Public History Curriculum: Illustrating Reflective Practice

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Public history curricula must prepare students for a reflective approach to public historical practice and introduce students to different models of practice. By teaching reflective practice techniques through concrete components assembled in linked course assignments, internships, and capstone projects, programs educate students to become history practitioners. A distinct, robust body of public historical knowledge and reflective practice constitutes a public history degree. Public history programs, as professionally oriented programs, prepare students in the high-order practice of the discipline, grounded in reflective practice techniques appropriate to applied history.

Public History as Reflective Practice

After twenty-five years of public history programs developed ad hoc, it is time to reconceptualize them. Today’s public history curriculum must aggressively prepare graduates in applied practice and conceptual approaches appropriate to the types of questions asked of practitioners and to the settings of their practice.

One conceptual approach essential to public history is reflective practice. Every new project, every engagement with new clients, every alliance with a new institution requires a re-examination of basic principles and issues. Therefore, programs that educate future public historians must include such practices in the curriculum, and educators must routinely model reflective
practice. Beyond basic historical understanding and an array of ways to communicate historical knowledge, public history requires as its foundation sound habits of thinking about and rethinking intellectual, practical, and moral issues.

This article argues that public history curricula must identify specific requirements that prepare students for this approach to public historical practice. Teaching reflective practice techniques throughout the curriculum distinguishes public history from traditional fields. Programs initially acquaint students with the historiography of the discipline—the conceptual frameworks historians rely on to articulate research questions—then define their public history approach and illustrate how those frameworks become lenses for explanation and analysis in reports, exhibits, site interpretive programs, and so on. They incorporate a variety of illustrative assignments in which students learn how public historians accomplish their work outside the academy, eschewing academy-based applications. Furthermore, public history programs introduce students to different models of practice through courses and projects. Above all, programs present the concept of reflective practice and its techniques through concrete components assembled in structured, linked, and integrated course assignments, internships, and capstone requirements such as a substantial final project, thesis, or dissertation. Thus, a public history degree provides a distinct, robust body of public historical knowledge and reflective practice, in contrast to the traditional history degree which provides enrichment study, preparation for the professoriate, or training for the secondary classroom. Traditional disciplinary contexts of a graduate curriculum are reset within a public history curriculum. Public history programs, as professionally oriented programs, prepare students in the high-order practice of the discipline, grounded in reflective practice techniques appropriate to applied history.

The Ad Hoc Era

In disciplinary forums outside history, discussion thrived about applied disciplinary practice beyond the academy, particularly, how to engage theory in addressing problems in real-world practice. That literature, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, set out a framework for a theoretical approach and suggested what graduate programs might do to prepare professionals as public practitioners. That conversation, however, failed to penetrate historical literature and influence the preparation of historians. Thus, though new programs in the 1980s built on the foundations of earlier applied programs, public history educators faced a dilemma: how to create a “public history” curriculum. Rather than specific courses on archival practice, historic preservation, cultural resource management, or museology, the core of the new programs included courses with a “public history” label. Public history courses demanded definition to enable them to function parallel to traditional courses offered in
geographic, political, and thematic subfields that were defined conceptually in a traditional historiography.¹

Furthermore, while courses on museums, archives, or historic preservation based their work on a separate, ever-enlarging stream of literature, no robust set of growing literature existed to define the “public” history field. In The Public Historian’s first issue in 1978, G. Wesley Johnson’s “Editor’s Preface” and Robert Kelley’s strong lead article (“Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects”) positioned “public history” as a distinct new field. Johnson argued that the field derived “from a different set of presumptions. It assumes that historical skills and method are needed now outside of the academy.” In public history lay an avenue to incorporate new “endeavors . . . essential for relating historical skills to the larger society.” Johnson believed that debating whether this was basic or applied research ignored the relevant issue: “training historians to do ‘applied’ research is clearly one of the facets of Public History.” Public historians have to “learn to conceptualize and create topics with categories suggested by their sponsoring agency or employer.”²

