

Museum Studies Standard Course List

version October 16, 2020

CMST 6101 - Museum Management

No matter what position you hold in a museum, you'll be a manager. You might manage a project, develop policies and procedures, supervise staff or volunteers, manage a department, or even direct a museum. A skilled manager can create a more productive workplace, effectively use limited resources, and meaningfully impact visitors and the community. Through this interactive course, you will develop a holistic view of a museum's purpose, governance, finances, staff, audiences, and strategy and feel more confident serving as a manager and leader within a museum no matter your responsibility or position. This course relies heavily on large and small group discussions, case studies, research and readings, workshops and exercises, guest speakers, and online activities and resources. These varied experiences will help you think critically about the management of museums throughout your professional career.

CMST 6102 – Museum Financial Management (not offered every year)

Designed for non-accountants, this course focuses on the management of finances in typical museums including financial planning and analysis, budgeting, financial reporting, presentation, internal controls, and leadership. These varied experiences will help students increase their financial literacy and become more confident in managing the finances of departments and museums. This course relies heavily on large and small group discussions, research and readings, workshops and exercises, writing and peer review, and online activities and resources

CMST 6104 - Managing People and Projects

Dealing with people is an area consistently mentioned as a major challenge for museum managers. Students study organizational behavior theory, the methods of building a motivated and skilled staff, and focus on the team process. Project management systems are taught including developing scope, schedule and budget, team dynamics, resource leveling, and working within a matrix environment. The role of the project manager is emphasized along with tools for managing change and negotiating conflict. Case studies are presented by practitioners working in museums today.

CMST 6105 – Museum Fundraising (not offered every year)

Fundraising is an increasingly important skill of today's museum professional. From the director to the curator, to the educator, to the development specialist, everyone may be called in from time to time to participate in the development effort. This course will cover the basics in fundraising today including sources of funds, best practices and approaches, annual funds and capital campaigns, and the internal management of the fundraising effort. Student work will include donor research, grant writing and a museum project.

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CMST 6106 - Museum Marketing

Marketing may be one of the most misunderstood terms in the museum field. Sometimes it's dismissed as a manipulative sales technique disguised as advertising, other times it's the missing secret ingredient that promises to transform the organization. In this course, we'll view marketing as an intentional approach to create mutually beneficial relationships between museums and their participants, supporters, and influencers in an increasingly complex environment. The theories and skills you'll develop in this course will help you create exhibitions, school programs, collections access, and fundraising appeals that strategically retain existing audiences and attract new ones. This course relies heavily on large and small group discussions, research and readings, workshops and exercises, writing and peer review, and online activities and resources. These varied experiences will help you think critically about marketing in museums throughout your professional career.

CMST 6107 – Museum Ethics and Values

Ethical questions museums face in practical, political, and institutional contexts, including governance and funding, collecting and preservation, exhibiting culture, and education and public programs. Students will analyze and evaluate current professional standards for museum ethics; research and analyze current and emerging ethical issues in museums; trace major movements in the development of museum ethics and values in the United States; evaluate important museum theorists in the area of ethics; think and write critically about museum ethics; and discuss and analyze theoretical critique that might inform – and improve -- future practice.

CMST 6109 – Museum Governance

Good governance with an informed diverse board and an effective board-staff partnership are central to the success of every museum. As a basic component of the museum professional's experience, everyone from the director, to the curator, to the educator, to the collections manager, to museum management, will have the responsibility of working with members of the board through special projects, their museum departments and trustee committees. To ensure the success of these experiences, strong working relationships between board and staff and an understanding of respective roles and responsibilities will be essential. This course will cover the role and responsibilities of the board and the elements of a successful staff-board partnership. Case studies from the museum community and guest speakers will exemplify these topics. (formerly CMST 6601: Special Topics)

CMST 6201 – Introduction to Collections Management

This class will serve as an introduction to creating, controlling, and protecting collections. We will look at the fundamentals of collections care (collections plans and policies, accessions, deaccessioning, loans, access, and the physical protection of museum objects) as well as legal and ethical issues related to collecting and collections management. Because guidelines to best practices run up against contingencies 'on the ground,' case studies will introduce students to challenges encountered in museum practice.

CMST 6202 - Collections Management: Practical Applications

This class focuses on the implementation of collections policies and procedures: establishing and managing collections, management procedures and systems, documentation of collections, records preservation, collections access and storage, handling, packing and shipping, and inventory control. This is the second-semester, applied class for 6201. Prerequisite- CMST 6201 – Introduction to Collections Management is required for this class.

