

**AMH 3931: Seminar in Public History**  
University of Florida  
Fall 2025 | Section 8JW1 | 3 credit hours

Keene-Flint, Room 111  
Tuesdays 11:45-1:40  
Thursdays 12:50-1:40

**Instructor:** Dr. Jamin Wells  
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**Office Hours**

Mondays: 10-11:00am  
Thursdays: 2-3:00pm

*\*email to make an appointment outside these hours*



*Digital Pop Art Illustration Representing a Public History Seminar. Created 8.15.2025. Microsoft Copilot.*

**Catalog Description**

Selected, variable topics in the history and culture of America.

**Prerequisite:** 3 credits of history.

**Course Description and Objectives**

This course examines how history works beyond the classroom by exploring the multifaceted field of Public History. Through readings, case studies, and hands-on activities, students will engage with key methodologies, core concepts, principles, debates, and ethical questions of this robust field of study and practice. Special attention will be given to museums, public commemoration, oral history, digital history, historic preservation, archival practice, and community-engaged history. Finally, students will create an original research-based, public history product.

**Required Materials**

- Jonathan Fetter-Vorm and Ari Kelman, *Battle Lines: A Graphic History of the Civil War* (2015).
- Loose-leaf paper for in-class History Snapshots and mid-semester exam.
- *Additional materials, listed in the schedule below, will be electronically posted on our course Canvas page*

No materials/supplies fees are assessed for this course.

### Student Learning Objectives

- Explain and evaluate core concepts, principles, processes, and methodologies of Public History.
- Critically analyze a broad array of public history products, programming, and practices across multiple media and community contexts using relevant scholarly frameworks
- Create and present an accessible, multimodal research-based public history project
- Identify and apply professional ethical practices and reflective methodologies for community engaged public history work

### Important Dates

Assignment	Weight	Important Due Dates
"History in the Wild" Reflections	25%	9/15, 9/26, 10/27, & 11/21
Exam	20%	9/30
Photo Essay	30%	10/3 (proposal 3%), 10/23 (draft 7%), 12/1 (essay 15%), & 12/2 (presentation (5%))
Final Essay	10%	12/10
Engagement and Growth	10%	Ongoing with self-assessments 10/3 & 12/10
Public History Snapshots	5%	Ongoing

### Grading Scale

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D	60-69
B-	80-82	F	0-59

*\*standard rounding rules apply: final grade calculations ending in .5, .6, .7, .8, or .9 round to the next whole number.*

## How does Dr. Wells grade?

I use detailed rubrics for all major assignments to ensure transparency and fairness. We'll review rubrics in class before you submit, so you understand them as you complete the assignment. These rubrics will outline the assignment-specific criteria I will use to evaluate your work—including clarity, thoughtfulness, use of evidence, and engagement with course concepts.

My grading philosophy values critical thinking, reflective practice, and growth. I reward work that demonstrates effort, curiosity, and meaningful connection to public history themes. I encourage you to take intellectual risks - to push yourself.

If you believe an error has been made in your grade, please reach out within one week of receiving the grade. We'll set up a time to review your work together and discuss any concerns.

This table outlines how I interpret letter grades across all coursework. Use it as a guide for assessing overall grades/rubrics.

A	Exceptional. Outstanding work, that significantly exceeds expectations for a 3000-level History course. Demonstrates deep engagement, originality, and polished execution.
A-	Excellent. Very strong work with minor areas for improvement in clarity, formatting, or depth. Shows clear understanding and thoughtful engagement for a 3000-level History course.
B+	Very Good. Better than competent for a 3000-level History course. Some aspects are particularly strong, but there is room for improvement in multiple area.
B	Good. Complete and competent for a 3000-level History course. Meets all assignment requirements with reasonable clarity and effort. Strengths may offset weaknesses.
B-	Adequate. Good effort but falls short of expectations for a 3000-level History course. May lack depth, originality, or thoroughness. Recommend meeting with instructor.
C+	Below Expectations. Meets basic requirements but lacks clarity, depth, or engagement for a 3000-level History course. Recommend meeting with instructor.
C	Marginal Pass. Barely meets assignment criteria. Writing or analysis may be unclear or underdeveloped. Strongly recommend meeting with instructor.
C-	Incomplete Pass. Does not fully meet basic requirements. Significant issues with clarity, completeness, or relevance. Strongly recommend meeting with instructor.
D	Poor. Significantly below expectations. Major deficiencies in content, structure, or effort. Strongly recommend meeting with instructor.
F	Failing. Work is incomplete, irrelevant, or violates course policies (e.g. plagiarism or AI). Strongly recommend meeting with instructor.