Kelley introduced public history as “the employment of historians and the historical method outside of academia: in government, private corporations, the media, historical societies and museums, even in private practice.” He proposed a larger role for the historian: bringing to bear a “genetic cast of mind; that is, one which assumes that we do not understand something until we dig out its origins, its subsequent development, and its causal antecedents.” He advocated the larger role of the discipline beyond the “academic community, where it has been put to use on matters far distant in time . . . [where it] produce[d] things which are interesting, which are essential to the human spirit, but which are not immediately useful.” Any relation to the world beyond academe was seemingly restricted to very narrow applications, e.g., to foreign policy, a “fundamental misconception which must be swept away. The historical method of analysis . . . is essential in every kind of immediate, practical situation.” He articulated the mission-oriented nature of research agendas for public historians that differentiated them from traditional modes of work. “In Public History, the historian answers questions posed by others . . . as a consultant, a professional, a member of the staff.” Though Kelley sharply defined the public historian’s sphere lying outside academe, he also wrote: “When academic historians perform professionally in this way, they are practicing the role of public historians.”³ This last point leaves the reader uncomfortably conclud-

¹ Work outside the discipline included studies being undertaken by Donald Schön, for example, and Chris Argyris on the work of practitioners dealing with theory applications outside academe. The 1979 founding of the National Council on Public History (NCPH) and the Society for History in the Federal Government (SHFG) marked the opening of a decade-long effort to shape a new curriculum and establish new programs.
² G. Wesley Johnson, “Editor’s Preface,” The Public Historian 1, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 4, 6, 8.
ing that public history begs to be defined in larger conceptual terms if where it is practiced is less important than how it is practiced, that is, how historically based research questions are approached “in every kind of immediate, practical situation.”

The not-so-subtle challenge laid down by Johnson and Kelley to define public historical practice failed to yield a literature. Meanwhile, the worlds of archives, historic preservation, museums, and even oral history enjoyed strongly defined professional organizations which developed the theoretical base of their particular literatures. They shaped discussions about training, defining good practices, and offering guidance on ethical questions.4

No parallel sustained effort defined intellectual frameworks on the practice of “public” history. What came closest were several meetings of humanists to address the applied humanities. There, humanists addressed the dimensions of applied practice across the humanities disciplines, a conversation largely ignored elsewhere. Policy issues, applications of theory in the real world, and litigation-based research, for example, were the focus of discussions broached by practitioners with Ph.D.s in philosophy, literature, history, and so on. Philosophers, for example, discussed the application of ethics in hosp-

4. The American Association of Museums (AAM, founded 1905), Society of American Archivists (SAA, 1936), American Association for State and Local History (AASLH, 1940), National Trust for Historic Preservation (1949), and Oral History Association (OHA, 1966) supported a robust “public history” practice. In contrast, the mainline disciplinary associations, the American Historical Association (AHA) and Organization of American Historians (OAH), lagged in promoting a vigorous public history conversation, except for articles in their newsletters. Only in the last three to four years has the AHA directly confronted that dilemma through its Task Force on Public History which produced a lengthy report that was enthusiastically embraced by the AHA Council and staff; the longstanding OAH Committee on Public History early on developed a small set of pioneering public history pamphlets exploring areas of practice, but these were not sustained. Columns in both association newsletters have done far more than their annual meetings or journals to engage public history discussions and to address professional issues.

Some associations like SAA steadily developed new ideas about practice and more narrowly carved out a niche area. SAA steadily differentiated archival practice, eventually founding and experimenting with an academy and establishing certification. This work paralleled in time the emerging public history movement. AASLH likewise maintained longstanding strong well-defined programs, for instance, a professional workshop series as well as professional publications (its practice-oriented magazine History News, newsletter Dispatch, technical leaflets, and books). AAM continued to be the major force in the interdisciplinary museum community with a full array of programs, including training workshops and strong expanding publications list and major magazine. SAA and AASLH joined with the OAH and AHA to help fund and nurture the newly established National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History in the early 1980s. Advocacy for history became an important agenda item as well in these years. The Oral History Association, founded in 1966, emerged alongside these older organizations with a sharply defined agenda of workshops, practice-oriented as well as theoretically driven annual meetings, and a journal that in part reflected the growing interest in the public historical work.