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CMST 6203 – Preventive Conservation Concepts

Examines the role of preventive conservation in museums by introducing materials commonly found in collections, the causes of their deterioration and the resources available to identify and mitigate collection risks. Students will learn how to handle objects, how to record object conditions in written and photographic formats, how to choose a conservator, how to test materials for use with museum collections, how to perform a qualitative assessment, and to understand the ethics that govern conservation. (Cross-listed with departments of Anthropology and Fine Arts.)

CMST 6204 - Preventive Conservation Techniques

Builds upon topics introduced in the Preventive Conservation Concepts course with emphasis placed on practical exercises and ethical issues. Students will learn how to evaluate and monitor collections, how to prepare a grant for collections care, and how to develop and implement policies and procedures to facilitate collections care. **Prerequisite-CMST 6203 Preventative Conservation Concepts (or its cross-listed equivalent in Fine Arts/Anthropology) is required for this class.**

CMST 6205 – Archival Practice

This course introduces museum professionals to the core ideas and practices of archivists and archival institutions. It establishes a foundation of knowledge about archival materials (their nature and uses); professional principles and practices in the management of archival materials (archival theory and functions); archival institutions (purposes, placement, operations); and the archives profession (values, organizations). It will illuminate differences and commonalities in professional values and methods of archives and museums. Students will become familiar with doing research in archives.

CMST 6206 - Digitization & Digital Asset Management

This course is designed for museum professionals who expect to manage digital assets, projects, or programs involving digitization and access. It examines current methods in the creation and dissemination of digital surrogates, associated metadata, and digital descriptive records of museum collections. By exploring the workflows and guidelines necessary to implement a successful digitization project, this course examines the aspects of maintaining and managing digital assets. Aspects of technical creation and guidelines will be addressed; digital asset management, metadata creation and use, as well as long-term preservation and access of those assets will be discussed.

CMST 6301 – Museum Exhibitions, Curatorial Practice and Planning

The class focuses on the work of curators in the selection, display and interpretation of objects for collections and in exhibitions. Sessions emphasize ethics and collecting, exhibit conceptualization and development, working with the community, the production of meaning, and the politics of exhibiting.

CMST6302 - Museum Exhibition Design

Participants will focus on translating museum exhibition concepts into specific plans, models, and specification documents in this introductory class. Different computer design and graphic programs are introduced.

CMST 6304 – Exhibition Development and Scriptwriting

Class emphasizes exhibition content and includes sessions on evaluation, team work, audience engagement, learning styles, budgeting, exhibition layering, language and best practices. Students follow an idea from conceptualization through organization to scripting---with extensive peer review. Class includes guest speakers. **Prerequisite- CMST 6301 – Museum Exhibitions, Curatorial Practice and Planning is required for this class.**

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CMST 6305 – Visitor Perspectives – Museum Evaluation in Exhibitions

Of the many components involved in exhibition development, incorporating the visitors' voice is often misunderstood, neglected, or under-used. This course will review current learning theory and visitor research related to exhibition development. Emphasis will be placed on how an understanding of the visitor experience informs the various stages of exhibition development, from concept generation, design, interpretation, and installation. Students will then put theory into practice by conducting visitor research on a local exhibition and organizing a public review of that exhibition by area museum professionals.

CMST 6306 – Race, Gender, Sexuality and Museums (This class is not offered every spring.)

Will explore the role that museums have played in the construction and reification of the categories of race (including whiteness) and gender, and the representation of the lives of women, African Americans, Native Americans, and other cultural minorities. The class will focus on museums in the United States but will include some non-US examples. We will also look at how these represented—and often unrepresented—groups have created opportunities to tell their own stories and exhibit their own cultural productions in museums such as the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Class readings and discussion will cover issues such as identity politics, feminism, essentialism, and the performance of identity in the museum setting.

CMST 6307 – Interpreting Historic Sites and House Museum

Historic sites and house museums are among the most common and most visited type of museum in the United States, but they are often have the fewest resources to provide an authentic, engaging, and meaningful experience for visitors. In this course, their interpretation will be explored from the perspective of women's history and African American history; use a wide range of unusual historical sources, such as furnishings, architecture, and maps; and introduce the theories and practices of historic research using documents, photographs, and material culture. This course relies heavily on large and small group discussions, research and readings, workshops and exercises, field trips to local collections, and online activities and resources. Research papers will focus on interpreting historic houses at various scales— from objects to architecture to neighborhood—using the Octagon as a case study. These varied experiences will help you think critically about the interpretation of house museums and historic sites throughout your professional career.

