Students in this course will use their research and writing skills to develop exhibits, tours, and public programming in museums and historic sites. The first half of the course will introduce some of the issues involved in working with objects and landscapes; the second half will consist of field projects in which students help develop an interpretive program or exhibit at a nearby historical institution.

Books on Reserve at the Du Bois Library and available for purchase at Amherst Books, 8 Main Street, Amherst

G. Anderson, ed. Reinventing the Museum
N. Simon, The Participatory Museum (also available on line)
J. Diamond, Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums and Other Informal Educational Settings
B. Serrell, Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach
B. Levy, S. Lloyd, S. Schreiber, Great Tours! Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites

Additional readings will be available on the Moodle site. Useful journals this semester, in addition to the conventional historical ones, include

Museum 2.0 Blog
Visitor Studies (e-journal)
Museum News (AM1 .A55--complete run at MHC & Forbes Library, Northampton)
History News (E172. A533)
Curator (QH70 .C8)
Winterthur Portfolio (N9. W52)
Public Historian (HN1 .P8)
Journal of American History (for exhibit reviews)
Technology and Culture (T1. T27)
Museum and Society (ejournal)

Field Projects:

Students will be working in teams of two or three, developing an interpretive project for a nearby historical institution. By the second week of class, you will be asked to rank your preference among the projects below:

1) The Samuel Harrison House, Pittsfield, MA

This summer the home of Samuel Harrison, a prominent African American who lived in
Pittsfield in the 19th century, will open to the public after an extensive restoration. Last fall a team of UMass Public History students met with the Samuel Harrison Society to propose an interpretive plan for the house, and this spring a team will implement one of the recommendations, most likely an exhibit on Harrison’s civil rights activism for one of the rooms on the first floor. It is possible that a second team this semester will work on implementing another aspect of the interpretive plan.

2) Disability History Project, Whitensville, MA

The UMass Public History Program has proposed to Alternatives Unlimited, an agency serving people with disabilities throughout central Massachusetts, a multi-faceted history project for their headquarters in a restored 1820s mill in Whitensville, MA. If the project is a go, a team of students will begin research that integrates the history of the mill with the history of people with disabilities in town to produce a Resource Study that will be the basis for future interpretive products such as a video, museum exhibit, and walking tour. Alternatively, the team might produce a temporary exhibit of a more general nature on the history of veterans and disability using on-line resources of the Disability History Museum (www.disabilitymuseum.org)

3) Springfield Armory National Historic Site, Springfield, MA

The Springfield Armory has approached the Public History Program in anticipation of launching a total make-over of interpretation at the site. Developing such a comprehensive interpretive plan is beyond the scope of what a team of 2-3 students can accomplish in a semester, but we hope to do this in a future project that would engage an entire class. Just last week, the Armory announced that it would be hosting a temporary exhibit developed in Britain on illegal firearms and gun control, and it might be possible for a team of students this semester to work on local public programming to accompany the exhibit (we will find out more about this before committing students to it).

4) Historic Deerfield, Deerfield: "Biographies in Space" (need to retitle this!)

Historic Deerfield would like to develop tour materials that would follow several individual lives through the spaces in town where they lived and worked (and were buried). Still to be determined is how many of these biographies students will do, whether or not one or more of them will be targeted to children, and the particular form that the tour materials will take. Most likely is a pdf document that can be downloaded from the Historic Deerfield website by visitors before they get to town, though a handheld application might also be possible.

5) Historic Deerfield Folk Art Project--TBA
Schedule of Topics/Readings:

1/23: Introduction: What is Interpretation?

USNPS, Fundamentals of Interpretation (2007)
http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/eastern/meaningful_interpretation/index.htm

1/30 The Institutional Setting: What is a Museum/Historic Site? (Museum History & Theory)


2/6 AT HISTORIC DEERFIELD: The Institutional Setting in Action


2/13 AT JOSEPH SKINNER MUSEUM, SOUTH HADLEY Interpreting Objects and Collections (Aaron Miller, Skinner Museum, South Hadley)

Besides seeing the collection, we will practice analyzing artifacts and writing labels

S. Pearce, “Objects as Meaning,” and S. Pearce, “Thinking About Things,” in S. Pearce, ed. Interpreting Objects and Collections, pp. 9-12, 19-29, 125-32. (available on line)

T. Gordon, Private History in Public: Exhibition and the Settings of Everyday Life
History 662: Museum/Historic Site Interpretation


2/20 Visitor Studies and Evaluation

J. Diamond, Practical Evaluation Guide: Tools for Museums and Other Informal Educational Settings


C. Perrin, “The Communicative Circle: Museums as Communities,” in Museums and Communities, pp. 182-220.


2/27: Using Interpretive Media: Exhibit Design

B. Serrell, Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach


3/6: Using Interpretive Media: Tours, Markers, and the Power of Place (Cynthia Dickinson, Emily Dickinson Museum)

Dickinson Museum Visitor Studies Assignment due today

B. Levy, S. Lloyd, S. Schreiber, Great Tours! Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites


J. Donnelly, Interpreting Historic House Museums


History 662: Museum/Historic Site Interpretation

3/13 Using Interpretive Media: Social Media and Visitor Engagement


3/20 SPRING BREAK

3/27 Using Interpretive Media: Audio, Video, and Object Theater (Steve Bressler, Monadnock Media)

Analysis of substantial audiovisual installation somewhere

**Week of 4/1 Museum Education: Interpreting History for Children**


**4/10: Using Interpretive Media: Demonstrations, Performance, and Living History**


R. Handler & E. Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*


History 662: Museum/Historic Site Interpretation


4/17: No class: UMass on Wednesday schedule

Work on final projects

4/24  Managing the Museum


5/1:  Course overview: Lessons from the Field

Assignment: Come to class with a list of “10 best practices” in interpretation, with enough copies to distribute.

Friday 5/3: Women’s History Conference in Honor of Joyce Berkman

Week of 5/6: Final project presentations to department and invited guests, with final reflection papers due May 9 (10-15 pages, relating what you learned in your field project experience to scholarly literature on museum and historic site interpretation)

MONDAY 6/3: "Listen my children and you shall hear": Balancing History and Myth in Massachusetts Public History’ 2013 Massachusetts History Conference, Hogan Conference Center, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA