

**HIST 395: Museum Exhibits**  
**Fall 2016, Section 1**  
**T/TH 12:35-1:50**  
**CCC 224**

Dr. Sarah Scripps  
Department of History

Email: sscripps@uwsp.edu  
Office: CCC 461

Office Hours: T/TH 2-3:30pm and by appointment

**Course Summary**

This course provides an introduction to the history and theory of museum exhibits. Over the course of the semester, students will experience first-hand the process of exhibition development by planning, writing, and designing an exhibit for the Portage County Historical Society. In addition, students will analyze both the theoretical and practical challenges historians face in producing exhibitions for a general audience.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students taking “Museum Exhibits” develop skills for analyzing and interpreting history to a general audience. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Evaluate how interpretations of the past are conveyed in museum settings
- Complete an experiential learning project by overseeing the development of a museum exhibition for the community from start to completion
- Reflect on the experiential project by recognizing both theoretical and practical challenges in creating museum exhibits
- Collaborate by working in teams to curate an exhibition for the general public
- Locate and synthesize source materials, including written texts, audio/visual material, and/or objects in a final project suitable for a public audience

**Required Texts**

Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, 2nd Ed. (for purchase at the bookstore)

Other assigned readings will be posted on D2L.

**Assignments**

**Participation:** Class participation consists of more than just regular attendance. It also involves coming to class prepared and engaged, bringing assigned readings, listening to fellow classmates and guest speakers, and actively contributing to class discussions. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Students may miss three classes before their final grade begins to drop 2% for each additional absence. It is not wise to use all of your absences early in the term in case you have legitimate reasons for missing class later. Arriving late or leaving early from class will be counted as one-half an absence. Students facing extenuating circumstances affecting their attendance (such as serious health issues, UWSP athletics, the birth of a child, military service, etc.) are encouraged to talk to me.

**In-Class Responses:** There will be a series of in-class writing responses to questions about the readings. I will grade in-class responses on a plus-check-minus system. A check-plus indicates exceptional work, a check represents basic competency, and a check-minus signals incomplete, inaccurate, or substandard work. Students who are absent will receive a zero for their participation grade that day and will not have an opportunity to make up the missing work. Students can drop their lowest response score.

**Exhibit Plan Rough Draft:** The exhibit plan is built upon several incremental assignments, including writing sample object labels, drafting an exhibit script, designing panels, producing a floor plan, and developing an exhibit evaluation.

**Exhibit Plan Final Draft and Presentation:** The final exhibit plan represents the body of work that your team compiled over the course of the semester based on team assignments and deadlines. All final drafts of materials created by your team should be included, such as the evaluation, floorplan, designed panels, and final script. You will present this work to key stakeholders on the last day of class.

**Final Essay:** Students will write a 4-5 page essay detailing their individual contributions to the project as well as how this project has influenced their understanding of the role of museums in society.

**Peer Evaluations:** Collaboration is a major component of this course. At the end of the semester, your peers will write evaluations regarding your contributions to the project.

**Assessment Breakdown\***

Participation: 15%

In-Class Responses: 20% (divided evenly among responses)

Exhibit Plan Rough Draft: 20% (5% object labels, 15% rough drafts of script, floorplan, design, and evaluation)

Exhibit Plan Final Draft: 25% (15% exhibit plan final draft, 10% final presentation)

Final Essay: 10%

Peer Evaluations: 10%

\*For students taking this course as a 500-level seminar, additional readings and projects may be assigned. Please see me for more details.

**Grading Scale**

A: 93-100

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69

D: 60-66

F: 59 and below

## **Classroom Policies**

Students are expected to arrive on time and to be attentive and engaged during class. This means you are not sleeping, reading/working on other materials, using electronic devices, talking to your neighbor, or disrupting class in any way. Students will raise their hands for questions and be respectful of fellow students and the professor. You may disagree with another person's comment or position, but do so with courtesy and respect. For more information on classroom expectations, see: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Academic-Misconduct.aspx>

All forms of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fraud, and unauthorized access to tests and assignments are strictly prohibited. Any words or ideas borrowed from another person or source, whether through a direct quotation or through paraphrasing, must be cited properly to avoid plagiarism. Please familiarize yourself with what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. Violations of the university's code of conduct are subject to sanctions ranging from a failing grade for an assignment to disciplinary hearings or potential failure of the course. For more information on academic dishonesty, see:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf>

If you have a learning or physical challenge that requires accommodation, please contact the Disability and Assistive Technology Center as early as possible. They will then notify me privately of the accommodations that will facilitate your success in the course. Their office is located on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor the LRC, Voice: 715-346-3365, TTY: 715-346-3362.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, see:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/ADA.aspx>

Computers and other electronic devices are not allowed in class without getting permission from me in advance. Studies have shown that students learn more and perform better by writing down the main ideas of lecture versus typing them. For more information, see the article in *Scientific American* entitled "A Learning Secret: Don't Take Notes with a Laptop" (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>).

