

MSL 2330H-S Interpretation and Meaning Making

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We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Course Description

This course provides an overview of western understandings of meaning-making, and examines how these traditions inform in the interpretive practices of contemporary free choice learning institutions. This course introduces you to current perspectives on interpretation in museums, providing you with the tools to evaluate critique and design various models of interpretive plans. We discuss in depth the different articulations of what and who constitutes the museum's audiences, publics and communities. Further, we apply these theoretical perspectives to interpretive planning and work on a variety of individual and group projects in order to experiment with various interpretive practices.

Relationship to Program Learning Outcomes

http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/system/files/user/108/policy_on_student_learning_outcomes_0.pdf

Course Objectives:

As visitor centered institutions, museums engage in various acts of interpretation, either large scale, as in interpretive planning, or in more obvious ways, through public programming and various other practices. Generally, this course observes interpretation as a form of communication with diverse audiences as museums are, first and foremost, public communicators. Therefore, this course has as its main objective to show you the multiple forms which interpretation, a very dynamic process takes in a museum. The course educates you about two sides of interpretation: the practice of meaning making: the complex and messy ways in which visitors make meaning and interpretive planning; (the crafting and communication of selected meanings) in various types of museums by museum professionals.

Student learning outcomes include:

- Develop a critical understanding of theoretical foundations and historical developments of museum interpretation
- Understand the practice of interpretive planning in diverse institutional contexts
- Demonstrated understanding of the value of interpretive work in supporting an organization's mission and strategic plan
- The ability to make concrete connections between meaning-making theory and contemporary practices, with the ability to professionally critique a museum's content decisions based on knowledge of audiences, learning and interpretive planning theory and practice.
- The development of a planning framework that will support strong interpretive practice during future professional work. These frameworks will be useful tools for both planning and implementation of interpretive work, and in communicating to funders, decisions makers and other professionals the planned interpretation, and its theoretical underpinnings.
- Students feel supported in professionalizing their practice of interpretation for future related work.

Relationship between Course Learning Outcomes and Program Learning Outcomes

http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/system/files/user/108/mmst_vision_rev_march_7_2014_0.pdf

Students will gain in depth knowledge and understanding of a significant practice (and its theoretical foundations) that impact exhibitions and education in museums. It will build their professional capacity to participate in the field as they apply this knowledge to an evolving practice.

Resources, Readings and Communications

All required readings will be available in electronic format on Blackboard. Readings from MSL2332H and MSL1350 will also inform this work.

About our Expectations:

Overall, students are expected to show professionalism in and outside of the classroom in their communication with their colleagues and the professors. Some signifiers of professionalism include:

1. Punctuality – students will arrive to class on time – class starts at 1:10 pm sharp
2. Preparedness & diligence – Students will read the assigned materials before class – keep in mind that the readings assigned for this course range from professional writings to theoretical literature, therefore certain readings will be more difficult than others. We strongly advise you to take notes as you read and write comments/impressions which you then bring to class for reference and to engage in conversation.
3. Respect & consideration – students will come to class prepared to engage in critical, respectful and thoughtful discussions with the colleagues and professor;
4. Proper use of communication technologies – students will turn off/silence their communication devices during class time and will not leave them on their desks. It is extremely distracting for your colleagues and disrespectful towards your professors to engage in conversations which are unrelated to course and content.
5. Proper use of laptops – Students will use laptops, (if they choose) ONLY in order to take notes and work on group projects. Checking email and using social media platforms or working on other course work is highly disrespectful to colleague's and professors
6. Attention to details – Students will not submit assignments via email unless specified by/discussed with the professors. Written assignments are to be submitted at the beginning of the class at which the specific assignment is due. Please review the policy on late submissions and extensions.
7. Good communication – Students are encouraged to inform one of the professors of any personal or professional issues which might interfere with their good standing in the class. It is YOUR responsibility to communicate your issues in a timely manner.
8. Proper email etiquette – students will communicate professionally in email with the professors, as they would in an employment situation in the future. This means that your email will begin with an appropriate salutation, will use official language in a polite tone, will be succinct and to the point and end with an appropriate greeting. If you articulate a problem in your email, please suggest at least one possible solution for approval. The professors reserve the right to not answer emails which do not respect the proper professional format suggested above.

