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Expos 20
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:30am – 11:45am
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Reading Museums

Course Description

As a repository of treasured cultural objects or a labyrinth of imposing masterpieces, museums can loom large in the public's imagination. Because they often command reverence as hallowed institutions of culture and education, it can be difficult to decode museums beyond the authoritative guides and scripted tours. Sometimes, as art historian Svetlana Alpers notes, "[m]useums can make it hard to see." In this course we will learn to "see" museums for ourselves – as cultural critics and personal stakeholders, examining the museum as a vital mode of cultural representation. We will analyze its visual language (e.g. its architectural design and layout, the curation and staging of its collections, its use of lighting, installations, and multimedia) as well as its written one (e.g. wall text, signage, and catalogue). Moreover, we will explore different genres of museums (e.g. large public art museum, private house museum, local gallery, natural history museum, etc.). We will investigate how these categorical differences can affect the way museums tackle the following questions: How do museums attempt to represent a nation's collective past, its singularity and diversity, and what do they reveal about our present values? How do museums grapple with the haunting legacies of historical atrocities in the case of slavery and colonialism? How do museums open themselves up to diverse (and sometimes contradicting) perspectives of race, class, and gender? Those questions allow us to examine how museums communicate and mediate our most cherished and contested values about who we are as individuals, as a society, and as a nation.

Course structure: two essays and a final capstone project

The course is divided into three units. Each unit consists of a series of preparatory readings and ungraded assignments that culminate in the graded final research paper and academic conference presentation. The specific assignments within each unit are arranged so you may practice writing and argumentative skills, which increase in complexity. The three units are organized sequentially for a similar reason; as the semester progresses, you should be able to build on the skills and knowledge you have acquired from your work in the preceding units.

- The **first essay** will give you practice in close reading a primary source, which is one of the fundamental skills you will be expected to master in a college-level humanities course. Close reading or close looking (for our purposes, we will use these terms interchangeably) refers to the process of analyzing the formal and material elements

of a text in order to create an evidence-based argument about how a text operates. In our case, we will “read” museums as texts, looking closely at its constitutive elements (such as space, installations, exhibits, and curatorial choices) to see how they function as modes of cultural representation and communication. We will closely read, analyze, and interpret a range of different types of museums (e.g. large public art museum, private house museum, local gallery, state history museum, etc.) to prepare for the first paper. For this close reading essay, you will be asked to choose one museum as your primary source (you can choose one of our case studies, a different 3D virtual museum, or a local museum you can frequent in person)¹, devise an investigative question about it, and then answer that question by conducting a close reading of your museum-text.

- The **second essay** will build upon the work you have already done for Essay 1. Once you have mastered the skill of creating your own unique argument about how a particular museum functions, you will be ready to place it into a scholarly conversation with different types of primary and secondary sources. Whereas the first unit effectively brackets off scholarship so you may engage one-on-one with the primary source, this second unit asks you to actively explore scholarship in order to advance your own argument. Ideally, you will be able to use much of the conceptual framework and close reading analysis from Essay 1 as an important starting point. However, don’t be surprised if – after placing your ideas in direct conversation with that of other scholars – your argument changes subtly or drastically. This dynamic process of allowing external ideas to bear pressure upon your own (and vice versa) will help you to refine your initial claims. Moreover, the incorporation of important contextualizing and/or theoretical scholarship will help you to insert your argument into a specific debate or on-going conversation in the field that will add to our collective understanding of the text.
- The **final capstone project** will require you to transfer the argumentative skills from the first two essays to a formal oral presentation format – the academic conference. By the semester’s end, you will be an authority on your particular museum topic and have the opportunity to share some of your finalized findings not only to your classmates but also to an academic audience of specialists from museum studies and other related fields in the humanities. During this 10-minute presentation (plus an additional 5-minute Q and A session with your audience), you will demonstrate your mastery of the following elements of argument in the realm of public speaking: thesis, scope, analytical lens, motive, close reading of primary source evidence, implementation of secondary sources, key terms, organization and structure. By crafting and performing a compelling and in-depth oral presentation out of your research topic, you will be participating in a key scholarly activity in the academic profession – the conference.

