

University of Wisconsin-Madison

HISTORY 401: Public History Workshop

3 Credits (Intermediate, Humanities)

Thursdays, 1:20-3:15 PM, Room: 5255 Humanities

Instructional Mode: Face-to-Face

Instructor: Leslie Bellais

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11:00 AM-1:00 PM, Room 5265 Humanities

Email: lbellais@wisc.edu

Textbook: *Introduction to Public History* (available at the University Bookstore and on reserve at the College Library). Other reading will be made available as PDFs on the Canvas site.

Prerequisites: History 201 or 2 courses in History or History of Science

Credit Policy Statement: This 3-credit course meets as a group for 2 hours per week. However, according to UW-Madison's credit hour policy, each class meeting counts as 3 hours. The course also carries the expectation that you will spend an average of at least 2 hours outside of class for every credit hour in the classroom. In other words, in addition to class time, plan to allot an average of **6 hours per week** for reading, writing, preparing for discussions and course activities.

Course Description: This course will introduce students to the practice of public history. Public historians ground their work in rigorous, academic research with the goal of presenting history in a collaborative and publicly focused manner. Students will learn how academic history gets translated to the public, not only by reading about public history, but by doing it.

Course Learning Outcomes

Students will leave this course with the ability to:

- Identify and summarize the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of public history
- Analyze how Wisconsin's history was affected by different migrant and immigrant cultures
- Discuss and understand concepts of material culture
- Analyze how research gets translated to the public
- Produce public history projects, including digital and in-person projects
- Write for a general public audience

- Recognize the importance of collaboration and shared authority to the practice of public history

Course Background

This seminar will give you the opportunity to explore and practice public history, while simultaneously providing you with tangible projects you can add to your resume or CV. This semester course will cover three main concepts: public history, material culture, and Wisconsin history. To begin the semester, we will learn about the theories that undergird the practice of public history. We will read critical public history texts that have shaped the field. At the same time, students will be introduced to material culture and explore some of its methodologies. They will also meet practitioners of public history and material culture, many who specialize in the various cultures that have populated Wisconsin over the centuries. Students will then put what they have learned into practice by choosing an object that helps elucidate Wisconsin history and use it to produce two real-world digital projects, as well as an exhibit design project.

Land Acknowledgement

The University of Wisconsin-Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop since time immemorial. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin. This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation. Today, UW Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.

A land acknowledgement is merely the first step in the process of reckoning with our nation's violent history of land dispossession, colonization, and genocide. Now that we acknowledge our continued participation in colonialism – what do we plan to do about it? I ask you to reflect on this question during your time at UW-Madison and in this course.

Assignments & Grading

Discussion (10%)

In the first half of the semester, a large portion of class time will be allotted to discussing the week's assigned readings. For the discussion to run smoothly, students are expected to come to class prepared, having read the readings thoroughly and considered questions or concerns. To help facilitate this, students will be divided into discussion groups and discuss the readings in Canvas a few days before class meets. Students will receive 2 points for coming to class and participating in discussion, 1 point for coming to class but not participating, and 0 points for not attending. A **make-up assignment** can be completed for those unable to attend for **weeks 2-8 only** and who inform me before class begins for that week. Non-attendance for weeks 9-14, except week 12 (Thanksgiving), is an automatic 0. Allowances can be made for medical and family emergencies.

There will be a group leader each week, whose online discussion will be **due by Monday at 11:59 pm**. Other group members will need to complete the online assignment by **Wednesday at 9:00 pm**.

Three homework assignments will be discussed in class as time allows. Their grade will be incorporated into the discussion grade.

White Paper Essay (20%)

Each student will identify one object that reflects some aspect of Wisconsin history (pre-1990), is closely related to a place in Wisconsin, and can help the general public have a better understanding of that place's unique identity and history. During **weeks 3 and 4**, students will meet with me one-on-one to discuss your Wisconsin object and potential essay topics.

The work of a public historian is grounded in academic research. To that end, students will write a white paper that includes a 1500-2500-word essay on the object beginning with a description and including its background, history, and significance, and its ties to a specific place in Wisconsin. Besides the essay, the white paper will include other sections to be completed, including object analyses, Wisconsin 101, AMUZ app, and exhibit ideas, a bibliography showing that academic sources have been reviewed, along with a list of related images, video, and possible exhibit artifacts. A template for this white paper will be provided.

DUE: October 30 (Wednesday) at 11:59 pm. Complete sections 1-10.

