Public History: Theory, Method, and Practice

HIST 506: 301 (3 credits)
Dr. O’Brassill-Kulfan

Offered annually — and fulfils the core course requirement for the Certificate in Public History

How do the histories that we learn in the classroom differ from those we learn on the street, in the museum, and in government documents? How do public historians grapple with the Confederate monument debate? What does it mean to ‘preserve our history’ or our heritage? Who controls the narratives of our histories, and what does that mean for who is and is not included in our retellings of the past? How should we account for power and absences in history? What methods and tools do we have available to improve historical awareness in the public sphere?

Studying public history involves considering these questions and exploring a variety of possible answers through the lens of the theory and practice of the field. By investigating a variety of public history institutions, from archives to museums to websites to parks and beyond, we consider different methodologies for sharing historical information, how various practitioners craft and disseminate historical narratives, and why. This course will explore a variety of definitions of the term “histories” as they exist within and without academia. Learning the intellectual and practical tools for creating and sharing history enhances community and civic engagement and shapes shared cultural memory. Students will have numerous hands-on opportunities to do public history work inside and outside of the classroom, in site visits, and curatorial practice.

This semester, this course also features a fantastic and unique opportunity for students to contribute to an international traveling exhibit with the Humanities Action Lab. Register as soon as you can!