Expected Outcomes: General Historical Knowledge

Graduates of the MA program with a public history certificate will exhibit general historical knowledge and an ability to conduct historical research, writing, and interpretation.

Assessment methods

Method: Thesis Defense

Students in the public history track must take at least two courses not focused on public history theory and practice, including courses related to American, European, or Latin American history, and the history of technology. In writing and defending their master's thesis, students will demonstrate an ability to draw on these fields in conjunction with their original research project.

Findings:

In the 2011-2012 academic year, two students graduated from the MA program with a public history certificate. Both students exhibited general historical knowledge and produced original M.A. theses. One student defended her thesis at the end of Spring term and another during Summer term, with both graduating during the summer. There is no sense that summer completion is a result of the lack of general historical knowledge, or an inability to conduct historical research, writing, and interpretation, but instead due to the timing of the degree completion requirements for Spring semester. Rather than defending their thesis early in the spring semester to meet degree conferral requirements, students greatly benefit from a full semester working on the thesis.

How did you use findings for improvement?

We expect students to defend their thesis no later than the summer concluding their second academic year, although it is preferred that they defend in the spring. To address the issue of time to completion and the Graduate Committee recommendation that Public History students enroll in two or more non-Public History courses, the public history program officer has directed incoming and current students to select appropriate non-public history graduate seminars early in their graduate careers. Additionally, the program manager continues to work with students during their first year to develop an appropriate research agenda for the thesis and currently enrolled students have embarked on thesis-related research during their first year in the program.

Additional comments:

None

Expected Outcomes: Public History Knowledge

Graduates of the M.A. and PhD programs whose goal is to pursue a public history career will exhibit a strong knowledge of the theory of public history and the practice of public history professions, including attention to issues of shared authority, collaborative work environments, stakeholder interests, and intellectual command of historical content.

Assessment methods
Method: Thesis Defense

Students in the MA program specializing in public history must write a thesis. The examining committee assesses both the written thesis and specific knowledge in public history theory and practice at the time of the final (oral) examination of the candidate and his/her thesis.

Findings:

During the 2011-2012 academic year, both MA students who graduated with public history certificates demonstrated exceptionally strong knowledge of the theories and practice of public history in their written thesis and oral defense.

How did you use findings for improvement?

In order to further consider how well students are initially connecting public history theory and practice from coursework into their thesis, public history students submit a thesis prospectus at the beginning of the third semester articulating research questions, methodology, and research plans for their thesis. The public history program has a standardized introductory (Fundamentals) course for all students specializing in this area and the public history program officer has either chaired or served on the committee of all students with a public history specialization. This may account for the consistent performance of students on knowledge assessed by this measure. For now, with the small numbers of students involved, it is possible for the public history program officer to discuss student strengths and weaknesses with the archival and graduate program officers.

Additional comments:

None

Expected Outcomes: Applied Public History Knowledge

Recognizing that public history is both scholarly and service-oriented, students in the public history program will complete an educational internship experience that requires significant work product. Interns will learn how to effectively function in a public history field setting that encourages collaboration and teamwork, apply the theories and skills they have learned to real-world environments, demonstrate an ability to explain the ethical issues and range of knowledge and skills required of public history professionals, and begin building a network with public history professionals.

Assessment methods

Method: Internship Sponsor Report and Student Project/Repo

Internship sponsors will provide a report to the public history program coordinator detailing student’s work and progress that will be considered along with the student’s final report and project.

Findings:

Four students completed public history internships during the 2011-2012 year and received exceptional ratings from their sponsoring agencies, the Alabama Historical Commission’s Old Cahawba, Alabama Power, Legacy Museum on Main/Troup County Archives, and the City of Montgomery Historic Preservation Coordinator. With the exception of the last internship, which was not done for credit, each student has submitted or will submit a final report and completed a project as part of their internship.

How did you use findings for improvement?

The goal of the internship is to help students apply knowledge in public settings and prepare
for work after graduation. Receiving a clear description of intern responsibilities prior to the internship, feedback from the internship sites, and site visits have helped the program officer provide some standardization to the internship experience while also allowing some flexibility to meet the needs of sponsoring institutions. The program continues to expand its network of sites to help provide students practical experience and an expanded professional network.

Additional comments:

None

Expected Outcomes: Public History Placement

Graduates of the public history program (MA, PhD, and certificate) who are pursuing a public history career will be highly competitive in the job market.

Assessment methods

Method: Public History Placement Survey

Survey graduates with a field in public history and those who completed the certificate in public history and are seeking a job in a public history field to determine what percentage are successfully employed within three years of completion of degree.

Findings:

The public history program remains relatively new. Information will continue to be gathered in the upcoming years from program graduates. Generally, students seeking a public history position should be successful within 3 years and advance beyond their initial appointment. Recent graduates who focused in public history are working at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (where the student is also completing an MLIS at University of North Texas), the Alabama Labor Archives and History, and as the Curator of Education at the Oklahoma History Center. One student is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Southern Mississippi with an emphasis in oral history. Another student who completed a PhD dissertation with an emphasis in public history in 2010 is now an assistant professor at the University of Virginia’s College at Wise focusing on public history.

How did you use findings for improvement?

One of the key program goals is to provide students with the necessary training to succeed in a variety of public history settings. The sample size for placement currently remains small, but as it grows, we can use it to draw useful conclusions about professional development opportunities, adjustment of program requirements, and training for graduate students. In an extremely tight job market and competitive applications for academic programs the fact that students are finding placements is important to note.

Additional comments:

None