

## ***History 573: Museum Exhibition***

Spring 2009

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Office Hours(Morton 264) Mondays and Wednesdays 10:00-1:00 and other times by appointment

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“No theory will suffice until it is grounded in practice, and no practice will sustain itself unless it can be understood and explained. The future health of museums requires the continued sharing of knowledge and bridging of these boundaries.”

--Silverman and O'Neill, "Change and Complexity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum."  
*Museum News*. November/December 2004

This course is about the theory and practice of historical exhibition. As we examine the major theoretical issues in contemporary historical interpretation via the exhibition medium—such as the relationship between preservation and communication, the role of visitor studies, the ethics of collection and display, and the politics of exhibition development—we will also develop, design, and install a historical exhibition in the Public History Graduate Student Gallery in the Randall Library. At the end of this course you will have a working vocabulary of exhibition, an understanding of contemporary historical exhibition theory, and basic skills in exhibition development, design, production, installation, and evaluation.

The exhibition is an important component of this class. It is an opportunity to gain experience in professional exhibition and provide the UNCW community with an educational resource. The topic of this year's exhibition will be consumerism in the 1980s. The UNCW Public History Program Teaching Collections will provide the base collection that you will use to create your interpretive plan.

### **Required Readings**

Required (on reserve at library):

Ames and Frye, *Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretive History Exhibits*

Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*

Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*

Ehrenreich, *The Worst Years of Our Lives: Irreverent Notes from a Decade of Greed*

Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*

Karaagac, *Between Promise and Policy: Ronald Reagan and Conservative Reformism*

(not on reserve)

McLean, *Planning For People in Museum Exhibitions*

Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*

Additional readings on reserve:

Barclay, *Mount Making for Museum Objects*

Formative Evaluations: 80s

Recommended:

Wiltenz, *The Age of Reagan*

Troy, *Morning in America*

In addition to these texts, you will conduct background research on a more focused theme relating to 1980s consumerism. Please pay attention to the course schedule to make sure you've completed the required readings on time.

### **Assignments and Grades**

Your final grade will be based on the following:

*Class Preparation (15):* The success of the class and ultimately the exhibition will depend on timely progress. Exhibition development is a process, and work that is not completed on time slows the entire exhibit team.

*Research-Based Interpretive Plan (40):* Curators must be equally skilled in both research and communication. The interpretive plan reflects these skills and is the most important document in the exhibit development process. It is the plan the team follows to create an exhibition with a clear and cohesive theme. Although the final version is team-authored, individual elements are the responsibilities of individual authors.

*The Exhibition (45):* We are responsible for producing a high quality exhibit that is relevant to the needs of the university community. We are more than a class; we are a project team with goals, responsibilities, and a budget.

The following scale is used to determine final grades:

Percentage	Grade
96-100	A
90-95	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-

### **Course Schedule**

January 8:

Read: Dean, 1-18; Ehrenreich

In class: course introduction, exhibition development processes and project plan, object study and exhibit topic

January 15:

Read: Karaagac

In class: discuss readings, object interpretation lab

January 22:

Read: formative evaluation surveys on reserve; McLean, *Planning for People*

In class: discuss McLean, prepare educational goals; workshop: working with collections

Prepare: notes on formative evaluation surveys: What are the trends in current levels of knowledge and interest in the 1980s?

January 29:

Prepare: ideas on interpretive plan and sub-themes

Read: Chang; readings related to sub-theme research

In class: discuss Chang and interpretive plan assignment, create "big idea" statement, divide curatorial duties; interpretive plan assignment

February 5:

NO CLASS: Arrange meeting with professor to discuss interpretive plan in progress

Read: scholarship in area of sub-theme

Prepare: research for individual interpretive plan

February 12

Read: Serrell, Dean Chapters 6-7; scholarship in area of sub-theme

Prepare: draft of individual interpretive plan

In class: revise big idea statement; workshop exhibit text, discuss Serrell, Dean; computer lab/ Adobe Illustrator

February 19: This class will meet from 8:30-9:15. Attend Michele Lanier talk at 7:00.

