Public History Practice
By arrangement and permission of the instructor
Professor Charlene Mires

This course offers the opportunity to gain knowledge of local and regional history while contributing to a public history project based at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities (MARCH) at Rutgers-Camden. The options include historic house research and curatorship for the Cooper Street Historic District and research and digital publishing for *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia.*

Students in this experiential learning course will contribute to ongoing projects that include previous work by undergraduate students, graduate students, public historians, and other scholars. Students will be provided with individualized training and ongoing supervision and feedback while working approximately six hours per week on their selected projects.

Learning Goals

Students will:

- Add to their knowledge of the history of Camden, Philadelphia, and the surrounding region, in the context of broader patterns of urban and U.S. history.
- Learn to do research using electronic databases, published scholarship, and primary source documents (texts, visuals, and artifacts).
- Learn to use digital tools appropriate to their selected projects, for example the WordPress digital publishing platform or the Omeka digital archive and exhibits platform.
- Practice and improve writing and oral communication skills.
- Become acquainted with the field of public history and its career opportunities.
- Become acquainted with local historic sites and archives.
- Learn laws and regulations that apply to public history projects, for example copyright law and criteria of the National Register of Historic Places.

Outcomes

Students who work on Cooper Street Historic District projects will be paired with a house occupied by a Rutgers office or department and produce one or more of the following, which will become part of the ongoing research and interpretation of the district:
- Data collection and a research paper about the house and its occupants.
- An artifact study of an original feature of the house.
- A thematic tour of the house and/or its neighborhood.
- A hallway exhibit and/or online exhibit about the house and its occupants.
- Interpretive media (signage, brochures, or websites) to communicate the history of the house and its occupants to the public.

Students who work on *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia* projects will produce pages for the encyclopedia's website, each including the following:

- Fact-checking a peer-reviewed essay (independently verifying a scholar's research).
- Locating and securing permission for illustrations to accompany the essay.
- Doing research and writing texts (up to 500 words each) to accompany the illustrations.
- Building the page on the encyclopedia's WordPress publishing platform.
- Identifying related digital resources held by historic sites, museums, archives, and other websites around the region and adding links to the essay page.
- Identifying related current events covered by WHYY NewsWorks and adding links to the essay page.
- Geocoding the page and creating links to place it in context of the encyclopedia's major subject categories, themes, and time periods.

Assessment

Students will receive ongoing feedback on project milestones through conferences and, in the case of written work, editing. Through learning journals, blogs, or social media reporting, they also will chart and reflect on their experiences on a weekly basis and at the end of the project.

A	(4.0)	Outstanding: Work is acceptable inclusion in the larger project.
B+	(3.5)	
B	(3.0)	Good: Work is acceptable in substance but requires minor editing or minor assistance for completion.
C+	(2.5)	
C	(2.0)	Satisfactory: Despite good effort, project has significant deficiencies that prevent inclusion in the larger project.
D	(1.0)	Poor: Incomplete project and/or serious patterns of error in research or writing.
F	(0.0)	Failing: Incomplete project, serious patterns of error in research or writing, *and* excessive absence from agreed-upon work schedule or dishonesty that places the integrity of the larger project at risk.

Project Option I: Cooper Street Historic District

Reading:
Dorwart, *Camden County, New Jersey: The Making of Metropolitan Community*
Hamer, *History in Urban Places: Historic Districts in the United States*
Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture*
Additional readings as relevant to selected projects, available on Sakai

Tentative schedule:

Week 1	Discuss interests and goals for project; tour Cooper Street Historic District.	
Week 2	Meet with project partner (faculty or staff in Cooper Street house); develop project plan and schedule.	Read Dorwart, *Camden County, New Jersey.*
Week 3	Training and practice: Historic District documentation and research sources.	Read selections in Hamer, *History in Urban Places.*
Week 4	Training and practice: Architecture and material culture methods and sources.	Read *Ames*, Death in the Dining Room.
Weeks 5-10	Project research and related reading.	Weekly: journal reflection on progress and learning.
Week 11	Milestone: Project draft; progress report to project partner.	
Week 12-13	Training and practice: Revision and/or creation of interpretive media.	
Week 14	Presentation of work to project partner.	Concluding assessment conference.

Project Option II: *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*

Reading:
Simon, *Philadelphia: A Brief History*
Selections from *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*
Articles about urban encyclopedias in *The Public Historian*

Tentative schedule:

Week 1	Discuss interests and goals for project; select essay topic for use in training.	Read *Public Historian* articles about urban encyclopedias.
Week 2	Training and practice: Scholarly research process; databases and other sources for fact-checking.	Read Simon, *Philadelphia.* Weekly: journal reflection on progress and learning.
Week 3	Practice: Fact-checking.	Weekly: journal reflection on progress and learning.

		Submit results of fact-checking for review.
Week 4	Training and practice: Digital archives and copyright law pertaining to use of digital images.	
Week 5	Practice: Locate up to six illustrations for training essay. Training: Research and writing for image gallery captions (up to 500 words each).	
Weeks 6-7	Research and write image gallery captions.	Submit captions for review and editing.
Week 8	Training and practice: How to build new pages on WordPress publishing platform for *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia.* Build page.	
Week 9	Training and practice: Creating a hub for regional resources. Add links and geocoding to page.	Submit finished page for review prior to publication.
Weeks 10-14	Repeat process for additional essay topics (a minimum of one additional topic page or more as time permits).	Concluding assessment conference.

Additional project options may be made available in future semesters.