DUE: November 24 (Sunday) at 11:59 pm. Complete sections 11-16.

If a student decides to change the object they have chosen within the semester, a new white paper will need to be written.

Wisconsin 101 Essay (15%)

With this assignment, students will take their white paper and turn it into a product for the Wisconsin 101 website and its specific audience. This will include a 400-500-word object history and TWO 600-750-word related stories along with appropriate images (still and/or moving). Guidelines for writing these essays will be provided. Wisconsin 101 staff will review the white paper essay and make suggestions to help students write successful essays for their website.

DUE: December 6 (Friday) at 11:59 pm.

AMUZ Essay (15%)

With this assignment, students will take their white paper and turn it into a product for the AMUZ app and its specific audience. The focus of this essay will be on the place the object is related to and its relevance to that place. It will include a 50-word description of the place and an essay that tells the history of the specific location through the lens of the student's chosen object. Guidelines for writing this essay will be provided. The essay will include appropriate images (photos, videos, panoramas, illustrations, and/or motion graphics), a map, timeline (if appropriate), demographics, and a 60-second video that introduces the topic.

Draft DUE: November 17 (Sunday) at 11:59 pm.

The drafts will be reviewed by the AMUZ app staff and suggestions made for improvements by them and me. Students will produce a second draft of these essays.

Final DUE: December 11 (Wednesday) at 11:59 pm.

Exhibit Review (5%)

Students will pick a case exhibit at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum during their visit on November 2 and review its strengths and weaknesses, as well as provide ideas as to how they would address the exhibit's weaknesses. Guidelines will be provided for the reviews.

DUE: November 6 (Wednesday) at 11:59 pm.

Exhibit Design and Labels (25%); Presentation (10%)

For the final project, students will design a case exhibit around their chosen object. Each student will write an exhibit proposal (homework assignment #3) indicating what type of museum the case exhibit would be in and who would be the intended audience, among other criteria. The proposal can be modified throughout the semester. Students will then choose objects and images (still or moving) for the exhibit, design its layout, and write and design the labels. The exhibits should showcase the student's creative, thoughtful, and engaging ideas.

In the last three weeks of the semester, students will present their research and explain/defend the decisions they have made about the exhibit to the class. These presentations will have time restrictions (minimum and maximum lengths). The work does not have to be in a finished form, but should be fairly far along. The class will have time to give feedback and based on the feedback received, students can consider modifying the project before turning it in.

These presentations are a chance for you to present your work, get feedback from your peers, and defend your curatorial choices. This also gives us the opportunity to collaborate with one another, to think creatively, and to practice public speaking in a safe environment. Creating a presentation that adheres to time restrictions, that is thorough and cohesive, and that expresses your ideas clearly is a vital skill that can be used in meetings, conferences, and in public history settings.

The final exhibit design and labels will be due **December 17 (Tuesday) at 11:59 pm.**

Late assignments will receive a deduction to the grade.

Grades for the course will be calculated as follows:

Discussion: 10%

White Paper: 20%

WI 101 Essay: 15%

AMUZ Essay: 15%

Exhibit Review: 5%

Exhibit Design and Labels: 25%

Presentations: 10%

Grading Scale

A = 93-100

AB = 88-92

B = 82-87

BC = 77-81

C = 72-76

D = 67-71

F = 66 or below

One-on-one Meetings

I am happy to meet with you one-on-one at any point during the semester, inside and outside of scheduled office hours, dependent upon my schedule.

The Week by Week: Readings, Assignments, and Discussions

Please note: I reserve the right to alter the assignments and due dates as we go. I will always give you plenty of advanced notice.

Week 1 – September 5: Introduction: Studying Public History and Material Culture through historical Wisconsin artifacts

Guest Speaker: Dr. Tom Broman, Wisconsin 101

Goals: Introduction to syllabus, including discussion of assignments and learning outcomes; greeting and learning about each other; learn about sources that feature Wisconsin objects
Professor Thal will introduce the class to the Wisconsin 101 website, which students will create a product for during the course of the semester.

September 11 (Wednesday) at 9:00 pm: Discussion 1 due

Week 2 – September 12: Defining Public History

Readings: *Introduction to Public History*, chapters 1-2: 1-32.

- Robert Weible, [Defining Public History: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary? Perspectives on History](#), March 1, 2008.
- Ronald J. Grele, —[Whose History? Whose Public? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?](#) *Public Historian* 3 (Winter 1981): 40-48.
- National Council on Public History [About the Field](#) page
- W. Caleb McDaniel, [How to Read for History](#). 2008.