Assessment

1. Series of 3 Concept Maps: 10%
Concept Maps must be completed in class, and handed in immediately after the exercise, directly to the instructors, on Week 2, Week 8 and Week 14. This process will be explained in class. The series of Concept Maps will be assessed for growing breadth, depth and complexity of understanding.
2. Conceptual Frameworks Presentation: 15%
Working in small groups students will present a synopsis of one learning or interpretive theory – with specific examples of how that theory is reflected in museum practice. In addition to an in-class presentation, the groups will prepare a 3 page synopsis covering key concepts, key contributors, impact on/utility in museology, limitations and a short (5-7 item) bibliography. Due Week 3.
3. Annotated Label 10%
In class, students will critique the provided label, identifying key concepts and relevant issues. Students will submit both the annotation and a revised label of approximately 80 words, written at the grade 8 level. Due Week 6.

4. Exhibition Critique Assignment 20%

Using an exhibition of their choosing, students will write a critical review outlining the successful and unsuccessful elements of that exhibition, and assigning it an overall grade. The paper is to include a short (1/2 page) description of the visitor experience, the inferred Big idea, and the relative success of strategies and vehicles utilized to engage visitors in the content. Contact with the host institution to understand intention is recommended but not required. As always, student opinions and observations should connect to theoretical frameworks. Approximately 4 pages in length. Due Week 8.

5. Interpretive Plan and Presentation: 30%

Students will choose a gallery at the ROM that they think could do a better job of engaging with its visitors. Students will identify a gallery, outline why it was chosen including identifying opportunities and limitations. Using the content and objects in the gallery, students are expected to prepare a full interpretive plan that includes, a definition of the target audience, goals, visitor outcomes and big idea for the gallery. Students are expected to include a thematic map and a fleshed out interpretive plan that details what visitors will see, do and experience in the updated gallery. In addition students will write 2 pages of the theoretical underpinnings that support their plan's decisions. Students will submit the Interpretive Plan they have developed, with an accompanying theoretical rationale in Week 11. Students will be assessed on both the integrity of their plan, and their justification. (Worth 25%) in Week 12 Students will present their plans in small groups to classmates who will offer input and questions. A one page summary of that discussion and subsequent changes to the original plan will be submitted in Week 13. (5%)

6. Class participation: 15%

Marks for class participation will be awarded to students who come to class prepared (that is, having read and grappled with the assigned texts) and who engage with both the topic at hand and with their classmates in a supportive, yet self-consciously critical manner.

Late Submissions: Late assignments will be graded with a penalty one grade point per week (for example from A to A-). Extensions without penalty will only be granted in cases of a medical condition or emergencies, upon prior consultation. If you are requesting an extension for medical reasons, you need to let the professor know as soon as you become aware of your situation via email, AND submit proper paperwork from a medical professional. If this is the case we will determine an appropriate timeline for your work. Extensions for reason only than medical (i.e. family emergency, etc.) must be discussed with the instructor directly (NOT via email) before the assignment deadline. NO extensions will be granted after the due date of the assignment.

Writing Support

As stated in the iSchool's Grade Interpretation Guidelines, "work that is not well written and grammatically correct will not generally be considered eligible for a grade in the A range, regardless of its quality in other respects". With this in mind, please make use of the writing support provided to graduate students by the SGS Office of English Language and Writing Support (<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/English-Language-and-Writing-Support.aspx>). The services are designed to target the needs of both native and non-native speakers and all programs are free. Please consult the current workshop schedule (<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Current-Years-Courses.aspx>) for more information.

