

AmCv 0190W S01 - Displaying Activism Then and Now: Making an Exhibition for Social Justice

Spring 2011

Tuesday, Thursday, 9 – 10:20 am, J. Walter Wilson, Rm. 202

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Office Hours:

Mondays 1:30 – 3:30 pm

Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America

150 Power St. (at the corner of Hope and Power), Rm. 207

Description of the Course:

In this seminar, we will investigate the possibilities for activism through display. You will create an exhibition at the Hay Library at Brown using the Gordon Hall and Grace Hoag Collection of Dissenting and Extremist Printed Propaganda, 1926-1996. You'll also collect contemporary material in the field from local activists and special events. The exhibition will display historical and contemporary activism on issues such as queer rights, feminism, environmental concerns, immigration / migration, anti-war, and anti-imperialism. The class will make the final selection of issues we'll address. The class will break into curatorial groups by issue, and each group will be responsible for curating that part of the exhibition. You'll choose the objects that best demonstrate activist techniques to the public. In particular, each group will exhibit the way in which activists on their issue would have made their point during a critical historical moment as well as how they might make their point today.

The readings in this course will include some foundational materials on the politics and uses of display in museums as well as on the history of activism in the US. Each curatorial group will also do research on its particular topic.

Objectives for the Course:

- Students will learn to:
 - Write clearly, succinctly, and persuasively.
 - Envision an audience for their writing and curatorial work.
 - Express an idea through the arrangement of objects, texts, and other materials.
 - Look for unintended consequences of specific forms of display and writing.
 - Use the libraries and special collections at Brown to conduct research.

Goals for the Course:

- Students will communicate well in writing, visually, and orally.
- Students will be able to discuss:
 - The power of objects.
 - The potential of exhibitions to work for social justice.
 - The social construction of difference and our ability to deconstruct it and reconstruct it in productive ways.

Required Texts:

As with all classes of this kind (WRIT designation), there are 100 pages of reading per week. On very rare occasions, I have assigned slightly more reading in a given week and offset that by slightly less reading the following week. Most of the readings are available via Online Course Reserve Access (OCRA): <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/reserves/>. The password for the class is *justice*. **Please bring a hard copy of the readings in class with you so that we may do close readings together.**

In addition to the readings on OCRA, the following books are required for the course. These are available at the Brown Bookstore and are also on reserve at the library.

- Bloom, Alexander, and Wini Breines. *"Takin' it to the streets": A Sixties Reader*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2002.
- Kyvig, David E., and Myron A. Marty. *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*. 2nd ed. Altamira Press, 2000.
- Sandell, Richard. *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*. London; New York: Routledge, 2007.

Requirements, Assignments, and Grading:

Written assignments, constructive participation in class, and participation in the group project of curating and mounting an exhibition at Brown will all be part of your grade for this class. Your grade is divided into five parts (described below), each of which counts for 20% of the whole grade. The assignments mentioned below are described in detail on the attached handout. They build on each other over the course of the semester, and move us towards the final exhibition:

1. Participation (as defined by the attached rubric)
2. Production of the exhibition - This includes the following assignments:
 - Curatorial statement (1 page)
 - Collecting for the exhibition (group assignment)
 - Exhibition checklist (group assignment)
 - Sample label for the exhibition (100 words + 50 words)
 - Notes for your guided tour of the exhibition
3. Article for our electronic catalog (10 pages)
4. Final labels for the exhibition
5. Revisions of written work – This includes the following assignments:
 - Revision of sample labels into labels for the exhibition
 - Final revisions of texts for the exhibition
 - Revision of your article for the catalog

Written assignments are due **electronically** (to my email address) **and in hard copy by 5 pm on the due date**. These are not complete until I reply to your email. Hard copies should be placed in my mailbox at 82 Waterman St. Our class is creating an exhibition for another organization. The Hay will be using its resources to support our work and will be publicizing our work and the opening date. Therefore it is our responsibility to submit materials to the Hay on time and in the proper format. I will not be able to accept late work

Overview of Assignments:

- **Show and Tell – due Feb. 1**

Bring an object (or a website or a song, something you can share with the class) to class that represents your “curatorial me,” something that would be in your “musée imaginaire.” Tell us why you chose this object and what it says about you and the way you curate the content in your own life.

- **Curatorial Statement – due Feb. 13**

Write a curatorial statement for the exhibition our class will create. It should be no longer than 500-550 words (~ 1.5 double spaced pages). This is your chance to define the most important part of the project, the answer to the “so what?” question.

Describe the purpose of the exhibition, the essential knowledge that grounds it, and how the form and contents of the exhibition will meet your goals for it. You’ll find some samples of curatorial statements on MyCourses, but this is the time to dream big and make a compelling case for the way you want to see the exhibition develop. There is no right or wrong answer to this assignment. I will grade it based on the, clarity, quality and correctness of the writing and the consistency of the content.

- **Collecting Contemporary Materials**

For this assignment, you need to find **contemporary** visual material that you may use in this exhibition. You can acquire this material at events or directly from activists who created it. This material must be freely available for you to take or must be a donation from a specific individual. See the attached list of possible organizations you may contact to ask for materials. Each student should collect 6-8 pieces of visual material including digital material.

- **Exhibition Checklist – due March 9**

This is a complete list of all objects in the exhibition. You will complete it as a group assignment by posting to a Google doc. You must fill in all of the information for each object.

The objects on this list that are in the Hall Hoag Collection should, by this point, have been flagged by one of your group members so that the staff of the Hay will be able to pull them out for the exhibition. You should have clear plans to take possession of the objects from local groups soon if you have not already. They should be deposited at the Hay by **April 4th**.

- **Sample Labels – due March 16**

Draft two sample labels, a main label for the whole exhibition OR a section label for your curatorial group’s section AND a label for one of your objects. The main label may be 200 words. The section label may be 100 words and the label for the object may be 75 words. You may not go over the word limits and the labels must conform to the Hay’s standards for formatting, posted on MyCourses. Your grade will be marked down if you do not conform to the Hay’s standards.

- **Final Exhibition Labels – due March 23**

Write a final draft of all of your labels. If you're in the group writing the main label, you need not worry about working on the label for your curatorial section. The remaining members of each curatorial section must work together to create a section label. Begin with someone's draft and use Google docs to edit it. Settle on a final version to turn in on behalf of the group. Each student is responsible for individual labels for his or her objects. Please follow the same rules as you did for the sample labels.

- **Catalog Article – due April 5th**

This is a ten page research paper for a lay audience. The topic must relate to the curatorial group you are in as well as to the objects you've been selecting and collecting for the exhibition. The writing must be clear and free of errors, but also free of jargon. You should be able to show the catalog to your friends and family and have them understand your subject and find it interesting. If you wish to discuss your topic with me, you may do so via email or during office hours **no later than March 15th**.

- **Lead a Tour**

Plan to lead a group of people on a tour of the exhibition between April 20th and April 27th. This can be any number of people, a group of friends, your family, a classroom of students (elementary, high school, college...), a team you're on. The only requirements are that you prepare to give the tour by producing some kind of written notes and that your visitors evaluate the tour and exhibition using the evaluation sheet we've created as a class. **Your notes and the completed evaluations must go into your final portfolio prior to your student / teacher conference.** Remember, as a tour leader, you need to be familiar with the work that the other curatorial groups have done as well as your own. Take time to review the complete exhibition script and spend time in the gallery as part of your preparation. Feel free to interview members of other curatorial groups for more information.

- **Evaluation, part 1**

Assemble an electronic portfolio of all of the written work you've done this semester via Google Sites (see instructional handout on MyCourses) and write a 2-3 page evaluation of your own work on the exhibition. Be specific as to what you did within your curatorial group, how you prepared to give your tour, what you did well and what you could do better next time.

- **Evaluation, part 2**

Sign up for and attend a 20 minute student / teacher conference with me. We'll discuss the portfolio you turned in to me last week.

Policies:

Rights and Responsibilities:

Above all, you have the right to be treated respectfully by all others in the classroom, including me, and you have the responsibility to do the same. Among other things, this means that I will ask you to leave for the remainder of the class if your cell phone rings or vibrates in class. Likewise, I ask that you not come to class sick, that you prepare for class, and that you not use your computer for activities unrelated to class

during our sessions. You have the right to be heard in discussion and the responsibility to participate. You have the right to discuss any academic concerns with me outside of class by email or in person and you have the responsibility to understand the work I expect of you in this course. For more on this, please see the rubrics in the folder on MyCourses entitled “What Your Grade Means.”

Academic Honesty:

All of your written work should be your own original work. Footnote anything you use from books, articles, interviews, or the Internet. Note ideas that came from other people. Failure to do so is plagiarism and may result in failing the class.

Disability Support Services:

I am committed to enabling the full participation of all of the students in this class. Students who, by nature of a documented disability, require academic accommodations should contact me by email or during office hours. Students may also speak with Disability Support Services at 401-863-9588 to discuss the process for requesting accommodations.

Finally:

My goal is for you to succeed in this course and for you to enjoy learning to think like a curator. I hope that this course will enrich your future experiences in museums and enhance your ability to communicate in writing, orally, and visually. Every group of students is different. I encourage you to share any concerns you may have about any part of this course with me as we go along and help me think of possible solutions. Likewise, if find that you have difficulty with the reading, the workload, participating in discussion, or group work, please let me know. I can help you brainstorm about your study habits and time management so that you get the most out of the time you spend on this course.