Art 3308 Introduction to Museum Studies
Fall 2025

<u>Course Information</u>
Title: Introduction to Museum Studies
110 Education Bdg
TR 9:00-10:20
Credit: 3 hours
Museum Studies website https://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/museum-studies/

<u>Instructor Contact Information</u>
Dr. Elisabeth Sommer
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<u>Instructor Introduction</u> (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.

<u>Course Description</u>
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.

<u>Course Style</u>
Notice my use of the term "we." This class is <u>not</u> 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 (hopefully) be taking some field trips (yay!!) and be hearing from guest speakers with experience in the field.

Course Goals and Structure
This class is intended to do the following:
- give you **a working acquaintance with museum functions** and roles within the context of newer museum ideals and challenges
- explore the **ways in which museums developed**
- explore the **changes museums have undergone in response to developments in society and culture**
- pay attention to current issues such as the way museums are **responding to the challenges posed by climate change, demographic change, events in local communities**

The writing assignments should **give you a taste of some of the activities of museum professionals**. These include the following:
- Critiquing an exhibit (**required of all students**) and
  A choice of one of the following:
- Cataloging an object
- Creating a PR piece (physical or web-based)
- Writing a grant request
- Creating an educational program

To accomplish the goals, **the course is divided into sections that address various aspects/roles that make up a museum.**

Class Expectations in the Age of ChatGPT
I'm old enough to get away with being cranky about AI. I realize it can be a helpful tool (actually, I don't, but people I respect say that it can) but using it to write your assignments robs your brain of the exercise it needs to stay sharp in today's world. While I understand the temptation to use AI in your writing assignments, I deliberately tailor my assignments to the class materials to ensure that you read thoughtfully and grapple with the arguments presented in them. I came across an excellent essay on the value of independent analysis and will just leave the following excerpt here:

Comparisons are sometimes made between LLMs and calculators, to make the point that AI bans are as futile and philistine as calls to return to the abacus. But the work that

we bypass when using a calculator is less important than what we bypass when using an AI language generator for writing. To be a human self, a human agent, is to be a linguistic animal. Popular theories of mind would have us think that we learn words and attach them to ideas that we already have, but the opposite is closer to the truth: To learn to use language *just is* to learn how to think and move about in the world. When we stop doing this — when our needs for communication are met by something outside of us, a detached mouthpiece to summon, describe, and regale — the intimate connection between thought and language disappears. It is not only the capacity for speech that we will slowly begin to lose under such conditions, but our entire inward lives. **https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-i-learned-serving-on-my-universitys-ai-committee?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_13784518_nl_Academe-Today_date_20250606**

If you do use an AI tool to organize your initial thoughts prior to the final draft, please **indicate how you've used it and which tool you've used.**

Reading Assignments
- Gail Anderson, ed. Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift 2nd edition, 2012 (in the bookstore and on Amazon)-main text for course
- Various articles and book chapters that are **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 an **exhibit review**, and your choice of **one** of the following practical exercises:
- Cataloging exercise
- Grant writing exercise
- PR pamphlet exercise
- Education programming exercise

Please note that the practical exercises will be due on different days within the semester. Further details on each assignment will be given out separately and posted on Blackboard.

In addition to the exhibit review and practical exercise, there will be an **open note midterm** and a **final paper** in which you will **create your own museum** and produce a portfolio of documents that reflect various facets of museum practice. **These documents will be required to include references to the class readings.**

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 <u>poorly written</u> 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 in hard copy on the date given on the syllabus** unless <u>prior</u> permission is given for an alternative due date.

<u>Paper Format</u>
Papers are to be double-spaced with proper paragraphing. You will be expected to use the **class readings** as your reference points. **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 you may use **parenthetical style** from MLA or Chicago Manual of Style. 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 <u>very</u> rare occasions for emphasis)
- Incorrect use of apostrophes (<u>only</u> used to indicate possession or for a contraction, <u>not</u> in the case of plurals—I don't care what sign producers do)

<u>Grades</u>
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	15%
Exhibit Review	20%
Practical Exercise	20%
Midterm	15%
Final Paper	30%

And now for the nuts and bolts…

Aug. 26: Introduction to the course: what makes a museum, and do they matter?

The Museum as a Changing Institution

Aug. 28: Defining Museums: Video *Riches, Rivals and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America*.

Sept. 2: Discussion of Two Views (From *Reinventing the Museum*, "The Gloom of the Museum" John Cotton Dana) What was Dana's vision for museums in 1917?

Sept. 4: Discussion of Two Views continued (From *Reinventing the Museum,* "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum" Duncan F. Cameron) How does Cameron define "the temple" and "the forum" in the world of museums? Does he think a museum can or should be both?

Sept. 9: Strategies for Museums in the 21st Century (**On Blackboard** from *Reinventing* **3rd Edition,** "Inside Out Outside In: A Resilience Model for Museums Offers Strategies to Address Challenging Realities" Anne W. Ackerson, Gail Anderson, Dina A. Bailey)

The Museum as a Public Institution

Sept. 11: The Heart of the Museum: Its Mission and Vision (you'll need to look up the mission and vision of your favorite museum and be prepared to discuss whether it's relevant for today, and whether it's visible in the museum or its website)

Sept. 16: Discussion of Museums and Community (From *Reinventing* "Embedding Civic Engagement in Museums" Graham Black). Have your own example of a museum working with its community—from a website, news article, or personal experience. How does Black define "civic engagement" and what example from the article do you find most compelling?

