Muse E-101 Proseminar:
Graduate Research Methods & Scholarly Writing in Museum Studies
Summer 2013
Mondays & Wednesdays 6:30–9:30PM
Sever Hall 101 & Peabody Museum
Christina J. Hodge (chodge@fas.harvard.edu)
Office hours by appointment

GOALS

Over the course of the summer term, we will study graduate level research and writing methods within the field of Museum Studies. Students will learn writing skills applicable to the future thesis in Museum Studies, including critically assessing sources, constructing scholarly arguments, critiquing museum practices, and using MLA style. To focus our efforts, we will research and write “object biographies,” life histories of objects. This task will exercise diverse scholarly research and writing skills and is a powerful way to tell stories in museums. How were objects understood by those who made and used them? How do their meanings shift when collected and entered into museum collections? How do museum professionals represent objects? How can an object serve multiple stakeholders? Students will practice graduate level research and writing skills to develop a deeper understanding of museum practice.

SCHEDULE

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<tr>
<th>WEEK 1</th>
<th>M Jun 24 @ Sever</th>
<th>Introductions</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Lecture: Overview of Syllabus/Course Policies and Goals</td>
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<td>In-Class Assignment: Précis of article (provided in class)</td>
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<td>Discussion/Exercise: History of Fredericksburg in 21 Objects</td>
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<tr>
<th>WEEK 1</th>
<th>W Jun 26 @ PMAE</th>
<th>Museum Tour</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading: Exhibit Labels ch 1–3</td>
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<td>Discussion: PMAE tour; Virtual Exhibit Big Idea/theme discussion</td>
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<th>WEEK 2</th>
<th>M Jul 1 @ Sever</th>
<th>Scholarly Skills I</th>
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<td>Lecture: Higher Order, Lower Order, &amp; Peer Review</td>
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<td>Reading &amp; Discussion: Letting Go pp 17–33; OWL’s MLA Powerpoint</td>
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<td>Roundtable: Object Choices</td>
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<td>DUE: Object Choice</td>
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<th>WEEK 2</th>
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<td>Lecture: Overview of Object Biography &amp; Formal Analysis: The King Philip Sash</td>
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<td>Reading: Exhibit Labels ch 6, 7, 10</td>
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<td>In-class Work: for Exercise #1: Formal Analysis</td>
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<th>WEEK 3</th>
<th>M Jul 8 @ Sever</th>
<th>Scholarly Skills II</th>
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<td>Lecture: Finding/Choosing Museum &amp; Library Sources</td>
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<td>Reading &amp; Discussion: Letting Go pp 56–67; 34–43</td>
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<td>Roundtable: Peer Review Exercise #1</td>
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<td>DUE: Short Paper #1, Assessing Scholarly Arguments: Age of Homespun</td>
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<th>WEEK 3</th>
<th>W Jul 10 @ PMAE</th>
<th>Object Biography: Collection History</th>
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<td>Lecture: Model OB: Collection History</td>
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<td>Reading: Exhibit Labels ch 11</td>
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<td>In-class Work: for Exercise #2: Collection History</td>
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<td>DUE: Exercise #1</td>
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| Week 4 | M Jul 15 @ Sever | Scholarly Skills III  
Lecture: Evaluating and Integrating Sources  
Reading & Discussion: Letting Go pp 68–97  
Roundtable: Peer Review Exercise #2 |
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| W Jul 17 @ PMAE | Object Biography: Contexts  
Lecture: Historical & Cultural Contexts: The King Philip Sash  
Reading: Exhibit Labels ch 12  
In-class Work: for Exercise #3: Historical & Cultural Contexts  
DUE: Exercise #2 |
| Week 5 | M Jul 22 @ Sever | Museum Methods I  
Lecture: Crafting Exhibition Text & Object Labels  
Reading & Discussion: Letting Go pp 124–137, 174–193  
Roundtable: Peer Review Exercise #3 |
| W Jul 24 @ PMAE | Object Biography: Interpretations  
Lecture: Interpretations: The King Philip Sash  
Reading: Exhibit Labels ch 20  
In-class Work: for Exercise #4: Interpretations  
DUE: Exercise #3 |
| Week 6 | M Jul 29 @ Sever | Museum Methods II  
Lecture: Authority, Authorship, and Audience  
Reading & Discussion: Letting Go pp 194–241  
Roundtable: Label-writing Workshop; Peer Review Exercise 4  
DUE: DRAFT Short Paper #2 for in-class discussion |
| W Jul 31 @ PMAE | GUEST LECTURE: TBA  
Reading: NONE  
DUE: Exercise #4  
DUE: Short Paper #2 |
| Week 7 | M Aug 5 @ Sever | Peer Review  
Peer Review; one-on-one meetings with Instructor  
DUE: Bring in complete draft for Peer Review |
| W Aug 7 @ Sever | Class Presentations  
Assignment: RESEARCH PROJECT presentations |
| F Aug 9 | NO CLASS MEETING  
Assignment: RESEARCH PROJECT DUE @ noon |
GRADE BREAKDOWN