Goals: Discussion of public history, its definitions, purposes, and challenges

I will introduce the class to the AMUZ app, which students will create a product for during the course of the semester.

September 15 (Sunday) at 11:59: Homework #1, Wisconsin 101

September 18 (Wednesday) at 9:00 pm: Discussion 2 due

Week 3 – September 19: Defining Material Culture

(MEET at Ruth Davis Design Gallery, Nancy Nicholas Hall, School of Human Ecology)

Guest Speaker: Dr. Sara Carter, Center for Design & Material Culture

Readings:

- Thomas Schlereth, “Material Culture and Cultural Research,” *Material Culture: A Research Guide*, ed. Thomas Schlereth (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 1985): 1-27.
- Jules David Prown, [Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method](#), *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 1-19.
- Ivan Gaskell and Sarah Anne Carter, “Introduction,” *The Oxford Handbook of History and Material Culture*, ed. Ivan Gaskell & Sarah Anne Carter (2020), 1-14.

WATCH: [What is Material Culture?](#) video by Sophie Woodward, University of Manchester, UK, 2014 (about 43 minutes)

Goals: Discussion of material culture, its theories and methods; put one of its methods into practice; share ideas of a possible object that you will focus on for the semester

A staff member from the Center for Design & Material Culture will discuss material culture

theory, discuss material culture opportunities on campus, and give a tour of the exhibit, “Questioning Things: A Quarter Century of Material Culture Studies at UW-Madison.”

September 25 (Wednesday) at 9:00 pm: Discussion 3 due

Week 4 – September 26: Defining Public History – Difficult Narratives

Guest Speaker: Professor Annie Jones, Organization Development and Tribal Nations Specialist, UW-Extension

Readings: *Introduction to Public History*, chapter 3

Patty Loew, *Native People of Wisconsin* (2015), ix-25, 150-159

Nancy Oestreich Lurie & Francis Paul Prucha, *Wisconsin Indians* (2002), 1-38, 76-90

National Park Service, [NAGPRA](#) (Native American Graves Protection & Repatriation Act)

[The Development of NAGPRA video](#) (about 32 minutes)

Ira Jacknis, “A New Thing? The NMAI in Historical and Institutional Perspective,” *NMAI: Critical Conversations* (2008), 1-33.

WHS “[Crossing the Line](#)” exhibit

WHS “[March on Milwaukee](#)” interactive map

Goals: Discussion of African-American and Native-American histories as a part of public history; how to tell this history in a way that is respectful to the people who lived it.

Professor Jones will provide an overview of Native American experience and history in Wisconsin and tie it to public history.

October 2 (Wednesday) at 9:00 pm: Discussion 4 due

Week 5 – October 3: Defining Public History – Museums, collecting and interpreting

Guest Speaker: Antje Petty, Associate Director, Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies

Readings: *Introduction to Public History*, chapters 4-5

Willard L. Boyd, “[Museums as Centers of Controversy](#),” *Daedalus*, Vol. 128, No. 3 (Summer 1999), 185-228.

Jennifer Wright, “[Exhibiting the Enola Gay](#),” *Smithsonian Institution Archives*, June 25, 2020

Elizabeth Merritt, “[Leading Forward: Engaging with Complex and Controversial Topics](#)”

Associate Alliance of Museums (AAM). March 15, 2018.

Richard H. Zeitlin, [Germans in Wisconsin](#) (2000), 4-11, 16-24, 37-43, 52-57

Goals: Discussion of the museum’s role in collecting and interpreting history

Antje Petty will discuss how the Max Kade Institute makes German-American history accessible to scholars and the general public, emphasizing the challenges the staff face and the products that have emerged because of them, especially travelling exhibits.

October 9 (Wednesday) at 9:00 pm: Discussion 5 due

Week 6 – October 10: Defining Public History – Historic Sites and House Museums

Guest Speaker: Anna Altschwager, Creative Director, Thinkwell Group

Readings: *Introduction to Public History*, chapters 6-7

Vagone and Ryan, *Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums*, Introduction, 33-46 and Chapter 4, 129-154 (2015)

Richard J. Fapson, [Norwegians in Wisconsin](#) (2001), 5-15, 24-28

WHS essay: [Black History in Wisconsin](#)

WHS essay: [Pleasant Ridge: A Community of Black Farmers in Wisconsin](#)

Goals: Discussion of historic sites' history and future; how can they maintain their relevance; which forms of interpretation work for today's visitor

Anna Altschwager, a former assistant director at Old World Wisconsin, will share how OWW presents the history of Wisconsin settlers using the site's built environments and material culture to encourage curiosity and informal learning on their site and how they train their guides, called Facilitators, through the use of essential questions and empathic engagement.

