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Office Hours TR 3:30-5  
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HISP 463 Museum Interpretation and Exhibit Design Lab

Welcome to the hardest class you’ll ever love (at least that’s what I’m hoping). Your task, and you have to accept it, is to learn the ins and outs of museum interpretation, and to play an active role in designing and implementing an exhibit. We will spend the first part of the course reading about and discussing issues of interpretation and the public interaction with museum exhibits, and looking at examples. Ultimately we will be producing an exhibit plan or script for a new exhibit on government in Fredericksburg that will be part of the permanent exhibit in the Town Hall. We will also develop and install a “teaser” case exhibit in Combs.

This class can only succeed with the full participation of all students. Because you will work as a team, and in sub-teams, everyone will be responsible for the finished product. You will be graded largely on your specific portion of the script/exhibit, but I will be paying attention to how each of you works with the others. When we have readings I expect you to come to class ready to discuss the material, so you need to plan your time carefully. Class conversation will critical to developing both the script and the case exhibit. We will also make a field trip, do some short practical exercises, and each of you will review the current exhibit that ours will replace. All of this work is intended to help you understand the challenges and processes involved in creating museum exhibits.

Reading Assignments
We will spend the first couple of weeks reacquainting ourselves with “best practices” in exhibit design and interpretation. This will consist of a set of readings on Blackboard (for some of you, this will be a repeat, but it can never hurt to review things), and Beverly Serrell’s book on label writing. This book, Exhibit Labels: an Interpretive Approach is the “bible” of label development, and extremely helpful in developing audience-friendly text and graphics.

Writing Assignments
In addition to the product of your contribution to the script and exhibit, you will also write an exhibit review, in which you assess the current “Crown to Council” exhibit and make recommendations for improvement. All students will have to write a draft label (details TBD). Finally, each of you will submit a brief report on your experience developing the script and exhibit, which will be due on the day scheduled for the final.

Grades
Discussion/Participation 20%  
Draft Label Exercise 15%  
Exhibit Review 20%  
Final Product and Report 45%
Exhibit Development Teams
On an actual exhibit development committee or team, each member represents an important facet of the process and product. Because this class is larger than most exhibit committees, we will represent these various facets through teams of three. Within these groups, each member should have particular responsibilities within the group’s aspect of the exhibit. The final product, however, needs to be cohesive, both in terms of the team’s contribution, and the script as a whole.

Team breakdown and responsibilities will be as follows:

**Curatorial Team**
Responsible for object research and recommendation for inclusion
Keeps track of all objects and produces final object list for script
Works closely with education and exhibit design teams to insure selection of best objects for interpretation and proper display conditions
Works closely with label writing team to insure accuracy of information

**Label Writing Team**
Responsible for insuring that exhibit message connects to the larger context and engages the visitor
Responsible for developing label types (i.e. theme labels, object labels etc.)
Drafts all label text (including that for interactives) and produces final text
Works closely with education and curatorial teams to insure accuracy and clarity
Works closely with design team to insure proper length and fit within design plan

**Education Team**
Responsible for developing concepts for interactive components of exhibit
Develops supporting educational programming, including supplementary exhibit material, docent training guidelines, school tour and/or in-class material
Works closely with label-writing and design teams to insure best practices in audience communication and engagement
Works closely with public relations/outreach team to insure harmony in message and approach

**Design Team**
Responsible for overall design of exhibit including floorplan, case layout, interactives, and label graphics
Produces final layouts in graphic form, including overall floorplan, label design, interactives design, and section and case layout
Works closely with curatorial team to insure proper placement of objects within design
Works closely with label writing team to insure harmony in design, size, and text
Works closely with public relations/outreach team to insure coherence in design of exhibit and PR materials
Works closely with education team on development of interactives
Public Relations/Outreach Team
Responsible for all aspects of promotion and community connection
Produces final model for all PR material, including postcards and posters (if relevant), press release etc.
Develops, implements, and interprets front-end evaluation survey
Develops proposals for supporting community outreach activities (lectures, special events, etc.)
Works closely with education team to insure that proposed programs are fun, engaging, and educational, and reach a variety of audiences
Works closely with design team to insure coherence between PR materials and exhibit

Resources
Much of the work for this class will need to be done outside of class meetings. You need to utilize the resources available in the seminar room/library, as well as the UMW collections and databases. In addition to these, I will place a selection of books on reserve in the conference room of the office suite, along with a sign-out sheet.

For the purposes of this project, one of the most valuable resources will be the various databases that Professor Stanton has posted on the Historic Preservation website. He has done a monumental job of identifying and making accessible a large number of documents specifically relating to Fredericksburg. Among these are the earliest of the Minutes of the Town Council (runs through 1800). The remaining years of these minutes are available on microfilm at the Rappahanock Regional Library on Caroline Street.

Assignment Schedule (subject to change)

January 13: Introduction (meet at the Fredericksburg Area Museum)


January 27: The Role of Interpretive Labels—we will revisit the FAMCC, critique their labels in the new exhibits, and discuss “best practices” in label writing (Beverly Serrell, Exhibit Labels Chapters 2-4, 6-8, 10, 14-15, 20) Assignment of Exhibit Teams

February 3: Field trip to the Virginia State Capitol—they have installed a new exhibit in their recent underground extension

February 10: Review current “Crown to Council” exhibit at FAMCC and exploration of potential exhibit objects; Label exercise due
February 17: Developing the Exhibit Concept—guest speaker on exhibit design process (this is your chance to hear from somebody who’s been on the front lines); PR team launches front-end evaluation; **Exhibit Review due**

February 24: Report on initial research from curatorial team, and report on results of front-end evaluation from PR/outreach team; decision on “big idea” and title, initial discussion of themes

March 3: SPRING BREAK!!! (don’t get too relaxed, the serious work starts now)

March 10: Group work; Decision on themes; **Object recommendations** from curatorial team

March 17: Group work; decision on objects; PR team presents **draft of PR material**; Design and label writing teams present **draft of label types**, color and font schemes; education team presents **proposal for interactives**

March 24: Presentation and group review of **draft floorplan, case design etc.**; PR team produces sample material; label writing team posts label text (on blog or Facebook, TBD)

**March 31**: Review and discussion of labels, design elements, interactives, and PR and programming for final versions

April 7: Final review of exhibit script elements and prepping for production; discussion of case exhibit design

April 14: Fabrication of case exhibit

**April 22**: Fabrication and installation of case exhibit; final production of script for submission to Fredericksburg Area Museum

**April 28**: **Individual project reports due by 5:30**