- Participation: 5%
- Discussion leadership: 10%
- Short Paper #1: 10%
- Short Paper #2: 10%
- Weekly Museum Exercises: 40%
- Research Project: 25%

grading:

- A = 100–93%
- A– = 90–92%
- B+ = 87–89%
- B = 83–86%
- B– = 80–82%
- C+ = 77–79%
- C = 73–76%
- C– = 70–72%
- D = 60–69%
- F = <60%

- A and A– grades represent work whose superior quality indicates a full mastery of the subject and, in the case of A, work of extraordinary distinction. There is no grade of A+.
- B+, B, and B– grades represent accomplished work of good to very good quality that does not merit special distinction.
- C+, C, and C– grades designate an average command of the course material.
- D+, D, and D– grades indicate work that shows a deficiency in knowledge of the material.
- E is a failing grade representing work that deserves no credit. E may also be assigned to students who do not submit required work in courses from which they have not officially withdrawn by the withdrawal deadline. There is no "incomplete" grade.

ASSIGNMENTS

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Each week, a student or student pair will lead their peers in a Discussion of readings from the course text *Letting Go*. Discussion leadership develops scholarly comprehension, evaluation, and presentation skills.
- Weekly Exercises will take you step-by-step through your Object Biography. In-class Peer Review will develop scholarly writing and editing skills. These exercises will form the basis of your Research Project.
- Two Short Papers will focus your writing skills to get you thinking about object biographies and interpretation. They will demonstrate your ability to complete work at an appropriate level for this class and the Museum Studies program.
- A Research Project that will develop research methods, writing, and critical and analytical skills necessary to produce a successful graduate-level research project in the Museum Studies. The Research Project takes the form of an Object Biography, in which you will construct an argument, assess sources, and use MLA style. The object will be chosen from among the ethnographic collections of the Peabody Museum and your project thesis will relate to a theme developed through class discussion.

This class requires graduate level writing, so you must be clear, correct, and creative. Grammar, syntax, and format matter. Make friends with an MLA style guide!

All assignments are due in the online Dropbox by the beginning of class on the due date unless otherwise noted. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day. NO EXCEPTIONS.

Use 12-point Times font, double-spaced, one inch margins, page numbers, no title page, for all assignments. Indent the first line of each paragraph five spaces; do not leave an empty line between paragraphs. As preferred by the Museum Studies Program, you will use MLA formatting for your paper, including in-text parenthetical citations/references cited list style. You will be penalized for failing to follow this format. This is a graduate level course: sources must meet scholarly standards. Do not use any source for which you cannot identify an author (individual or institutional). Failure to follow style or editing guidelines will negatively affect your grade.

Students are expected to attend and to participate actively in all classes (participation is 5% of your final grade).

DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP (10%)

To develop critical reading, assessment, and presentation skills appropriate to a graduate-level seminar, students will take turns leading their peers in discussing reading from *Letting Go*. Everyone must lead discussion at least once. If time allows a second leadership, the less successful leadership will be forgiven. Tips: use skills of abstracting and critiquing discussed in class and practiced in other assignments; consider sources as a combination of a position arguments and/or case studies.
MUSEUM EXERCISES (40%)

We will spend most Wednesdays at the PMAE working hands-on with objects and documents. Four Exercises will take students step-by-step through their Object Biography and provide a draft foundation for the final Research Project. Students will develop scholarly argument skills, research skills, and an understanding of the roles of collections in museum studies. Exercises will be peer reviewed in class the day they are due.

SHORT PAPERS (20%)

Short Paper #1 (10%): Evaluating a Scholarly Argument: *The Age of Homespun* (due Monday July 8)

This assignment will demonstrate your ability to comprehend, summarize, and critique scholarly writing. You will read the “Introduction” and ONE Object Chapter from Ulrich’s *The Age of Homespun*. You will write an Abstract, Reverse Outline, and Critique.

- **Part 1: Abstract**: In one to two paragraphs, write an abstract of Ulrich’s work. An abstract is a brief, comprehensive summary of a piece of scholarly writing. You must address both the Introduction and the Object Chapter, and you must identify Ulrich’s central thesis.
- **Part 2: Reverse Outline**: Make a bulleted “Reverse Outline” list for the selected Object Chapter. A Reverse Outline reconstructs a scholarly argument by summarizing the topic of each paragraph. Use complete sentences, one per bullet point/paragraph.
- **Part 3: Critique**: Consider your work in Parts 1 and 2. Assess how successful Ulrich was at using an object biography to convince you, the reader, that her thesis has merit. Critiques provide substantiated opinions and analysis of clarity, organization, purpose, research methods, findings, and recommendations.

Short Paper #2 (10%): Writing for Museums: Virtual Exhibition Labels (due Wednesday July 31)

This assignment will develop your skills in scholarly argument and museum interpretation and contribute to the Research Project. You will write two labels: a Wall Label on our exhibit theme and an Object Label on your object. Use lessons from course readings and lectures on museum interpretation and label writing to craft your label text. Your research to date will drive your message.

- **Wall Label (100–150 words)**: Provide an introduction to the Big Idea of our class exhibition theme.
- **Object Label (75–100 words)**: Interpret your object explicitly in the context of the exhibition theme by summarizing the main thesis/argument of your Research Project. Reframe the thesis according to museum label guidelines.

You may choose to include images or virtually layout your label design, but it is not required.

RESEARCH PROJECT: OBJECT BIOGRAPHY (25%) (due Friday August 9 at NOON)

Your Research Project will be 5–7 pages of text and should show a mastery of secondary scholarly sources on your topic as well as demonstrate original and critical ideas, all supported by primary evidence. You will include a Works Cited list per MLA standards, as well as an Annotated Bibliography. Supporting images are optional but, if included, must be appropriately sourced and described. The sections will be as follows:

1. **Introduction: Theme/Thesis**
2. **Object Biography**
   a. Formal Analysis/Description
   b. Provenance/Collection History
   c. Historical and Cultural Contexts
   d. Interpretation
3. **Conclusion/Reflection**
4. **Works Cited**
5. **Annotated Bibliography**

You must cite ONE class reading and at least THREE additional scholarly sources. Your writing must conform to the standards of graduate level expository writing. Refer to the *Guide to the ALM Thesis in Museum Studies*. You will present your final project in class.
ACADEMIC HONESTY

Harvard’s policy on academic honesty, quoted below, will be strictly adhered to in this class:

All homework assignments, projects, lab reports, papers and examinations submitted to a course are expected to be the student’s own work. Students should always take care to distinguish their own ideas and knowledge from information derived from sources. The term “sources” includes not only published primary and secondary material, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people. The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with the individual student. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student’s reading and research or from a student’s own writings, the sources must be indicated (Handbook for Students, 305).

COURSE READINGS (books are reserved at Grossman Library; articles/excerpts are PDFs on course website)

REQUIRED

RECOMMENDED TO PURCHASE

***MANY ADDITIONAL READINGS AND WEBPAGES ARE ON THE COURSE WEBSITE***

30 May 2013