October 13 (Sunday) at 11:59 pm: Homework #2: Edit Curators' Favorite Essay

October 16 (Wednesday) at 9:00 pm: Discussion 6 due

Week 7 – October 17: Defining Public History – Underrepresented Cultures

Readings:

Sergio González, [Mexicans in Wisconsin](#) (2017), 8-17, 30-33, 41-47, 91-96

Clint Smith, "The Whitney Plantation," *How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America* (2021), 52-84

Goals: Discussion of ways the history of underrepresented cultures can be presented in public history settings. Students will do a 5-minute presentation of their object.

October 23 (Wednesday) at 9:00 pm: Discussion 7 due

Week 8 – October 24: Shared Authority

Guest Speaker: David Driscoll, Curator of Economic History, Wisconsin Historical Society

Readings: Mai Zong Vue, [Hmong in Wisconsin](#) (2020) 1-20, 41-47, 57-61

Cia Siab and the Wisconsin Historical Society, "[Unmaking the Museum: Towards a Transformative Approach to Collaborative Curating](#)" video (1 hour)

Elizabeth A. Duclos-Orsello, "[Shared Authority: The Key to Museum Education as Social Change](#)," *The Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (July 2013), 121-128.

Smithsonian Exhibits, [A Guide to Exhibit Development](#)

Goals: Become aware of "shared authority" concepts and how they can be practice in a museum setting by looking at an example of a Hmong exhibit using the shared authority approach. Begin to learn how exhibits are designed as students start to work on their exhibit proposal.

October 30 (Wednesday) at 11:59 pm: White Paper due (sections 1-10)

Week 9 – October 31: Exhibits – VISIT Wisconsin Veterans Museum

(MEET at Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 30 W. Mifflin Street on the Capitol Square)

Guest Speaker: Kevin Hampton, Curator of History, WI Veterans Museum

Readings:

"[History of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum](#)" video (5 minutes)

"[Museum Exhibit Helps Wisconsin Veterans Share their Stories](#)" video (2 minutes)

Goals: Interact with exhibits to learn what works and what doesn't in exhibit design and labels; begin to use your reactions to these exhibits to inspire your own exhibit design.

Kevin Hampton will review the “Souvenirs of Service: The Things They Kept” exhibit, including design decisions and how they worked with Wisconsin veterans to tell their story.

November 3 (Sunday) at 11:59 pm: Homework #3, Exhibit Proposal

November 6 (Wednesday) at 11:59 pm: Wisconsin Veterans Museum Exhibit Review

Week 10 – November 7: Exhibit Design & Labels

Guest Speaker: DesignLab representative

Readings:

B Erin Cole, [“I Have to Write the Labels,”](#) Medium (Blog), December 2 2018

Larry Borowsky, [“Telling a Story in 100 Words or Less,”](#) American Association for State and

Local History, Technical Leaflet #240, in History News vol. 62, no. 4, Autumn 2007

Goals: Learn how to design engaging exhibits and write labels that will be read and remembered.

Guest Speaker: DesignLab representative

DesignLab representative will discuss exhibit design concepts.

Bring EXHIBIT PROPOSAL to class.

Week 11 – November 14: Student Presentations

November 17 (Sunday) at 11:59 pm: AMUZ essay draft due

Week 12 – November 21: Student Presentations

November 24 (Sunday) at 11:59 pm: White Paper due (sections 11-16)

Week 13 – November 28: THANKSGIVING Vacation

Week 14 – December 5: Student Presentations

December 6 (Friday) at 11:59 pm: WI 101 essays due

December 11 (Wednesday) at 11:59: AMUZ essay, final version, due

December 17 (Tuesday) at 11:59: Exhibit design and labels due

Additional Tools

In a semester long course, it is impossible to cover everything about the field of public history. Spanning more than 40+ years, hundreds of institutions, and thousands of working professionals, you may still be asking yourself – what is public history really? This question will always be contested. And most likely, the definition will continue to change as new tools and methods are introduced and explored. But as a United States Supreme Court Justice once famously stated while talking about pornography and obscenity in 1964: “you know it when you see it.” I hope this course has helped you to identify public history when you see it. However, if you find yourself with an abundance of free time and a longing to learn more about the field, below are some additional tools and projects you may find helpful.