## **Assignments**

### **“History in the Wild” Reflections (25%)**

Throughout the semester, you will complete three (400-500-word) “History in the Wild” reflection essays that connect course concepts to real-world encounters you have with Public History. These assignments are designed to sharpen your analytical skills while exploring how the theories and methods we discuss in class manifest in everyday spaces and experiences.

For each essay, you will identify and analyze a Public History “product” that you encounter in your daily life, be it a museum exhibit, a historical marker or monument, a podcast, social media, historical reenactments, commemorative events, or even historically-themed restaurants, businesses, or video games, for that matter. The key is that your chosen product attempts to present, interpret, or engage with the past for a public audience. Detailed directions and assignment rubric will be posted on Canvas.

While detailed instructions will be posted on Canvas (and discussed in class), each essay will include a brief description of the Public History product you encountered, a critical analysis grounded in course materials, and a reflection on what the product reveals about the current state of public history practice, public memory, or historical consciousness in contemporary society.

### **Exam (20%)**

There will be one in-class exam. Administered during the seventh week of class, this exam is designed to assess your understanding of key concepts, debates, and ethical considerations that have emerged during the first half of the semester. A study guide will be provided in advance that will include a list of potential terms and concepts, sample case study scenarios, and possible essay topics to help focus your preparation.

### **Photo Essay (30%)**

This capstone project provides an opportunity to synthesize course concepts through original research, analysis, and interpretation. You will design and create a photo essay (think: Instagram Stories or Carousels) that combines visual storytelling (10 images) with critical analysis (~2,500-words) to explore a public history theme, site, controversy, or practice that interests you. This is your chance to be a public historian — conducting research, making interpretative choices, and presenting historical content for a public audience. We’ll spend a significant portion of the second half of the semester on this assignment, including two in-class workshops, to support your success. Detailed directions, including a rubric, will be discussed in class and posted on Canvas.

### **Final Essay (10%)**

Reflective practice is a cornerstone methodology in Public History, enabling practitioners to critically examine their work, consider multiple perspectives, and

continuously improve their interpretative approaches. For this final assignment, you will engage with this essential professional practice by drafting a ~1,000-word essay that substantively reflects on your learning this semester. Not simply a summary of course content, strong essays will offer a thoughtful examination of how your understanding of Public History has evolved and deepened through our readings, discussions, and assignments. Detailed directions, including a rubric, will be provided in class and posted on Canvas.

### **Engagement and Growth (10%)**

Effective Public History practice requires ongoing self-reflection, a growth mindset, and collaborative engagement with a variety of stakeholders, from professional colleagues to disparate communities. This assignment introduces you to the reflective practice and continuous improvement mentalities that characterize the best public history work while fostering your development as a thoughtful, engaged participant in our learning community. You will complete two self-assessments — one mid-semester and another at the end of the course — that critically examine your participation, engagement, and professional development in the class. These self-assessments are designed to foster conversations about growth and improvement. Your grade will be based on these two self-reflections combined with evaluation of your participation/completion of in-class activities. Detailed directions and rubric will be posted on Canvas.

### **Public History Snapshots (5%)**

At the beginning of most class sessions, you will respond to a short prompt designed to spark reflection, interpretation, or connection to the day's topics and/or assigned readings. These "History Snapshots" are concise (3-5 sentences), informal writing exercises that help you engage with course themes, readings, and your own evolving understanding of Public History. Snapshots are graded for thoughtfulness, relevance, and effort, not for polished writing. Strong responses demonstrate engagement with course materials, offer evidence-based insights, and reflect on Public History concepts we've engaged with — or that you encountered in assigned readings. You must be present and submit your response during class to receive credit - no late submissions accepted. Rubric is posted on Canvas. Your four lowest grades will be dropped from the final grade calculation.

## Schedule

*\*The instructor reserves the right to modify readings, assignments, or due dates when necessary for legitimate pedagogical reasons. Students will receive at least one week's advance notice of any changes through Canvas announcements/in-class notifications.*

### Week 1: Welcome/Introductions

August 21 - Welcome/Introductions

### Week 2 - History Today

**DUE 8/25:** *History and You* survey

August 26 - History and You

**Read:** Peter Burkholder and Dana Schaffer, "A Snapshot of the Public's Views of History," *Perspectives on History*, August 30, 2021; AND Adamali De La Cruz, "Gen Z has Entered the Chat: What We Want From Museums," *American Alliance of Museums, Alliance Blog*, June 10, 2025.

August 28 - History and the Nation: Current Debates

**Read:** Executive Order: "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" March 27, 2025; Mike Gonzalez, "Trump's Righteous Smithsonian Reforms," *Washington Examiner*, April 10, 2025; American Historical Association, "AHA Statement Defending the Smithsonian," April 21, 2025.

### Week 3- What is Public History?

September 2 - What is Public History?

**Read:** Cherstin M. Lyon, Elizabeth M. Nix and Rebecca K. Shrum, *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences* (2017), Chapter 1.

