

# Syllabus<sup>1</sup>

## MSL 2370H Museums and Cultural Heritage: Context and Critical Issues

Mondays, 9 am – 12 noon, Bissell 538

Instructor	Costis Dallas	
Office	Bissell 636	
Phone	(416) 978-7097	
Email	<a href="mailto:costis.dallas@utoronto.ca">costis.dallas@utoronto.ca</a>	
Office Hours	Mondays 12 - 2 pm or by appointment	
TAs	<b>Sandrena Raymond</b>	<b>Lindsay Small</b>
Office	Bissell 705, desk 9	
Email	<a href="mailto:sandrena.raymond@mail.utoronto.ca">sandrena.raymond@mail.utoronto.ca</a>	<a href="mailto:lindsay.small@mail.utoronto.ca">lindsay.small@mail.utoronto.ca</a>

### Course Description

This course provides students with an introductory overview of critical issues faced by the museum and cultural heritage sectors. Students will be exposed to a wide range of themes and concepts that constitute and shape the past and present of the field. Museums, art galleries, memorials, national parks, historic sites, among other examples of cultural heritage, will be examined in light of philosophical issues and evolving political, social, economic and cultural contexts.

### Learning objectives

By participating in this course, students will:

- Develop their historical understanding of museums and cultural institutions,
- increase their familiarity with current issues in the field of museum studies and the museum profession,
- enhance their research skills and capacity, as graduate students, to critically engage with and analyze issues in their field, and

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<sup>1</sup> This syllabus is based, with some modifications, on Prof. Cara Krmpotich's 2015 syllabus for the course.

- be inspired by the possibilities and challenges within museums, cultural institutions and society.

These objectives relate to the program's overarching objectives:

- To contribute to the museum profession's evolving body of knowledge,
- to foster a comprehensive understanding of cultural institutions as comprised of people, ideas, materials and values, and
- to actively engage with the iSchool, University of Toronto, and communities and cultural institutions in the Greater Toronto Area.

## Student outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will have awareness and applied understanding of:

- the history of museums, and the centrality of representation within their social and political roles in societies,
- ethical issues facing cultural institutions, agencies, and professionals.

Students will also be better able to:

- advocate for the importance of cultural institutions in society,
- communicate effectively by integrating content, form and media to achieve desired goals.

## Course Structure

We will meet for three hours each week. Classes will include lectures, tutorials involving seminar discussions, group activities, guest speakers, and we will endeavour to connect with current events and opportunities as they arise.

## Expectations

- Students are expected to critically read assigned materials before the start of class.
- Active listening – to classmates, the instructor, guests and the TA – is central to graduate learning.
- Handing work in on-time becomes habit-forming and is a necessary professional skill.
- Value your time in the classroom: single-task, be in the moment, learn something new every day, ask questions, engage your classmates.
- The instructor and TA will also be active listeners, inside and outside the classroom.
- We will respect and make the most of our time with you – to inspire you, to guide and advance conversations and learning, to provide constructive feedback in a timely manner. We will value being in the classroom with you, and our opportunity to learn with you.
- We will welcome diverse perspectives.
- We will challenge you to push yourself further.

## Evaluation

Description and due time	Weight
<b>E1. Participation:</b> in class and with our colleagues/publics, plus regular and substantial contribution to the course's online forum	<b>20%</b>
<b>E2. Critical Issues Investigation</b> Phase 1: Monday, January 23 Phase 2: Monday, March 13	<b>40%</b>
<b>E3. Research Paper</b> Monday, April 10	<b>40%</b>

### E1. Participation

In this course, participation includes your activities within the classroom, your contribution to the course's online forum, and also your engagement and participation with the museum profession, museum studies, and publics. Attendance will be monitored, and active, constructive participation will be acknowledged (and, ideally, rewarded) in your final grade.

You will be expected to contribute regularly on class topics, activities, and questions by posting to the course's online forum at <https://msl2370.slack.com>. Your posts will draw from your study of readings, but also from your actual field experiences, as well as from current news stories or blog posts from professional organizations, reputable news sources, prominent individuals in relevant fields, or institutions in the field of museums and cultural heritage.

Through your participation, you should show 1) ability to identify and represent important issues and questions related to the history, theory and practice of museums and cultural heritage, 2) an informed, critical and balanced engagement with the perspective(s) and ideas of others. Your posts may draw upon scholarly literature, refer to current or past exhibitions or programs, make connections to parallel cases or contexts, or engage with ideas contributed by other students. Take advantage of hyperlinks to provide context. Keep your posts succinct, informative and civil, and use reason and evidence to substantiate your arguments.

**You are expected to contribute often, and at the very least once per week**, and thus to demonstrate your regular engagement with a wide range of topics discussed at the course. Both the frequency and the quality of your contributions will be assessed. This is an exercise in developing and articulating your ideas and "voice" on critical issues to museums and cultural heritage, an essential skill for future museum professionals.