¹ Please note that due to Covid, the accessibility of museums will most likely be changing constantly. If you decide to use a local museum as your primary source, you should look for one that has a good virtual 3D platform that enables you to access and revisit its space during a potential lockdown. You should also take ample photographs and video footage to document your primary source evidence.

Elements of argument discussed throughout all three units include thesis, keyterms, motive, evidence, analysis, sources, counter-evidence and counter-arguments, orientation, transitions, structure, stance and style. We will also look closely at introductions and conclusions.

Required Texts & Materials

All course readings will be made available on Canvas. If you click on the “Files” tab, they will be in the “Course Readings” folder. Please download and print them out in preparation for class discussions.

Also available online:

The Harvard College Writing Program’s [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](#)

The Harvard Writing Center’s [Strategies for Essay Writing](#)

[The MLA Style Center](#)

[Purdue Online Writing Lab's MLA Guide](#)

[Sample paper and Works Cited in proper MLA format](#)

You will also need the Zoom software for some classroom discussions and a reliable headset with headphone, microphone, and a USB port (Academic Technology recommends the Logitech headset, which can be found on [Amazon](#)).

Course Policies and Requirements

Harvard College Writing Policy on Attendance

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the college can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean, as you will also be required in the case of protracted or repeated illness. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly

petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

If you are late for class, your participation grade will be lowered. If your lateness exceeds ten minutes, it will be counted as an absence.

There is no way to make up a missed class. By taking this course, you are committing to come to class at the appointed time. **You will be responsible for keeping up with the course readings and assignments for the missed day. Additional tutorials during office hours will not be given in lieu of class attendance.** If you miss a class due to medical or religious reasons, however, I would be happy to answer targeted follow-up questions about the day's readings or assignments during office hours or via email.

Harvard College Writing Policy on Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must submit all of the assigned essays to pass the course, *and you must complete them within the schedule of the course*—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. The written assignments, oral presentations, and smaller exercises work as a planned sequence of writing that will help you to pace yourself and write the final essays in incremental steps. Therefore, if you fail to submit an assignment, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit the work by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

Based on the needs of the class, I may assign additional readings and/or modify assignments throughout the course of the semester.

Lateness

Punctuality and attendance are mandatory. Class starts promptly. *If you are late to class, please be sure to notify me afterwards via email.* Otherwise, I will have marked you as absent during roll call. It is the student's responsibility to keep track of their absences and lateness. Excessively late arrivals and absences during class (more than ten minutes late) will be marked as unexcused absences. Frequent late arrivals can also add up to an unexcused absence.

For *all* assignments promptness is *mandatory* and part of the grade so please schedule your work accordingly. **YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE FEEDBACK ON YOUR RESPONSE PAPERS AND DRAFTS IF YOU TURN IN THESE ASSIGNMENTS LATE.** Regarding your revisions, the penalty for late written work will be a deduction of 1/3 of the final grade for each day that it is late. (So if you were three days late in turning in an essay that would have received an "A-", you would receive a "B-" for it.) Please note that weekends are included in the deduction of a grade for late work. Late work any more than 5 days after the due date will not be accepted. While I do not offer any extensions, please contact

me if you have a medical reason or family emergency that will prevent you from turning in your work on time.