Within the very large professional associations (e.g., AAM and SAA), affinity groups or subgroups sharpen that focus even more. Professional workshops held at annual meetings as well as at other times during the year complement association publications and affinity group newsletters and group meetings within annual meetings addressing issues related to good professional practice. Annual conferences incorporate more practice-oriented opportunities and activities for members. In addition, SAA provides rigorous, substantive curriculum support for archives, AAM for museums, and AASLH for history-based offices, organizations, and museums.
tals to clarify in a rigorous, dispassionate way critical issues facing staff and families at times of patient crisis, or in the arms industry to the application of theory to building military weaponry. Still other humanists explored issues related to the application of their discipline-based knowledge to public policy.5

The academy’s dwindling job market compelled people to reach out for the first time to practitioners and ask them to explore the intellectual connections of their work to the applied side of discipline-based knowledge and how they linked the knowledge base of their discipline to workaday situations. These “found” historians, who worked throughout public agencies at the local, state, and federal levels and in nonprofit organizations, had solid credentials and longstanding records of service.6

Articles in *The Public Historian* and elsewhere demonstrated that practitioners focused on how questions raised from real-world situations and contexts compelled better analysis by using a disciplinary lens or how retrospective studies of decisionmaking might capture contemporary history in a substantive, critical fashion.7 Yet we learned more about where someone practiced and what topics and issues they addressed than about how they conceived and practiced their work. No rich discussion emerged about how applied issues compared to those embedded in historical practice emanating from the academy.8

5. The National Federation of Humanities Councils, a sponsor, published some conference remarks in its newsletter. In other cases a book of essays appeared (e.g., see note 8 that follows). Familiar names from academe in the area of applied history participated: Peter Stearns, then at Carnegie Mellon University’s applied history program; Otis Graham, then at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where a business policy program was linking historians and uses of history to the business school; and Fred Nicklason from the University of Maryland, who was a well-known consulting scholar with American Indian tribes and specialist on federal Indian policy. At these meetings humanists described their work outside academe.

6. Indeed, in 1978, the first issue of *The Public Historian* presented articles by distinguished historians long at work outside the academy: David Trask, Richard Hewlett, and David Clary. Subsequent issues kept bringing more such information to the fore. Identifying the broad range of historians at work outside academe through articles about them or based on their work had a positive effect. It shifted the focus of discussion away from saying that historians beyond the academy produced publications similar to academic monographs but for employers outside academe (e.g., the defense establishment, energy department, or corporations), or from assuming that public historians served merely as occasional consultants to assist public agencies or nonprofits in analyzing particular policy problems.


8. One particular point-counterpoint presentation yielded published essays illustrating where the conversation might have gone: Daniel Callahan, Arthur L. Caplan, and Bruce Jennings, eds., *Applying the Humanities* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985). Peter Stearns (“Applied History: Policy Roles and Standards for Historians,” 221–46) argued that the applied approach more precisely and more deftly dealt with questions by employing a history-based lens to applied research projects. He identified key elements in the work of applied historians: analogy, evaluation, paradigms, trend assessment, and context. He differentiated between how applied history and conventional history treated similar subject matter. Otis Graham (“Intellectual Standards in the Humanities,” 261–70) responded in a substantive critique of Stearns’ key elements, puzzling over
As the conversation withered, we excised the word “applied” as pejorative and adopted “public,” even more indefinite. “Public” increasingly became linked to revealing the public’s history or people’s history, about giving voice and agency to public- or community-based groups, about sharing authority in the practice of the discipline in public settings with individuals or groups, about civic engagement by members of the academy if they momentarily venture outside the academy, and about public programming. “Public” came to mean generically history-based, conventional work in specific venues outside the academy or with a particular group or in civic engagement.9 The impetus to comprehend the contribution of professional practice to research, distinct from a basic research practice, collapsed.10

