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129 Combs Hall
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Office Hours TR 3:30-5
W 10:30-11:30

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 be 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 Frdericksburg Area Museum)

January 20: Visitors and the Museum (Lynn Falk and John Dierking, *The Museum Experience*, Introduction and Chapters 10-11; C.G. Screven, “United States: a Science in the Making” and Lois Silverman, “Making Meaning Together: Lessons from the Field of American History,” both from *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* on Blackboard) **Submission of Exhibit Team Assignment Requests**

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