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ART 3311 Education and Interpretation in Museums

Welcome to the fascinating and sometimes frustrating world of museum education and interpretation. For many years, museums put a premium on physical space and objects as the focus of their messages. These physical things, however, need interpretation or placing in context in order to tell their story. This becomes the job of museum curators and educators (who go by many designations). They are charged with guiding museums and historic sites in the choosing of objects, crafting the stories the objects can tell, and determining the best means of communicating these stories and engaging the public. In the 21st century museums have been called to reach beyond their objects and even their walls, to become community sites and resources. Educators (and curators) play a crucial role in helping museums meet this call.

Course Goals

This course serves as an **overview of the role of education and interpretation** in the museum, with a **focus on developing and implementing experiences** for a variety of audiences, including school groups, families, and adult learners. The ability to develop effective experiences **is based on an understanding of how people learn and make meaning**. As you will notice (if you're paying attention, which I trust you are), the **syllabus is divided into a series of themes** to help identify the particular topics the class will cover, including both theoretical issues/approaches and practical knowledge. In order to ensure an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice (not to mention beefing up your resume, always a good thing) you will have the stimulating task of **developing your very own museum education program (yay!)**.

Class Expectations

You will be expected to **engage with the readings and participate in class discussions**. You should arrive in class with a **written list** (with pages noted) of the points/ideas you believe most significant from the readings assigned for that day. **I reserve the right to collect these without prior notice.**

Discussions will be supplemented by **two short (4-5 page) papers** and a **semester long project**. For this project you will put theory into practice by developing your own museum education/interpretation program for one of the following museums:

The El Paso Museum of History
The El Paso Museum of Art
The Centennial Museum

The International Museum
Los Portales Museum (San Elizario)
Magoffin Home State Historic Site
The Black Business Museum
The McCall Center

The program can take the form of a special event (family day, holiday celebration etc.), a camp, a tour of an exhibit or place, a curriculum-based school program, a program aimed at a particular audience (seniors, veterans etc.) a web-based initiative, or an interactive for an exhibit. Along the way you will be required to give **progress reports** on the days specified in the syllabus. These reports are not optional. If you find yourself in trouble, let me know ASAP so we can fix the problem. If you want to work with a museum that's not on this list, we can certainly explore the possibility.

Reading Assignments

The following book is available in the bookstore, and on the internet:

Museum Education for Today's Audiences: Meeting Expectations with New Models, Jason L. Porter and Mary Kay Cunningham, eds.

Various articles **on Blackboard** from:

- The American Association of Museums, *Excellence and Equity* (1992)
- Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons* (2006)
- *The Journal of Museum Education*, vol. 42, no. 4, Dec. 2017
- *The Journal of Museum Education*, vol. 43, no. 4, Dec. 2018
- *The Journal of Museum Education*, vol. 44, no.1, Mar. 2019
- *The Journal of Museum Education*, vo. 45, no. 1, Mar. 2020

Discussion Assignment

Each of you will be responsible for leading the discussion on one of the readings. You may request which reading you prefer to lead. Your questions or prompts need to be thoughtful and facilitate engagement with the article topic.

Writing Assignments

The short papers should be written in essay form and well-organized, using proper grammar and spelling. You should use end or footnotes (any format is fine but it must include the page number). You do not have to include a bibliography. The semester's education program project will take a different form and will require a bibliography. **Details on the semester project and its format are given in a separate document posted on Blackboard.**

All assignments are due on the dates noted in the syllabus. If there is a problem, **notify me ASAP.**

Grades

Grading will be broken down as follows:

Attendance and discussion 20%

Papers 40% (20% each)

Final Project 40%

And now for the course schedule (subject to change):

Aug. 26: Intro: The Role of Education and Interpretation within Museums

Aug. 28: The Call to Arms from the AAM (*Excellence and Equity*)

Some Building Blocks of Museum Learning

Sept. 2: "Building Bridges: The Need for Cultural Competence in the Museum Field" (*Museum Education for Today's Audiences*, Chapter 11)