Collaboration

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students, and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

Class Participation

Unlike a large lecture course, a small seminar demands its participants to be rigorous and active co-producers of knowledge. As a seminar, the success of our class depends on the active involvement of *all* of its members. By involvement, I mean a number of things: taking part in class discussion; coming to class having done the reading and exercises, and being prepared to talk about them; providing other students in our class with thoughtful feedback on their writing during our draft workshops and peer-editing; participating in an academic conference (in class); being cooperative with others and respectful of opinions that differ from your own. Participation in general describes your efforts to make the course work. Thoughtful oral participation also reflects your commitment to practice the critical thinking skills that will enable you to improve your writing. *Every class should be considered a verbal “workshop” of your ideas for the day and should ultimately reflect the daily effort you make in improving your argumentative and interpretive skills.*

In-Class Workshops

The texts used in these sessions will be the drafts that you and other students have produced for our class. The purpose of these workshops is to develop our appreciation for audience and to give you and others practice in evaluating your own work. Before the workshop takes place, I will either email or upload onto the course website the workshop essays we will discuss, along with some guidelines for discussion and analysis. As with any class discussion, you are responsible for coming to the workshop having read and thought about the material carefully.

Academic Integrity:

Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. *All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work*

should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

Submission Format for Written Work

You will submit your work electronically this semester. As you send or upload each written document to our course website, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in **Microsoft Word doc or docx** (No PDFs or .pages for written essays please! However, PDFs of your appendix of visual images for the essays are fine.). It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

All written assignments (including short writing exercises, the draft, and final essay) must be typed, double-spaced, titled, paginated, and proof-read. Please use Times New Roman for the font and set the font size to 12pt. On the first page, you should have a double-spaced header at the top left-hand corner with your name, the instructor's name, the course, and the date. You should also set the margins for your essays at 1 inch all around. Please be warned that if your essay displays numerous spelling or grammatical errors, it may receive a lower evaluation. Also, I expect you to be consistent in the style of citation you adopt in any given paper. For our humanities course **we will be using the MLA format**. Mastery of correct citation usage (which is an integral part of research) will be part of the criteria for passing this course.

Please refer to [Purdue Online Writing Lab's sample paper and Works Cited](#) for the proper MLA format.

Please note that all deadlines are in ET (Eastern Time).

Electronic Devices:

Cell phones must be turned off during class.

We will use Zoom occasionally when we need to "Share Screen" our visual evidence during group work and/or when we have guest speakers outside of class time. We will also use Zoom if changes in Covid protocol at Harvard mandate that we pivot to remote learning. If necessary, by facilitating the simultaneous audio and video participation of all members of the course, Zoom will enable us to mimic an in-class experience. Before our first class, please be sure that you can log into Zoom and enable the video and audio functions. You will also need a headset with headphone, microphone, and a USB port. High speed connections are best to ensure a smooth uninterrupted participation in class. **Ultimately, you will be responsible for ensuring that you have all the proper equipment and smooth connection for this course by our first class.**

If we are conducting a Zoom class, please be mindful of the fact that this course will simulate an in-person classroom in order to engage the students in a dynamic scholarly conversation. As such, please be considerate and keep your video on ***in a quiet and private atmosphere*** that is conducive to discussion. **If you happen to be “on the go” (e.g. in a café, in the car, etc.) when the class is in session, you will not be allowed to participate and your absence will be counted as an unexcused absence.**

That said, I would like to limit our use of screen time whenever we can. The internet will not be used in class to look up course readings. Please create a course reader by printing out our class readings and handouts and putting them in a binder or folder. You should bring this course reader to every class so that we can reference readings from previous weeks in a specific manner.

Grading:

I will grade only the revisions (that is, the final version) of your essays, not the drafts or response papers. Course grades will be determined as follows:

15% Participation (in-class discussions, exercises, draft conferences, and workshops)
 25% Unit 1 Close Reading Essay (4-5 pages)
 30% Unit 2 Research Essay (8-10 pages)
 30% Unit 3 Capstone Project: 15-minute Oral Presentation with Slides for Museum Studies Conference

Your participation grade includes credit for turning in each of your assignments. You are expected to submit all assignments, including drafts, on time; failure to do so will affect your participation grade.