Sept. 18: Discussion of the Museum Visit Experience with Josie Jimenez-Howard, Community Engagement Coordinator at the El Paso Museum of Art (assigned reading *Reinventing* "The Visitors' Bill of Rights" Judy Rand)

Sept. 23: Opening Up the Museum (From *Reinventing* "Threshold Fear: Architecture Program Planning" Elaine Heumann Gurian). How does Gurian think museum architecture (inside and out) affects visitors?

The Museum as a Collecting Institution

Sept. 25: Discussion of the Role of Objects in the Museum (**On Blackboard** from *Reinventing* **3rd edit**. "Cultural Interpretation in the 21st Century: Transformational Changes in Museum Practice" W. Richard West Jr.) How have non-western cultural concepts challenged/changed museum thinking about objects and collections?

Sept. 30: Collections Management (From *Reinventing* "Collections Planning: Pinning Down a Strategy" James Gardner and Elizabeth Merritt). **Field trip** to tour the updated collections storage area at the Centennial Museum.

Oct. 2: **Midterm** (open book/note)

Oct. 7: New Issues in Collections Care (From *Reinventing* "Sustainable Stewardship: Preventive Conservation in a Changing World" Jerry Podany).

Oct. 9**:** Object Care and Handling (the basics) and Exploring Collections Software (Download the free evaluation version of the Past Perfect software—may be challenging if you use an Apple device)

The Museum as an Educational Institution

Oct. 14: Facing Race in Museums (From *Reinventing* "Mining the Museum: an Installation Confronting History" Lisa G. Corrin; **On Blackboard** from *Slate* "Museums Have a Docent Problem," Sophie Hagney) **Cataloging Exercise due**

How did Fred Wilson use museum objects to confront race?

Oct. 16: The Role of Exhibit Design (**On Blackboard** Chapters 1 & 14 from *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, Beverly Serrell) **Field trip** to the El Paso Museum of History (meet there—the Starbucks at the Mills Building offers one hour of free parking in the Mills Parking Garage—ask for the parking QR code).

Oct. 21: Interpretation in Historic House Museums (**On Blackboard** article by Barbara Levy) **Field trip** to Magoffin Home. Meet at the Magoffin Visitors Center (1117 Magoffin Ave.) How does the Magoffin Home illustrate the issues of interpretation discussed by Levy?

Oct. 23: Integrating Multiple Disciplines and Conversation in Museum Education. **Field trip** to the Rubin Center (meet there)

Oct. 28: Creating Educational/Interpretive Programs in Local Museums; Guest speakers TBD **Exhibit review due**

The Museum as a Financial/Bureaucratic Institution (well, you knew it was coming)

Oct. 30: Museum Structure (From *Reinventing* "Creating a New Business Model" John Falk and Beverly Sheppard; **On Blackboard** from *The Manual of Museum Management*, section on types of governance-particularly the chart on p.21) How do Falk and Shepherd think museums can benefit from a revised business model?

Nov. 4: Private and Public Partnerships in Museums—guest speaker Stephanie Otero, Interim Executive Director, La Nube (**On Blackboard** "Collaboration for the People: Community Consultation and the Case of the El Paso Children's Museum" Eric Boyer, from *The Intersector: How the Public, Nonprofit, and Private Sectors Can Address America's Challenges*, Daniel P. Gitterman and Neil Britto, eds. Brookings Institution P., 2021)

Nov. 6: Grant Writing 101 (explore these websites www.candid.org and www.imls.gov possible Zoom session with Laura Zamarripa, Museum Program Specialist, Institute of Museum and Library Services)-- **museum education exercise due**

Nov. 11: Critiquing Museum pamphlets (group exercise)

The Museum as an Institution of the Present and Future

Nov. 13: Exhibiting the Environment: National Parks and Our Future (Zoom session with Gia Flores, NPS Interpretive Ranger, Olympic National Park)

Nov. 18: Creating the National Museum of the American Latino--guest speakers Professor Yolanda Leyva and Eduardo Diaz

Nov. 20: Discussion of Ways Museums can Matter (From *Reinventing* "The Mindful Museum" Robert R. Janes) How can a museum by "mindful" and why does Janes think it's important for the future? --**grant-writing exercise due**

Nov. 25: Museums and Technology: The Real Encounters the Virtual (From *Reinventing* "The Exploded Museum" Peter Samis) **PR pamphlet exercise due**

Nov. 27: **Happy Thanksgiving!** (give thanks that we're almost at the finish line)

Dec. 2: Mapping a Digital Strategy (**On Blackboard** "Digital Transformation: It's a Process and You Can Start Now" John Russick and Jack Ludden, from *Reinventing* **3rd edition**)

Dec. 4: Catch up day/review

Dec.9 (Tuesday): **Final Exam/Paper due via email by 6:00.**