I hold regular office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-3:30pm (461 CCC). During this time, my priority is to talk to students about any questions or concerns they may have. I truly enjoy meeting with you to hear about how things are going. If you are struggling, stop by and let's chat. If you are unable to meet during office hours, email me and we will set up an alternative time.

*Please note that the syllabus is subject to change and assignments may be added.*

## **Schedule**

### **Week 1: Course Introduction**

September 6: Course Introduction

September 8: Selection of Teams and Project Overview

Reading: Exhibit Proposal; Team Overview (on D2L)

### **Week 2: The Big Idea**

September 13: Museum Definitions

Reading: Serrell, pp. 1-18; Dillenburg, "What, if Anything, Is a Museum?" (on D2L);

Baker, "Planning Exhibits: From Concept to Opening" (on D2L)

September 15: The Big Idea and Interpretive Labels

Reading: Serrell, pp. 19-46

### **Week 3: Site Visits**

September 20: Tour of Synagogue

September 22: Tour of Heritage Park

### **Week 4: World War I in Central Wisconsin**

September 27: World War I: An Overview

Reading: Brewer, *Why America Fights* (on D2L); National World War I Museum and Memorial Timeline (link on D2L)

September 29: World War I in Central Wisconsin

Reading: "Shellshocked and After" (on D2L); Zonderman, "Over Here: The Wisconsin Homefront During World War I" (on D2L)

### **Week 5: Exhibit Labels**

October 4: Exhibit Labels Workshop

Reading: Serrell, pp. 86-105 & 117-143; Lord and Lord, *Manual of Museum Exhibitions*, pp. 398-400 (on D2L)

### **Due: Object Labels**

October 6: Visitor Engagement

Reading: Serrell, pp. 49-85

### **Week 6: Exhibit Design**

October 11: Design Overview

Reading, Serrell, pp. 166-177 & 266-286; Williams, *The Non-Designer's Design Book* (on D2L)

October 13: Design Workshop (Location TBD)

### **Week 7: Exhibit Production**

October 18: Production/Fabrication

Reading: Serrell, 287-301; Parman et al, excerpts from *Exhibit Makeovers* (on D2L)

October 20: Museums as Spectacles

Reading: Lawrence Godkin, excerpt from *Museum Origins*, pp. 33-38 (on D2L)

### **Week 8: Museum Evaluation**

October 25: Evaluation

Reading: Serrell, pp. 244-265 & 302-324; Other readings TBD

October 27: Ethnographic Museums  
Reading: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography" (on D2L)

### **Week 9: Museum Objects**

November 1: Natural History Museum (Date Subject to Change)

**Due: Exhibit Script Rough Draft**

November 3: Museum Objects

Reading: Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* pp. 20-29 (on D2L)

### **Week 10: Museum Outreach**

November 8: Museum Outreach

Tongorra Matelic, "New Roles for Small Museums;" excerpts from Anderson, ed.  
*Reinventing the Museum* (on D2L)

November 10: Museums and "Edutainment"

Reading: Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, pp. 159-174 (on D2L)

### **Week 11: Digital Media**

November 15: Digital Interpretive Devices

Reading: Serrell, pp. 204-229

November 17: Team Updates

**Due: Rough Drafts- Exhibit Design, Floorplan, and Evaluation**

### **Week 12: Museum Ethics**

November 22: Museum Ethics

Reading: McGreal, "Coming Home" (on D2L)

November 24: NO CLASS

### **Week 13: Museums as Forums**

November 29: Museums as Community Forums

Reading: Archibald, *The New Town Square*, pp. 1-14 (on D2L)

December 1: Museums and Memory

Reading: Linenthal, excerpts from *Preserving Memory*; Lowenthal, excerpts from *The Past is a Foreign Country* (on D2L)

### **Week 14: Museums and Memory**

December 6: Team Workshop

December 8: Class Review of Final Drafts

**DUE: Final Drafts- Exhibit Script, Floorplan, Design, and Evaluation**

### **Week 15: Museum Controversies**

December 13: Museum Controversies

Reading: Dubin, *Displays of Power*, pp. 246-275 (on D2L)

December 15: Presentations to Stakeholders (Location TBD)

### **Week 16: Final Exam**

**FINAL EXAM:** Wednesday, December 21, 12:30-2:30pm, 224 CCC

**DUE: Final Essays.** In-class peer reviews of fellow team members.