Academic integrity

Please consult the University's site on Academic Integrity (<http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>). The iSchool has a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism as defined in section B.I.1.(d) of the University's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>). You should acquaint yourself with the Code. Please review the material in Cite it Right and if you require further

clarification, consult the site How Not to Plagiarize (<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>). Cite it Right covers relevant parts of the U of T *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (1995)*. It is expected that all iSchool students take the Cite it Right workshop and the online quiz. Completion of the online Cite it Right quiz should be made prior to the second week of classes. To review and complete the workshop, visit the orientation portion of the iSkills site: uoft.me/iskills

Accommodations

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or a health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Accessibility Services Office (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>) as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let them and I know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Format of Sessions: Sessions will include interactive lectures, case studies, student presentations, discussion of readings, guest lectures, small group work, and individual reflection. The class meets for a 2.5 hour period without a break – and will have the format of a seminar. Professors will be available for 30 minutes post class to answer questions and offer advice. Students should plan to spend on average of 10 hours weekly outside of class time in order to conduct the readings and work on assignments for this course.

The final date to drop full-year and winter session half (S) courses without academic penalty: Feb. 27, 2017

Detailed Syllabus

The following is a proposed course outline of the course content. Modifications may be made as the course proceeds.

Week 1: January 9th

The class will be used for two main purposes: First, to give an overview of the format and key themes of the course, and for a discussion of what students hope to derive from the course, so these elements can be incorporated the course. Secondly, an introduction to the utility of Falk's Motivational Identity Theory in Interpretive Planning will be given.

Suggested Readings:

1. Falk, J. H. (2006). An identity-centered approach to understanding museum learning. *Curator: The Museum Journal* 49 (2). (pp.151–166).
2. Black, G. (2012). *Transforming museums in the twenty-first century. (pp.1-6)*. New York: Routledge.
3. *The Theory Underlying Concept Maps and How to Construct and Use Them*

Week 2: January 16th

This class examines the foundations of Interpretation and Meaning-making and will begin to build a shared vocabulary and understanding interpretive planning in the field. In this class students will also be an assigned a learning framework for next week's presentations. In class assignment: First Concept Map completed in class.

Required Readings:

1. Meszaros, C. (2008). Un/Familiar. In J. Koke & M. Adams, *Institution Wide Interpretive Planning Journal of Museum Education* 33:3, Fall 2008, (pp. 239-246).
2. Wells, M., Butler, B., and Koke J. (2013) *Interpretive Planning for Museums: Integrating Visitor Perspectives in Decision making*. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA. Chapter 2: Conceptual Foundations (25-36)

3. Nielsen, J. K. (2015). The Relevant Museum: Defining Relevance in Museological Practices. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 30(5): 364-78
4. Nina Simon (2016). The Art of Relevance. (pp 27-47)
5. O'Neill, M. (2006). Essentialism, adaptation and justice: Towards a new epistemology of museums. *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21 95-116.
6. <https://museumquestions.com/2014/08/20/what-is-engagement-and-when-is-it-meaningful/>
7. *The Exhibitionist* (Fall 1999 issue) Articles by Jay Rounds and George Hein. Available at: <http://name-aam.org/resources/exhibitionist/back-issues-and-online-archive>

Suggested Additional Readings

8. Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1999). Education, communication and interpretation: Towards a critical pedagogy in museums. In E. Hooper-Greenhill, *The educational role of the museum* (p. 3-27). London: Routledge
9. Simon, N (2011). <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter4/>
10. Fritsch, J. (2011). "Education is a department isn't it?" In J. Fritsch (Ed.) *Museum gallery interpretation and material culture*. (pp.235-245). London: Routledge

Week 3: January 23rd

This class focuses on the learning frameworks that were assigned in week 2. In order to create shared vocabulary and understandings of Interpretive and learning theories, students will present a 10 minutes presentation on one Learning Model that covers key concepts of the model, key contributors, theory in practice, limitations and a short bibliography. The presentation will be accompanied by a 3 page, single spaced document that covers the same information for distribution. Students need to be cursorily familiar with all of these models, and have at least 2 frameworks they are very familiar with. All future assignments will require foundations in a theory base.

Frameworks to be covered:

- Tilden Freeman - Interpretation
- Philosophical Hermeneutics - Gadamer
- Schema - Barlett
- Jean Piaget – Developmental Approach
- Malcolm Knowles - Self-Directed Adult Learning
- Lev Vygotsky – Social Learning
- Falk and Dierking - Contextual Model of Learning,
- Howard Gardner - Multiple Intelligences
- Constructivism – Johassen, Hein
- Experiential Learning (4H model, etc. Applied experiential models)
- Dewey -
- Critical Multicultural Education
- Positive Youth Development - Pittman and Yohalem
- Flow – Czyksentmyhali

Required Reading: "The Nature of the Beast: The Museum Encounters Critical Theory" Chapter Three of [Beauty and the Beast: Museums and Interpretation](#), Shiralee Hudson, 2003 MMst Thesis paper.

