VIII – 3/10 – SPRING BREAK, No Class

Week IX – 3/17 - Digital Public History & Museums

How do physical/material and digital/multimedia ways of communicating history overlap? Differ? Complement each other? What are the strengths and limitations of each? What audiences do they reach? How are museums confronting the recent Digital Turn? How can digital means enhance community engagement? Does the museum you visited in Week II have an effective digital presence? What does Corn Hill currently look like in cyberspace?

Readings: Sayer, *Public History*, 73-136; * W. Ryan Dodge, “[Technology – Are Museums Keeping Pace?](#)” *Muse* (2016) 35:40-45; <https://cornhill.org/history-of-corn-hill/> and search for Corn Hill on your own.

Week X – 3/24 - Design in Public History

What role does visual design play in Public History? How can particular choices help engage audiences and communicate narratives and points of view?

GUEST SPEAKER Julia Maddox (iZone Director) will discuss strategies for clearly communicating your exhibit’s vision, field questions, and provide useful feedback on your current exhibit design work.

Assignment for next class: Visit an area museum: RMSC, Monroe County/Rundell Library, Memorial Art Gallery, High Falls Museum, Susan B. Anthony House, Strong Museum of Play, etc. Speak to who you understand is the intended audience and what is the intended goal. Write a 3-5 pp. journal entry evaluating how did specific design choices enhanced or detracted from what you understand to be the intended goal. Offer at least one suggestion for improvement.

Week XI – 3/31 - Textual Fit? / Material Culture?

Work Session on assembling the pieces going into your exhibit and integrating multi-modal (if applicable) elements of the project. Also consider our marketing and public attraction campaign – media and communications avenues? People to get in touch with? Press release creation and obtaining permissions for copyright material and objects?

Week XII – 4/7 - When is it history/historic?

What makes something historic? Worthy of preservation? How old does it need to be to be Old? What makes something historically significant? How does society assess something's value? What laws and institutions exist to safeguard historic material and encourage preservation?

Readings: Sprinkle, “[“Of Exceptional Importance”: The Origins of the “Fifty-Year” Rule in Historic Preservation](#),” *Public Historian* (Spr ‘07); Sayer, *Public History*, 211-244

Week XIII – 4/14 - Promoting Public History

What role does public outreach play in public history? What happens when the historical record challenges historical memory? Or when national narratives conflict with particular people's heritage and experiences? Who gets to promote history and how do we reconcile different, even conflicting, versions of the past?

Readings: Weyeneth, “The Risks of Professionalizing Local History,” *Public Historian* (Fall 2003).; Sayer, *Public History*, 245-282; David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig, *The Presence of the Past*, 147-207.

Class exercise: consider how our exhibit project could be misread or miss the mark with unintended audiences who might encounter it. How might we anticipate and correct for this possibility?

FOR NEXT WEEK: marketing and promotion of our Museum Exhibit.

Week XIV – 4/21

Work Session and mock-up assembly for placement at Wheatley Library

Week XV – 4/28 - Public History Assessment

Installation of Exhibit at Wheatley Library and consideration of how we might assess the effectiveness and success of our exhibit and solicit feedback from the community.

Readings: -----

Final Journal entry: Reflect broadly on how you now better understand how particular pasts are communicated via public history. How has your understanding of history changed over this semester? What skills, sensitivities, and perspectives have you acquired while designing and building our exhibit? Do you consider our exhibit a success as a means of learning and as a way of teaching the public about Rochester's past? Would you now consider a career in museums or public history attractive? Important?