Sept. 4: "The Brain Science of Museum Learning" (*Museum Education for Today's Audiences*, Chapter 14)

Sept 9: Exploring an Example of Educational Theory (Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons*, Chapters 1-2)

Sept. 11: *Multiple Intelligences* continued (Chapters 6-7 and Chapter 8 pp.134-142)

Making a Difference: Museum Education/Interpretation and Society

Sept. 16: Connecting with Communities (Heba Abd el Salam, Dawn McCormack and Brenden Martin, "Connecting People with Their Museum" and Emma Martell, "Engaging in the Community: Zoo Camp Goes to School" both from *Journal of Museum Education=JME*, vol. 42. No. 4, Dec. 2017)

Sept. 18: Bridging Communication Gaps (Beth Redmond-Jones, "The Spectrum Project: Social Stories, Museum Educators, and Young Adults with Autism" *Museum Education...*, Chapter 3)

Decision on project place deadline

Sept. 23: Using Art to Address 21st Century Challenges (Line Ali Chayder, "Art as a Bridge-Builder: A Program for Young Refugees" from *JME*, vol. 44, no. 1, Mar. 2019; Shiralee Hudson Hill, "A Terrible Beauty: Art and Learning in the Anthropocene" from *JME*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2020)

Sept. 25: Using a Historic Site to Address 21st Century Challenges (Lauren Zalut and Sean Kelley, "The Power of Proximity," *Museum Education...*Chapter 17)

Sept. 30: "Building a Better World: Rethinking a Museum's Civic Engagement Model" (*Museum Education...*Chapter 6)

Education within the Museum Structure

Oct. 2: "Shared Authority: School and Museum Partnerships for the 21st Century" (*Museum Education...*Chapter 2)

Oct. 7: Seeing Multiple Stories in Old Buildings: Conversation with Danielle Brissette, Site Supervisor, Magoffin Home- **First paper due**

Oct. 9: Tales from the Field: Zoom session with Rebecca Gavin, Director of Education at the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History (formerly the Connecticut Historical Society)

Oct. 14: Developing multi-disciplinary approaches to museum learning (familiarize yourself with the TEKS <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/curriculum-standards/teks-review/texas-essential-knowledge-and-skills>)

Check up on semester projects

Oct. 16: Interpretation Within Exhibits (Discussion of examples from *The Popular* and other local exhibits-find an example of an effective or ineffective interpretive element currently on exhibit, take photos and be prepared to explain why it's effective or problematic)

Oct. 21: Using Art Education Techniques in Museums (guest speaker Dr. Heather Kaplan)

Varieties of Museum Education

Oct. 23: From Expert to Facilitator ("Creating Empowered Educators," *Museum Education...*Chapter 9, pp. 135-145)

Oct. 28: Digital Media and Museum Learning (Discussion of "Animating the Kress Collection" project and of "Digital Decisions to Evolve, Change and Adapt," *Museum Education...*Chapter 4)

Oct. 30: "The New Children's Museum: Innovating Ways to Support Today's Children" (*Museum Education...*Chapter 12)

Nov. 4: "Training for the Rainbow: Preparing Educators to be LGBTQ-Inclusive" (*Museum Education...*Chapter 5)

Nov. 6: Engaging Visitors with Contemporary Art--meet at the Rubin Center

Nov. 11: Reckoning with Race ("No Longer Business as Usual," *Museum Education...*Chapter 15)
Check-up on Semester Projects

Nov. 13: Tales from the Field—Zoom session with Oscar Navarro, Interpretive Ranger, New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs-**Second paper due**

Nov. 18: Interpreting Difficult History—field trip to the El Paso Holocaust Museum

Nov. 20: Promoting Self-Guided Interaction (Phillippa Pitts, “Visitor to Visitor Learning: Setting Up Open-Ended Inquiry in an Unstaffed Space” from JME, vol. 43...)

Nov. 25: Work Day (please use this time profitably!)

Nov. 27: Thanksgiving!!

Dec. 2 and Dec. 4: **Project Presentations**

Dec. 11: Projects due to me by **6:00**