Week 4: January 30th

This week will introduce students to the importance and function of defining goals and outcomes in the interpretive plans. In addition, students will discuss the use and limitations of various intellectual frameworks and practices of

interpretive planning such as defining and writing a ‘Big idea’, the British Museum Gateway Objects approach, and the Smithsonian museums’ IPOP framework.

Required Readings:

1. Serrell, B. (2015). Exhibit labels: An interpretive approach (pp. 8-18). Walnut Creek: Altamira Press
2. Pekarik, A. J (et al). (2014). IPOP: A theory of experience preference. Curator Vol 57: 1 January 2014, (pp. 5-27).
3. Wells, M., Butler, B., & Koke, J. (Eds.). (2013). Interpretive planning for museums: Integrating visitor perspectives in decision making (pp. 51-70). Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
4. AAMD 2008 *Introduction to Logic Models*
5. Stark, D, Slack, S & Edwards, C. (2011). An evaluation of object centred approaches to interpretation at the British Museum. In J. Fritsch (Ed.) *Museum gallery interpretation and material culture*. (pp.153-164). London: Routledge
6. Sample Interpretive Plans:
J.M. Basquiat: Now’s the Time (2015) art Gallery of Ontario
<http://resource.aaslh.org/view/sample-interpretative-plan/>
[http://smithtrail.net/files/CAJO Interpretive draft.pdf](http://smithtrail.net/files/CAJO_Interpretive_draft.pdf)
<http://creative.fwdp.co.uk/pdfs/fwdp-lullingstone-interpretation-plan.pdf>
http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_003298.pdf

Week 5 – February 6

This week students will visit the ROM and identify the collection gallery for which you will be developing an interpretive plan for your final assignment. In addition, you will complete an activity for which we expect you to visit the ROM and find examples of a range of interpretive vehicles. The information you gather as part of your work will be used as the basis for the following weeks in class discussion.

Required Reading

Nina Simon (2011). *The Participatory Museum* <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter4/>

Week 6: February 13th

This week students will discuss the range of interpretive vehicles that were identified while visiting the ROM. This week will also explore exhibition text in greater depth and will include a close review of exhibition labels.

In class label assignment: Label review

Overview of assignment 3: Exhibition critique

Required Readings:

1. Reconceptualising Museum Audiences: Power, Activity and Responsibility in Visitor Studies, Visitor Studies, 2010, 13(2) 130-144.
2. Serrell, B. (2015). Exhibit labels: An interpretive approach (pp. 86-96 & pp. 205-229). Walnut Creek: Altamira Press
3. Kelly, L. (2013). Learning in 140 characters: The Future of museum learning in a digital age. Paper presented at Museums and the Web Asia, December, 2013. (pp. 1-10).
4. Burnham, R & Kee, E. K (2011). Teaching in the art museum: Interpretation as experience. (pp. 59-65 & 79 – 93). Getty Publications.
5. Howes, D. (2014) Introduction to Sensory Museology, *The Senses and Society*, 9:3, 259-267
6. Simon, N (2011). *The Participatory Museum*
7. <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter1/>
8. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/04/arts/design/review-diego-ivera-and-frid-kahlo-in-detroit.html?> and director response (provided)

9. Mann, Laura and Grace Tung. "A new look at an old friend: Reevaluating the Met's audio-guide service." MW2015: Museums and the Web 2015. Published February 1, 2015.

Suggested Readings

Various Selections from Exhibition Spring 2016 available at: <http://name-aam.org/resources/exhibitionist/back-issues-and-online-archive>

Week 7: February 20 - No Class Reading Week

Week 8: February 27th

This week will focus on the role of interpretive planning and the interpretive planner when dealing with difficult, sensitive or political material.

This week's class will be held at the AGO and will include guest speakers.