Contact Info & Office Hours

Please do not message me via Canvas if it is a time-sensitive issue since Canvas can go through a significant period of delay in notifying its recipients of messages. If you need an immediate response, it is always best to email instead.

My email address is ckbecker@fas.harvard.edu. I generally check email twice a day (once in the morning and once in the afternoon) between the hours of 9:00am – 5:00pm (EST) from Monday to Friday. If you email me in the morning or early afternoon, you will most likely get a same day response from me (EST). If you email me in the late afternoon or evening, you may get a response by the following day. If you email me during the weekend or holiday, you will receive a response by the next business day.

Office hours are *by appointment* on ***TBD***. **To sign-up for a 15-minute time slot, please email me *at the latest* by ***TBD*** so that I can confirm a specific time with you.**

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

(Readings, assignments, and deadlines are SUBJECT TO CHANGE, depending on final confirmation of enrollment, particular needs of class, and changing program policies due to emerging Covid protocols. Please note that deadlines for smaller preparatory exercises are not listed on this draft schedule.)

SEP 2: Introduction (Overview of Course Policies, Schedule, and Methodology); Preview Exercise on Close Looking/Reading

Additional readings after class: Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* chapters

SEP 7: Gauging the Grading Rubric Exercise; Writer's Colloquium on Process

Readings due: 2 Sample Student Essays in "Gauging the Grading Rubric Materials" folder in Files tab; student personal essays on Bird by Bird chapters in Files tab

UNIT 1: Mastering the Art of Close Looking/Reading Primary Sources

SEP 9: The Museum as a Way of Seeing

Readings due: Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing"; Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder"

SEP 14 and 16: Feminist Interventions and the Museum (Part 1 and 2); How to Avoid Plagiarism: Summary, Paraphrase, and Quotation

Readings due: Anne Higonnet, "Private Museums, Public Leadership: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Art of Cultural Authority"; *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*
Case Study: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

SEP 21 and 23: Museum Objects and the Staging of the Colonial Past (Part 1 and 2)

Readings due: James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones"; Enid Schildkrout, "Ambiguous Messages and Ironic Twists: *Into the Heart of Africa* and *The Other Museum*"

Case Study: Royal Ontario Museum's *Into the Heart of Africa* catalogue

SEP 28 and 30: Museums & the Mapping of National Identity (Part 1 and 2)

Readings due: Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum"
Case Studies: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Metropolitan Museum of Art

OCT 5 and 7: Museums, Historical Trauma, and the Politics of Race (Part 1 and 2)

Readings due: Lisa G. Corrin, “Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves”; Bettina Messias Carbonell, “The Afterlife of Lynching: Exhibitions and the Re-composition of Human Suffering”
 Case Studies: The Carters’ music video “ApeSh-t”; Fred Wilson’s “Mining the Museum” exhibit

OCT 12 and 14: Conference Week and Workshops for Unit 1 Essay

UNIT 2: Creating a Scholarly Conversation with Secondary Sources

OCT 19: Research Session with Harvard Research Librarian

OCT 19: Unit 1 Close Reading Essay due by 10am

OCT 21: Evaluating & Using Sources; Online Research Lab

Readings due: *Harvard Guide to Using Sources*

OCT 26 and 28: Testing a Theory through Close Reading

NOV 2, 4, and 9: Research Proposal Presentations/Workshops

NOV 11, 16, and 18: Conference Week and Workshops for Unit 2 Research Essay

UNIT 3: The Final Capstone Project: The Academic Conference

NOV 23: Fundamentals of Public Speaking with Expos 40 Preceptor*

NOV 23: Unit 2 Research Essay due by 10am

Wed, NOV 24 – Sun, NOV 28: Thanksgiving Recess

NOV 30: Final Capstone Project: Conference on Museum Studies*

DEC 2 and 7: Final Capstone Project: Conference on Museum Studies*

*Guest speaker session on 11/23 and Final Capstone Conferences may be held outside of class time.