

History 3810A
Introduction to Public History: Putting History to Work in the World
Fall 2025
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Office Hours: TBA

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace in September for a final version.



Image: Overlaid London Streetscape

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Course Description

This course is an introduction to Public History- or the diverse ways in which history is put to work in the world! Public History is a museum exhibit at the ROM, an *Assassin's Creed* video game, an episode of *Bridgerton*, the movie *Oppenheimer*, *Maus* the graphic novel, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, a walking tour of London's Labatt Memorial Park, a heritage plaque, history podcast, and family stories shared by your nan and pop! It is history experienced by everyone, for history is all around us, and there are many different ways to share it. Public History involves understanding the various means in which people engage with the past and learning how to communicate the past to larger audiences through a variety of tools, including objects, exhibits, film, oral history, digital media, comics, games, plays, and historic sites.

In this course, students will become acquainted with the wide range of skills, experiences and careers possible in public history through assignments, guest speakers, workshops and site visits. It is a required course for those enrolled in the Public History Minor, excellent preparation for graduate work in history, and/or an exciting way to exercise your love for history!

This is a draft outline. 2025-26 version. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Prerequisite(s): Registration in third year or above, any module.

Antirequisite(s): History 3813E

Course Learning Outcomes

By the conclusion of the course, students should have:

- a sense of the origin, theory and growth of the public history field,
- an awareness of the main issues and challenges faced by public historians,
- a familiarity with the variety of tools and media used by public historians, including archival materials, digital technologies, film and oral history,
- first-hand experience working with material culture objects,
- an ability to examine and critically assess various forms of historical media,
- the capability of delivering a short presentation of their work to their peers,
- demonstrated critical thinking and writing skills,
- the experience of working in small groups on a public history community project,
- visited several local public history-related sites,
- made contacts with public history professionals and institutions,
- an understanding of the primary career avenues for practicing public history.

Course Materials

There is one textbook for the course, **freely available** to be read online through Western Libraries (student login and password required):

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=6940543&pq-origsite=primo>

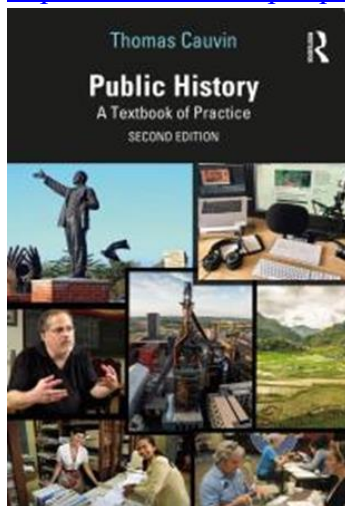


Image: Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*. Second Edition (Taylor & Francis, 2022).

Additional readings, consisting of book chapters, articles, and videos, will be accessible through the course website on OWL Brightspace.

Methods of Evaluation

This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

RCRM Object Study	20%	Due Online by 11:59pm EST Monday, 06 Oct.
‘Me in 3’ Exhibit Presentation	15%	Due Online by 11:59pm EST Friday, 17 Oct.
Participation	25%	Weeks #1 to #12
Group Project Proposal	10%	Due Online by 11:59pm EST Monday, 10 Nov.
Group Project Final Project	30%	Due Online by 11:59pm EST Tuesday, 09 Dec.

The **RCRM (Royal Canadian Regiment Museum) Object Study** (1,000 words) will require students to choose an object from a specified section of its second-floor gallery and justify why they believe it to be representative of the story being shared with the viewing public. The class scheduled for Monday, September 22nd will take place at the RCRM (located at Caserne Wolseley Barracks, 701 Oxford St. East), where students will receive an orientation to the museum and career options in museums before taking a guided ‘behind-the-scenes’ tour of the Collections Storage facilities, followed by time in the gallery in which to begin the assignment. More information about this assignment will be provided on Owl Brightspace.

The **‘Me in 3’ Exhibit Presentation** is designed to allow students to be the curator of an exhibit about their own lives. Each student will record their own story in three minutes using three objects of their choosing. Students will also be required to comment on a minimum number of their colleagues’ presentations in the discussion forum. More information about this assignment will be provided on Owl Brightspace.