Required reading:

1. Mears, H & Modest, W. (2013). *Museums, African collections and social justice*. In (Eds) R. Sandell & E. Nightingale. *Museums, equality and social justice*. (pp. 294-300). New York: Routledge
2. Intro The Heart of Africa (ROM)
http://www.columbia.edu/itc/anthropology/schildkrout/6353/client_edit/week11/schildkrout.pdf
3. Torture and punishment at the Tower of London
<http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/publications/prisoners-punishment-and-torture>
4. Phillips, R. (2011). *Modes of Inclusion: Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario*. (pp 253-276).

Suggested Readings:

Various Readings from Fall 2008 Exhibitionist Journal *The Unexhibitable*. Available at: <http://name-aam.org/resources/exhibitionist/back-issues-and-online-archive>

Week 9: March 6th

New models of exhibition planning invite in the audience as part of the planning, design and implementation. This class will explore the continuum of shared authority and examine different ways that a museum can share its space with its audience in the shaping of content and narrative.

Guest speaker: TBA

Required Readings:

1. Koke, J. and Ryan, K. (2017) *From Consultation to Collaboration*. In Villeneuve P. and Love, A. (Eds.) *Visitor-Centered Exhibitions and Edu-Curation in Art Museums*. (45-54) Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. (Chapter provided).
2. Various Selections from Exhibitionist, Fall 2009 available at: <http://name-aam.org/resources/exhibitionist/back-issues-and-online-archive>
3. McLean, M. and Pollock, W. eds. *Visitor Voices in Museum Exhibitions*. ASTC, 2007.

Week 10: March 13th

This week will look closely at strategies for digital engagement and explore some of the best examples in the field. This class will help you to determine when to use digital and when an analog strategy works best and prepare you to answer - why can't we just put that on an app? The second half of the class will focus on the development of institutional wide plans that focus on shaping impacts for an organisation.

Small groups will be assigned for next week's presentations.

Required Reading:

1. Kelly, L. (2013). Learning in 140 characters: The future of museum learning in a digital age. Paper presented at museums and the Web Asia, December 2013. (pp 1-10).
2. <http://best-of-3.blogspot.ca/2016/05/wcmt-acquittal-draft-digital-innovation.html>
3. Koke, J. (2008) Comprehensive Interpretive Plans: The next Step in visitor Centered and Business Success? In Journal of Museum Education 33(3) 247-253.
 1. Adams, M. and Koke, J. (2008) Comprehensive Interpretive Plans: A Framework of Questions. In Journal of Museum Education 33(3) 293-299.
 2. Korn, R. (2007) The Case for Holistic Intentionality. Curator 50(2) 255-264 available at: http://www.randikorn.com/docs/the_case%20for_holistic_intentionality_042007.pdf
 4. <https://museums.novascotia.ca/about-nsm/interpretive-master-plan>

Suggested Reading:

http://digitalengagementframework.com/digenfra3/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Digital_engagement_in_culture_heritage_and_the_arts.pdf

Week 11: March 20th

Individual Interpretive Plans due (see Assignments).

Required Readings:

Guest lecturers: "Where plans and reality meet: Planning for success." Utopian planning, while an instructive exercise, is not practical. How are well developed and grounded plans affected by budgets, schedules, personalities and shifting markets? How are these spaces negotiated and resolved? Can we plan for the unexpected and political?

Required Readings:

1. Czajkowski, J and Hudson, S. (2008) Transformation and Interpretation: What is the Museum Educator's Role? In Koke, J and Adams, M., *Institution Wide Interpretive Planning* Journal of Museum Education 33:3, Fall 2008, pp 255-265.

Week 12: March 27th

In practice, interpretive planning is done in collaboration with other internal stakeholders. To reflect this, students will present Interpretive Plans with handouts to small groups of classmates. After a 5 minute presentation with handout, other group members will discuss their response to that plan (10 minutes) to identify strengths and weaknesses/omissions, and how the plan might be strengthened. Students will assume role of curator, exhibition designer, membership and marketing staff. One student acts as timekeeper.

Week 13: April 3rd

This week is being left open to respond to issues and topics that emerge from our conversations and your interests.

Assignment: Final concept map to be created and collected in class.