What historical literature ignored was discussion about applied practice and the professional practices of practitioners in other disciplines as they debated applying theory in real-world situations. That professional literature of the 1970s and 1980s failed to influence the developing applied history movement or the new field of public history. No body of literature discussed what constituted substantive “public” history practice or how to conceptualize the work of the public history practitioner. Issues of the applied side of the discipline remained unexplored and uncritiqued in their own right.11


10. At one point an effort blossomed momentarily within NCPH to create panels at professional meetings of NCPH, AHA, and OAH to illustrate the value of public practice and its contribution to new directions in the discipline. That too just faded away because, though based on a strong, substantive idea, it lacked a field-oriented approach and structured intellectual framework to define and organize the effort.

11. Still, some would suggest otherwise. Some historians have grappled with the basic question of how the preparation of historians and the practice of the discipline should differ for the applied world. Rebecca Conard set out such an approach by studying the early twentieth century work of Benjamin Shambaugh in Iowa with a subtitle that suggestively nudges us to consider the point: The Intellectual Foundations of Public History (University of Iowa Press, 2002). Her discussion set out not only to understand the work of Shambaugh but also to consider the practice across the twentieth century. She concludes, though, that defining “public” history remains off the agenda.
In these circumstances, public history educators shape a practice-based curriculum, preparing skilled graduates to enter the practice in career paths outside the academy. Students learn the traditional dimensions of the discipline through rigorous content-based courses, while hybrid courses introduce a different literature, provide an expanded historical skill set, and present applications of the discipline in different settings of the practice. Furthermore, public history educators address what their traditionally oriented colleagues do not: the dimensions of the culture/history wars, applications of the discipline in exhibit preparation, public programming with a state humanities council or state archives, the role of cultural institutions within a community and justification of their programming and support, creation of a commemorative plan to mark an upcoming community or state anniversary, ownership of the interpretation of a site, or the choice of voice(s) to be heard in an exhibit. They must embrace this world of contested history, the everyday setting of the public historian.

The applied approach demands a structured practice because it is grounded in settings requiring the linkage of practice, skill sets, and sharply defined mental frameworks that bring the intellect of the historian into situations that are often indeterminate and lacking coherence. There, the practitioner introduces disciplinary intellectual frameworks, recasting questions as intellectual problems within a framework analytically designed to give direction and purpose and to create an orderly construct. A historian fully engaged in this type of practice must be reflexive and reflective. Therefore, definitions of public history based in venue-driven historical practice or as history primarily bringing different public voices to the fore must be suspended if we are to understand the preparation of historians as reflective practitioners.

Conceptualizing Public History Practice

We must reconsider how to conceptualize public history programs. Public history programs function as hybrids, preparing students as a professionally defined academic program would: to be high-order practitioners of the discipline’s knowledge base and historiography, able to draw on that theory and disciplinary knowledge and apply it to the intellectual problems of practice-oriented situations. Public history practitioners embrace practice-oriented work, applying history-based thinking in a wide range of professional arenas where the expert-scholar in history is unlikely to be the audience but where the ranges of audiences will stretch from experts in other fields to community-based groups or professions based in agencies or nonprofits. This professional-based practice approach broadens our perspective of what a public history program must do: it must include preparation for history-based prac-

12. Stearns, “Applied History,” 232, used the words “conventional history” to distinguish applied practice from traditionally based work.
tice responding to the questions raised in public agencies, foundations, museums, historic sites, consulting research firms, corporate settings, public historical offices within the government, and so on. Public historians as reflective practitioners in these settings must be prepared to bring their historically based thinking and skills to bear on questions and work assignments defined within settings characterized by colleagues trained in a variety of disciplines and with whom they must work collaboratively.\(^\text{13}\)