Prepare: ***Your part of the interpretive plan is due in class; send me an electronic version as well***

Read: scholarship in area of sub-theme, Dean Chapters 3-5

Discuss: 2D and 3D design, software.

February 26:

Prepare: presentation for Advisory Committee

Read: scholarship in area of sub-theme

In class: present interpretive plan to advisory committee; make FINAL revisions to interpretive plan and exhibition text

March 15:

Prepare: design ideas; send me a copy of your revised interpretive plan before 11:00am today

Read: Hooper-Greenhill

In class: discuss Hooper-Greenhill and 3D design, create 2D style, identify graphics needs, discuss main graphic; graphics workshop

March 19: GALLERY STUDY; Meet at Fort Fisher in Kure Beach

Bring notebook for sketching mounts, case designs, etc.

Read: Barclay (on reserve); copy sections applicable to your objects

In class: discuss mounts, gallery and case layouts

March 26:

Prepare: case layouts and mount drawings; present plans to exhibition team

In class: present plans to exhibition team; finalize main graphic; design and production; divide production duties

April 2: Production

April 16: ***INSTALLATION DAY***

Prepare: before class, pack your objects for transfer; finish all mounts and graphics

In class: install exhibit elements in gallery; bring case layout plans

April 23: OPENING RECEPTION

*Meet in gallery*

Prepare: Your gallery talk and at least 5 interviews (turn in copies of forms)

In class: opening reception, results of surveys, course evaluations

## **Interpretive Plan Assignment**

The interpretive plan is the most important document in the exhibition development process. It includes the formative evaluation report, the educational goals of the exhibition, a “big idea” statement, a visitor walk-through description, all exhibition text, a bibliography of relevant scholarly works, and a list of exhibition resources: objects, photos, interactive elements.

For this assignment, you will provide the following *for your section* of the exhibition:

- The educational goal of your section and an explanation of how your section demonstrates the big idea
- Main label text for the section
- Label text for all the objects
- A list of exhibition resources (existing or proposed)
- Acquisition recommendations if applicable
- An annotated bibliography of works that support the interpretation of the artifacts and theme (at least five scholarly monographs and five scholarly articles)

This assignment (worth 40 points) will be graded on the:

- Proposed section’s relevance to the big idea and educational goals (10)
- Feasibility of the section (5)
- Adherence to professional guidelines for labels as described by McLean and Serrell (10)
- Primary and secondary source support for the interpretation (15)

While this assignment will be graded, it will not be considered the finalized interpretive plan. The team will finalize the interpretive plan after receiving feedback from the advisory committee.

Bring eight copies of your interpretive plan draft to class on February 12.

***This assignment is due in class on February 19.***

## **Exhibition Assignment**

The final project (worth 45 points) will be graded on the following:

Quality of physical elements: graphics, interactives, design (25)  
Ability to work collaboratively (10)  
Ability to follow project timeline (5)  
Visitor engagement (5)

***This assignment is due on April 16***

### ***Lead Curator Responsibilities***

The lead curator will:

- Organize Advisory Committee and lead Advisory Committee meeting
- Provide leadership during exhibit development: title, big idea, subthemes
- Author exhibit style guide
- Lead development of poster and main graphic
- Act as liaison with library personnel
- Research, develop, fabricate, and install introduction/orientation section of exhibition

### ***Curator Responsibilities***

Each curator will:

- Research the main exhibit theme and one subtheme
- Present interpretive plan to advisory committee
- Produce mounts, graphics and other exhibition elements for subtheme section according to exhibit style guide
- Contribute substantively to development and production of big idea, poster, title, 2D and 3D design
- Research, develop, fabricate, and install one section of exhibition

### ***Exhibition Budget***

The total budget for this exhibition is \$2500. The team will decide how that is to be spent, but instructor will manage and maintain responsibility for the budget. During the fabrication phase, each curator will be responsible up to \$25 for materials ***not provided by the lab***. This lab fee is intended to facilitate production by eliminating the wait time between identification of need and university procurement of materials. Keep all materials receipts in case you need to go over the \$25 lab materials fee.