## E2. Critical Issues Investigation

This assignment requires you to visit institutions and understand how the “critical issues” *represented* in museums are not necessarily the same as the critical issues *facing* museums. This assignment encourages you to investigate the ways museums present critical issues (social, environmental, political, financial, spiritual) to their publics. It also gives you a chance to re-visit an initial assessment of a space or presentation, and refine your analysis of a situation. This assignment therefore happens in two phases across the course.

### Phase 1

You will visit a cultural institution of your choice (i.e. art gallery, historic house, community museum, aquarium) before Week 3 of term. Hint: a small- to mid-sized institution will make this task more manageable.

Look for critical issues facing society explicitly and/or implicitly represented at the site. What issues do they address? In what formats (i.e. temporary exhibition, permanent exhibition, artist intervention, evening lecture, family weekend activity, podcast, on-line catalogue records)? Were there any surprising omissions?

Try to understand why each institution has chosen to represent particular critical issues, in the way that they do. Identify the potential benefits *and risks* of approaching those critical issues. Think about the space, publics, funders, institutional status, formats, goals/objectives, resources, and history of the institution.

In your informed opinion, how successful is the institution at incorporating critical issues into their institution?

Reports should be **750 to 1000 words, including references** (which are likely to be minimal at this point!). Reports should be submitted via Blackboard as .doc, .docx, .odt, or .pdf files.

Comments will be provided to students on phase 1 that give you a clear sense of the report's strengths and areas for improvement. No grade will be assigned at this point.

### Phase 2

Revisit your site before week 10. Has anything changed at the site? Have you changed in the ways you are able to “see” or “read” the site? In what ways can you extend, nuance and contextualize your assessment of the site from Phase 1? Are there existing models or cases that could be drawn upon to improve things at the site?

Reports should be **1500 to 2000 words, including references**. Use course readings, relevant blogs, and/or additional literature to support your analysis of the sites. Reports should be submitted via Blackboard as .doc, .docx, .odt, or .pdf files, by 11:59 pm.

Comments and grades will be provided for phase 2. Comments and grades will reflect clear and concise communication, intellectual rigour, analytical growth from phase 1 to phase 2, and intellectual risk-taking.

### E3. Research Paper

*Research is one of the joys of life!!* And, in contrast to a blog post, this is a sustained piece of research and writing that allows you to go in-depth into an issue and push and pull the limits of your own knowledge and existing perspectives on an issue. It should be, ultimately, rewarding to you as a museum studies scholar and growing professional.

Choose an issue or question exploring a historical facet of museum development *or* a critical issue *facing* cultural institutions currently that you want to know more about.

Explore and critically assess primary and secondary evidence related to the issue or question. Work inductively to develop a thesis that helps your reader understand the history or critical issue. Craft a research paper that supports your thesis (including countering opposing interpretations as needed) by presenting and synthesizing evidence in your own voice.

It is **strongly recommended** that students make an appointment with the TA or the instructor to help clarify “the big picture” or context in which their research sits; to identify a reasonable strategy to focus their investigation as needed; and to receive suggestions for additional resources and/or approaches that are likely to be of assistance.

Papers should be double-spaced, properly referenced following the style in the journal *Museum Management and Curatorship*, and **2,500-3,000 words, excluding references**. Papers should be submitted via Blackboard as .doc, .docx, .odt, or .pdf files by 11:59 pm.

Comments and grades will reflect clear and concise communication, intellectual rigour, sound analysis, and intellectual risk-taking.

## Course Policies

### Attendance

Regular on-time attendance in class is an important part of this course. If you miss class it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from your fellow students.

### Evaluation

Please consult the iSchool's Grade Interpretation Guidelines (<http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/grade-interpretation>) and the University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/grading.pdf>). These documents will form the basis for grading in the course.

### Late assignments

A penalty of 2% per day will be imposed on every assignment if it is not handed in by the due date. Papers that are still outstanding 5 days after the due date will not be accepted. Extensions without penalty will only be granted to individual assignments in cases of legitimate illness or

emergencies. Such extensions will not be granted for requests made on or after the due date for the assignment. This policy is to ensure fairness to all students.

### **Extensions beyond the end of term**

Extensions beyond the term in which the course is taken are subject to guidelines established by the School of Graduate Studies (SGS). Please see:

<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/current/policies/coursework.asp>. “The authority to grant an extension for the completion of work in a course beyond the original SGS deadline for that course rests with the graduate unit in which the course was offered, not the instructor of the course.” Students must petition the graduate unit for extensions, using the SGS Extension to Complete Coursework form:

<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/Documents/Extension+to+Complete+Coursework.pdf>.

### **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>).

### **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.

### **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.