[The National Council on Public History](#)

NCPH is a membership association dedicated to making the past useful to the present and putting history to work in the world. They have various publications including a peer-reviewed journal, *The Public Historian*, and a blog, *History@Work*. They also have a [Resources for Students](#) page that includes a complete list of [public history programs](#) (should you wish to continue your studies in the field), as well as a [job board](#), updated weekly with jobs across the field in all experience levels.

[The American Association of State and Local History](#)

AASLH is a professional association of “history-doers.” They aim to create a community for people working across the historical field in various roles. Their website has a resource center with events calendars, educational webinars, and history curriculum. They also have a [job board](#), updated weekly with jobs across the field in all experience levels.

[The Inclusive Historian’s Handbook](#)

This handbook, co-sponsored by the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) and the National Council on Public History (NCPH), provides easy, accessible information to historians working in a variety of contexts. The writings focus on making history accessible, inclusive, and equitable.

[Association of Midwest Museums](#)

The purpose of AMM is to connect museum professionals throughout the Midwest and provide them with opportunities to share expertise and exchange ideas. Consider attending their annual fall conference to network with public historians in the Midwest and learn the state of the profession in the region. The site also has a [job board](#) that is updated weekly.

[Wisconsin Federation of Museums](#)

WFM is a membership organization that promotes the general welfare of museums in Wisconsin and the Wisconsin museum profession. Consider attending their annual fall conference to network with state public historians and to learn the state of the profession in Wisconsin. The site also has a job board, but it is not very extensive.

PRIVACY OF STUDENT RECORDS and the USAGE of AUDIO RECORDED LECTURES

View [more information about FERPA](#).

Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW-Madison. Students in this course may use the materials and recordings for their personal use related to participation in this class. Students may also take notes solely for their personal use. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record my lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability who has an approved accommodation that includes recording. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or have lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities, with the exception of sharing copies of your personal notes as a notetaker through the McBurney Disability Resource Center. Students are otherwise prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct. Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

RULES, RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

- See: <https://guide.wisc.edu/undergraduate/#rulesrightsandresponsibilitiestext>

ACADEMIC CALENDAR & RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

- See: <https://secfac.wisc.edu/academic-calendar/#religious-observances>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion. <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/syllabus-statement/>
In this class: USE OF AI TOOLS SUCH AS ChatGPT CONSTITUTES A VIOLATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy ([UW-855](#)) require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational services. Faculty and students share responsibility in the accommodation process. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable instructional and course-related accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: [McBurney Disability](#)

[Resource Center](#))

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

[Diversity](#) is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

TEACHING & LEARNING DATA TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

The privacy and security of faculty, staff and students' personal information is a top priority for UW-Madison. The university carefully reviews and vets all campus-supported digital tools used to support teaching and learning, to help support success through [learning analytics](#), and to enable proctoring capabilities. View the university's full teaching and learning [data transparency statement](#).

COURSE EVALUATIONS

Students will be provided with an opportunity to evaluate their enrolled courses and their learning experience. Student participation is an integral component of course development, and confidential feedback is important to the institution. UW-Madison strongly encourages student participation in course evaluations.

DIGITAL COURSE EVALUATION

UW-Madison uses a [digital course evaluation](#) survey tool. In most instances, students receive an official email two weeks prior to the end of the semester, notifying them that course evaluations are available. Students receive an email with a link to log into the course evaluation with their NetID. Evaluations are anonymous. Student participation is an integral component of course development, and feedback is important. UW-Madison strongly encourages student participation in course evaluations.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STATEMENT

Students often experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and personal well-being. These may include mental health concerns, substance misuse, sexual or relationship violence, family circumstances, campus climate, financial matters, among others.

Students are encouraged to learn about and utilize UW-Madison's mental health services and/or other resources as needed. Visit uhs.wisc.edu or call University Health Services at (608) 265-5600 to learn more.

CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

- [University Health Services](#)
- [Undergraduate Academic Advising and Career Services](#)
- [Office of the Registrar](#)
- [Office of Student Financial Aid](#)

- [Dean of Students Office](#)
- [Graduate Student Services](#)