

Community Engagement Fellows Project Report

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Proposed Course: Introduction to Public History

Working as a 2016-17 Community Engagement Fellow at Western Washington University through the Center for Service Learning was an engaging and productive experience. Through the program, I made valuable connections with community members who collectively helped me to refine and think critically about my project. Travis Tennesen's work with our group, in particular, was instrumental in helping to have me think expansively about the project.

My project was to produce a syllabus for my third year history course, HIST 393: Introduction to Public History. I taught this course in Spring 2017, and will teach it again in Spring 2018. My first goal was to produce a syllabus that included a mix of theoretical approaches, practical application, and community engagement. I wanted to draft a syllabus that reflects these three elements in a balanced and meaningful way that provides students with both theoretical background and practical skills to develop their work as public historians. As a cultural historian, I have a firm grasp of the scholarly works and approaches to the study of public history. However, I wanted to produce a syllabus that focused on students' engagement with public history spaces in and around Bellingham. I wanted to ensure that class assignments allowed students to engage with community spaces in a way that allowed them to develop their work as public historians. As someone who is relatively new to the area, my second goal was to make connections with community members who would be able to suggest different public history sites that I was not familiar with.

As a result of input from other Community Engagement Fellows, I was able to develop a wonderful list of local public history sites that served as the basis for several class assignments. This included the City of Bellingham's Self-Guided Tours, the Washington State Rural heritage Site (hosted by the Washington State Library),

and the Bellingham Sin and Gin Tour. One assignment required students to engage with and offer a critique of the site. This also required the students to think critically about what “silences” exist in these public history sites, and to propose a public history project that, in some way or another, attempts to address these “silences.” Overall, the goal of these assignments was to challenge students to engage with different ways of seeing their community, and to engage with a wide range of public history landscapes. Many of my 22 students enrolled in HIST 393 this quarter engaged with these local public history sites that, for some, have become the basis for their major research papers in the course.

Overall, the Community Engagement Fellowship Program allowed me to make connections both within the Bellingham community and with other faculty members at Western who helped me to move my project forward and to bring in different components to my work.