CMST 6308 - Critical Visitor Experience

As museums become increasingly visitor-focused, it is critical to understand the multiple factors that affect the whole visitor experience. What is the impact of museum architecture on the museum visit? How does the museum's shop, café, and other non-exhibit spaces inform the visitor experience? In this field-trip based course, students will utilize multiple frameworks through which to explore, observe and critique visitor-facing aspects of museum work. Note: This course will be based at institutions around the DC area. Students will need to travel to different locations depending on the week. (formerly CMST 6601: Special Topics)

CMST 6403 – Museums and Technology

In many museums, digital technologies are now a naturalized and expected presence—core to the institutional approaches to problem solving. In the post-digital museum, technology and digital media are not considered as ends in themselves, but rather, as the means that helps the museum meet its mission and goals. Technology is not neutral, however. It has its own histories, both within and outside museums that impact its adoption within the museum. Museums began using digital technologies in the 1960s, and this has affected how museums work and how they define themselves. This course will explore the relationship between museums and digital technology, considering how and why it has been incorporated into practice.

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CMST 6404 - Museums and Social Media

The introduction of Web2.0 or the ‘social web’ in the mid-2000s led to an influx of new participants in the consumption and creation of digital information. Typified by platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and blogs, the social web focused on user participation as critical in the creation of value. By lowering the technical barriers to entry, the social web made it easier for people outside formal institutions such as the press to create and publish their own work, changing the ways that people communicate and interact with one another, and with organizations and institutions. Museums continue to experiment with how best to engage in this environment to serve their missions and their audiences. In this course, students will utilize multiple online platforms to discern the affordances and complexities of social media for museums. Together, we will consider strategies, tactics, and benchmarks for measuring social media, as well as risk, privacy and publicness, and online identities (professional, personal, and institutional). Students should be prepared to be active participants in an online, multi-platform peer discourse throughout the semester.

CMST 6501 - Museum Internship

Supervised practical training in Washington area museums (or elsewhere). Internships are supervised by one or more members of the sponsoring museum staff and focus on a variety of areas including museum management, conservation, collections management, exhibition design and development. Prior approval required.

CMST 6502 - Directed Research

Individual research on special topics in the museum field working with a MSTD professor or outside museum experts. Topics must be approved in advance by MSTD.

CMST 6701 - Museum History and Theory

More often than not, museum practitioners and theorists speak at cross purposes. This course will take steps to bridge that gap. We will first explore the origins of the modern museum and the history of (mainly) American museums. Then, using U.S. and non-U.S. examples, we will engage with theorists whose ideas have been accessed to inform our understanding of museums as places of meaning making, power, empowerment, and cultural authority, and as “contact zones” (James Clifford, 1997). As the theory informs our understanding of how museums have functioned – both in the past and in more contemporary examples –we will be better prepared to engage critically with our own work as museum practitioners.

CMST 6703 - Museums and Community Engagement

Museums of all types are increasingly turning to their local communities as a primary audience for programming and support. We will study why this shift in thinking is occurring in museums and when it is an appropriate strategy. Then we will use a variety of techniques to identify and describe a local community and develop a range of methods for engagement to fulfill a museum’s mission and goals. By the end of the course, each student will be able to craft a community engagement plan that is suitable for presentation to a board or executive director.

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CMST 6601 - Special Topics: Issues Related to Collections Policy

This class will look in depth at five issues related to collections in which there is currently some debate or question as to “best practice”: deaccessioning; repatriation and restitution; provenance research; storage for culturally sensitive collections; and collections access. Each week will be devoted to one topic, with one class spent discussing readings on the issue, and one class in conversation with a professional in the field. Students will be required to write 4 short papers (one per week) reviewing the assigned readings, and one longer paper on the issue of her choice based on a case study.

CMST 6601 - Special Topics: Museums and Social Justice

In 2020, museum activists and organized publics are challenging museums to confront their colonial and racist pasts, to acknowledge the continuing effects of those origins in their exhibitions and programming, and to engage programmatically in urgent matters of racial, economic, social, and climate justice. These calls have been made before, but now, emboldened by the resurgence of and broad support for the Black Lives Matter movement, they are stronger, perhaps more integrated (or at least visible), and are meeting with more success. In addition, critics and museum employees are pushing for a reckoning with institutional labor practices and biases regarding hiring, compensation, and protections at the institutional level and in the field as a whole.

In this course, we will engage critically with museum content -- past and present -- designed to challenge the status quo, support social change, reveal and wrestle with past injustices, and attempt reconciliation and reform beyond the walls of the museum. We will look backward and to the present political moment at exhibitions, programming, engagement efforts, commissioned art installations, and other projects to contextualize the demands for a new kind of museum that eschews the pretext of neutrality to act in creative and conscious ways in the pursuit of equity and inclusion, in terms of staff, audiences, and content. For the last five weeks of the semester, we will apply the theoretical critique and historical knowledge we have gained toward the creation of projects that creatively employ the institutional history of GWU to increase awareness, spur dialogue, and perhaps even enact change..