Because public interaction is a key element to practicing public history, scheduled weekly classes will often take the form of a combined lecture-seminar format. **Participation** in discussions is essential to a quality learning experience. Students are expected to regularly contribute informed and thoughtful opinions on assigned readings. To better prepare students for each discussion, several questions relating to the readings will be posted on the course website. Students are expected to be attentive, make comments, and ask questions, especially to guest speakers and hosts of our site visits. Students are also invited to share their personal stories and news of any recent events that relate to a particular week’s topic. To help students better gauge their performance, a participation update and suggestions for improvement will be given prior to their return to classes after the Fall Reading Week.

Community collaboration and working in groups are important features in public history work, and these skills are particularly valued by employers and admissions committees for graduate and professional programs. The **Group Project** is designed to provide students with such prized skills and experiences. Students will be placed in groups of three (3) to develop a local historical walking tour. All groups will submit a group contract and initial proposal, as well as a final project. More information about the group project will be provided on Owl Brightspace.

Policy for Late Assignments: Any accommodation for the group project will require supporting documentation from each group member. Students must complete all assignments to pass this course and are expected to attend all classes (including site visits), complete weekly readings, and participate in class discussions. Late assignments will be deducted 5% for the first day, followed by 2% each day (including weekends and holidays) thereafter.

Students should also inform themselves of the processes and policies set out by Social Science Academic Advising on [Absence & Academic Consideration](#), the university's policies on [Academic Consideration for Medical Illness](#), and the Department of History's own [Undergraduate Policies and Statements](#).

Class Schedule & Readings

Week:

#1 September 08 Introduction: "What is Public History?"

Readings:

Cauvin, TBD

TBD

#2 September 15 Museums & Historic Sites: How to 'Read' Objects & Sites

Readings:

Cauvin, TBD

TBD

#3 September 22 **SITE VISIT**: RCRM (Caserne Wolseley Barracks, 701 Oxford St. East)

Readings:

TBD

#4 September 29 **SITE VISIT**: Material Culture Workshop (Medical Artifact Collection)

Readings:

TBD

#5 October 06 **SITE VISIT**: Western Archives (D.B. Weldon Library)

Readings:

TBD

Note: The RCRM assignment is due online by 11:59pm EST Monday, Oct. 06

October 13 **Thanksgiving: No Classes!**

Note: The 'Me in 3' exhibit presentation is due online by 11:59pm EST, Friday, Oct. 17

#6 October 20 **SITE VISIT**: Museum of Ontario Archaeology (1600 Attawandaron Rd.)

Readings:

TBD

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#7 October 27 Family & Community History

Readings:

Cauvin, TBD

TBD

November 03 **Fall Study Break: No Classes!**

#8 November 10 Heritage Conservation & Tourism

Readings:

Cauvin, TBD

TBD

Note: Group Contracts & Project Proposals are due online by 11:59pm EST, Monday, Nov. 10

#9 November 17 Popular History: Comics, Games & Novels

Readings:

Cauvin, TBD

TBD

#10 November 24 Digital Public History

Readings:

Cauvin, TBD

TBD

#11 December 01 Film & Documentary (Guest Speaker TBD)

Readings:

Cauvin, TBD

TBD

#12 December 08 Careers in Public History (Guest Speaking Panel TBD)

Readings:

TBD

Note: Final Group Projects are due online by 11:59pm EST, Tuesday, Dec. 09

Additional Statements

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI):

You may use generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course for activities such as researching and refining your ideas or drafting an outline to organize your thoughts—but not for generating prose. All writing submitted in this course must be your own. If in doubt, please ask me for clarification and advice.

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Communication:

The best ways to stay in touch over the course of the term is via my UWO email address or in person before or after class or during my weekly office hours, details of which will be shared through the final version of the draft syllabus on OWL Brightspace. We can also set up a zoom meeting if necessary. I hope this will be an enjoyable experience for you. Please let me know as soon as possible if you are having issues or concerns and we will work towards finding a solution. Thank you for enrolling in this course. See you soon!

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.