**Explore:** National Council on Public History (NCPH) website and read the NCPH Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

September 4 - Case Study: Jack the Ripper Museum

**Read:** Claire Hayward, "Waxworks and Wordless Women: The Jack the Ripper Museum," *Public Historian* 39, no. 2 (2017): 51-57.

### Week 4: Is this Public History?

September 9: *Battle Lines* I

**Read:** Jonathan Fetter-Vorm and Ari Kelman, *Battle Lines: A Graphic History of the Civil War* (2015), Chapters 1-7

September 11: *Battle Lines II*

**Read:** Fetter-Vorm and Kelman, *Battle Lines*: Chapters 8-15

**DUE 9/15: Draft of History in Wild Essay 1**

## **Week 5: Public History Essentials**

September 16: Reflective Practice, Shared Authority, and Ethics

**Read:** Lyon, Nix and Shrum, *Introduction to Public History*, Chapter 3; Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks* (2012), Chapter 6

September 18: Oral History with guest lecture by Anna Hamilton, Assistant Director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program

**Read:** Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 3rd. Ed. (2015), Chapter 1.

## **Week 6: Public History Essentials II**

September 23: History, Memory, and Silence

**Read:** Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Chapters 1 & 2

September 25: *25 Texans in the Land of Lincoln* (2019)

**Read:** Michael Van Wagenen, *Remembering the Forgotten War: The Enduring Legacies of the U.S.-Mexican War* (2012), Introduction & Chapter 1.

**DUE 9/26: History in the Wild Essay 1**

## **Week 7: Midterm**

September 30: **in-class midterm exam**

October 2: Photo Essay Workshop 1: Photo Essays 101: Structure, Topics, and Research Strategies

**Read:** "Creating Photo Essays About Community: A Guide to Our Where We Are Contest," *New York Times*; "W. Eugene Smith: Master of the Photo Essay," *Magnum*.

**DUE 10/3: Mid-semester Engagement and Growth self-assessment & Photo Essay Proposal**

## Week 8: Museums

October 7: Museums 101

**Read:** Steven Lubar, *Inside the Lost Museum: Curating, Past and Present* (2017), Chapters 15 and 16.

October 9: Fundamentals of Interpretation

**Read:** Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957), Selections; Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretative Approach*, 2nd edition (2015), Chapter 1.

## Week 9: Exhibits

October 14: Exhibits and Exhibiting

**Read:** Lubar, *Inside the Lost Museum*, Chapters 9 & 10.

October 16: **NO CLASS MEETING** - Photo Essay Independent Research

## Week 10: Interpretative Writing

October 21: Interpretative Writing

**Read:** Lubar, *Inside the Lost Museum*, Chapter 12; Serrell, *Exhibit Labels*, Chapters 2 & 3.

October 23: Photo Essay Workshop 2: First Drafts, Peer Review, and Design 101

**Read:** Nora Ephron, "Revision and Life: Take it from the Top—Again," *New York Times*, November 9, 1986.

**DUE 10/23: Photo Essay Draft**

**DUE 10/27: History in the Wild Essay 2**

## Week 11: History on the Streets

October 28: Historic Preservation

**Read:** Jacob Anbinder, "What Historic Preservation Is Doing to American Cities," *The Atlantic*, May 2, 2022.

October 30: Ghost Tours

**Read:** Tiya Miles, *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of the South* (2015), Introduction & Chapter 2.

## Week 12: Public Archaeology and Public Monuments

November 4: Public Archaeology with guest lecture by Dr. Mary Minkoff, Director, Florida Public Archaeology Network

**Read:** Flewellen, Ayana Omilade, Alicia Odewale, Justin Dunnavant, Alexandra Jones, and William White III, "Creating Community and Engaging Community: The Foundations of the Estate Little princess Archaeology Project in St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, vol. 26, pp. 147-176.

November 6: Monument Wars

**Read:** "Historic Statue Removal: Should Historic Statues Be Taken Down?," [britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com).

## Week 13: Video Games and History

November 11: **No Class for Veterans Day**

November 13: Playing the Past

**Read:** Tore C. Olsson, *Red Dead's History: A Video Game, An Obsession, and America's Violent Past* (2024), Introduction and Chapters 1 & 16.

## Week 14: Public History, present and future

November 18: Digital Public History with guest lecture by Dr. Christopher Goodwin, UF Department of History

**Read:** Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*, Introduction.

November 20: The Future of the Past

**Read:** "Editor's Corner," a research article, and a review of your choice from the current issue of *The Public Historian*.

**DUE: 11/21: History in the Wild Essay 3**

**Fall Break - no class the week of November 24** (complete photo essays!)

## Week 15: Photo Essay Finale

**DUE 12/1: Photo Essay**

December 2: **Photo Essay Presentations**

**DUE 12/10 @ 5pm: Final Essay & End-of-semester Engagement and Growth self-assessment**

## The Fine Print

**This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolices).** (The direct link is <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolices>.)

### Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for this course. That said, life happens. After two unexcused absences (as defined by [UF attendance policy](#)), your overall grade will be deducted 2 points per additional unexcused absence. You must submit appropriate documentation of excused absence(s) to the instructor via email within seven days of your return to class or the absence(s) will count as an unexcused absence. I highly encourage you to attend office hours to review materials missed during an absence.

### Late Assignments

Late assignments will be accepted for up to seven days after the posted due date. The overall final grade for late submissions will be deducted 5% per day for up to a 25% deduction. Out of fairness to your classmates, I strictly follow this protocol.

### Course AI Policy

UF is a global leader in artificial intelligence, and students, faculty, and staff have access to a powerful suite of AI tools—including [NaviGator Chat](#)—to support learning and research. That said, AI is a rapidly evolving technology, and as a society and academic discipline, we are still learning how to ethically and responsibly integrate it into our work.

Recent research suggests that relying too heavily on AI tools can hinder academic growth, especially in areas like critical thinking, writing, and historical interpretation. It also hallucinates and frankly gets a lot wrong. At the same time, AI literacy is increasingly vital in the workplace, and understanding how to use these tools thoughtfully is part of your professional development.

In this course, we will cautiously explore AI as a tool for learning and public history practice. You are welcome to use AI tools to support your work—but you must always disclose how you used them. This includes:

- Generating outlines or brainstorming ideas
- Summarizing sources
- Checking grammar or formatting
- Any other use that influences your submitted work

**Undisclosed use of AI tools will be treated as intentional plagiarism.** If you're unsure whether a particular use is appropriate, please ask before submitting your work.

We'll discuss AI use in class and reflect on its implications for historical research, interpretation, and public engagement.

### **Course Plagiarism Policy**

Plagiarism — whether intentional or unintentional — is a serious academic offense and will be treated accordingly. All instances of plagiarism will be reported via the Student Honor Code Process. If found guilty via that process, I will recommend a failing grade for the course.

### **Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism**

In history—and especially in public history—citation is not just a technical requirement; it's a disciplinary value. We cite sources to show how we built our arguments, to allow others to trace our thinking, and to contribute to an ongoing scholarly conversation. Citation demonstrates your research, your depth of engagement, and your respect for the work of others.

In this course, you must cite everything that informs your thinking, whether it's a direct quote, a paraphrased idea, or a conceptual influence. This includes:

- All quotations from primary and secondary sources, which must be enclosed in quotation marks and followed by a citation.
- All ideas that are not your own, even if paraphrased.
- Any source not assigned in the course, including books, lectures, conversations, or comments from classmates—these must be cited in a footnote or endnote.

All written work must follow Chicago-style citation using footnotes, unless otherwise specified. For more on Chicago Style see Perdue OWL.

If someone helps you with your paper—by reviewing it for clarity or grammar, or by discussing ideas—please include a brief acknowledgment in a footnote stating who helped and how. This is also the best way to acknowledge your use of AI. It is perfectly acceptable to seek help, as long as your helper does not write the paper or provide its arguments.

Rest assured, we'll spend time talking about this in class and I will provide a useful handout to guide your decision making/understanding related to plagiarism *and* a refresher on the Chicago citation style (it's the best, of course).

### **Important Information and Updates**

Faculty members must sometimes update course elements such as schedules or assignment details in response to student needs, compelling pedagogical reasons, and/or external events (e.g., severe weather or public health emergencies). If updates become necessary as the course progresses, students will be notified of any changes through Canvas announcements and/or email as soon as possible

**Course Note**

History is hard work. It's hard to talk about, think about, write about. It's filled with violence and pain, hope and healing. It's emotional. It's terrifyingly complex. It matters.

At times this semester, we will be discussing historical events that may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. If you are aware of particular course material that may be traumatizing to you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have with it before it comes up in class. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to such material with the class or me afterward, I welcome such discussion as an appropriate part of our coursework.

If you ever feel the need to step outside during one of these discussions, either for a short time or the rest of the class session, you may do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material/assignments you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant amount of time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student and/or see me individually to discuss the situation and get you caught up to speed.

UF offers an array of free resources to help you learn, thrive, and flourish. You can find [UF Student Success resources here](#) and [UF Campus Health and Wellness resources here](#).

**Course Disclaimer:** Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint, or belief. Course content has been carefully structured to explore various viewpoints, core concepts, and perspectives in the discipline of Public History. Student perspectives, claims, conclusions, and viewpoints will not be a factor in any assessment. Students should feel encouraged, welcome, and free to respectfully agree, criticize, or disagree with any discussion, reading, or other course material without penalty or benefit.