Adopting a professionally defined attitude toward public historical practice requires us to conceive the practice differently. It encourages us to introduce new notions about how to conceptualize the theory underpinning and guiding the work of the history practitioner. The history practitioner exercises enormous control over the delivery of the discipline, ranging from what to add to the permanent collections in archives or museums, to what to preserve as the historical landscape, which themes to emphasize in exhibits under development, interpretation strategies at historic sites, preparing reports within confidential settings, and determining what questions to pursue in shaping oral histories. Some of this work is driven by collaborative working groups, some by public policy guidelines, and some by public agency responsibilities (e.g., stewardship of parks or collections in a historical museum or a museum’s library and archive). In this public practice, the historian exercises considerable power and authority over what to include or exclude, especially if only one historian represents the discipline in such settings. Programs must teach public history students about this power and how to engage the production of history on the basis of strong ethical values.

Preparing historians in the reflective practice of their discipline differentiates the work of a public history curriculum from that which prepares traditionally focused graduates. Teaching reflective practice is a primary focus in public history curricula. Reflective practice is the key factor that separates public history practitioners from their traditionally prepared peers.

Programs and courses constructed around this practitioner-oriented node form the context of a public history program. Arguing that good historical training prepares students equally well for careers in the academy or in public historical practice wrongly frames discussion. We must recast the point: the approach to historical questions separates how the discipline responds in different settings and sets the course of applying discipline-based ideas, methods, and theories. Public history practice fully engages the definition of

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\(^{13}\) To make the contrast: traditionally based programs prepare graduates in a conventional academic degree format, that is, in research practices drawn from and honed in carefully considered historiographically based courses and research-paper driven seminars whose expectations are that graduates will produce articles or monographs for journals whose audiences are the scholar-experts in the field. Their applied practice will primarily engage student audiences in the classroom. In terms of career paths, this academe-oriented preparation presumes research-driven practice and teaching-based settings appropriate for doctoral degree graduates entering positions in the academy or at the master’s level for graduates entering positions in the community college or secondary education.
history as inquiry in shaping responses to intellectual problems driven in large measure by meeting audience-based needs. It does not matter whether it is an audience of one (e.g., a client or firm) or thousands (an exhibit or major public anniversary event). The engagement of the discipline at that point of contact—at those margins of the discipline where it bumps up against other disciplines, other disciplinary-based theories and practices, audiences of experts or experts from a mix of disciplinary backgrounds, or inexpert audiences—is the distinguishing factor. That is, public history practice turns at the point the questions raised create a problem-definition that requires an explanation based in historical thinking.

We should work to conceptualize that public history practice. We can draw from ideas posited by Donald Schön as well as those of Nicolas Maxwell and Ernest Lynton. Their writing articulates a theoretical and experiential base for professional practice and a concern for the rigorous application of knowledge in public settings. Their work also addresses substantive questions about applied practice in the professions similar to our own questions about the preparation of public historians.

In the early 1980s, at the same time that public history programs emerged, Donald Schön was constructing an analysis of professional practice that examined how professionals take on the study of an ill-defined problem in what he called problem-settings outside the academy and seek to frame it in such a way as to enable a solution. Schön argued that professionals who deal with tasks of the real world link the theories and broad-based intellectual methodological practices of their discipline to the question-driven work of the professional who responds to assignments that originate with others. He defined these professionals as reflective practitioners who engage the high-order practice of their disciplines. These practitioners bring the theories, methods, and knowledge of the discipline to bear on particular problems defined in arenas beyond the academy. If historians, they do not engage history as their counterpart historians in the academy, who create and manage their own agendas, normally do. Rather, clients, supervisors, boards, agency directors, and public needs bring the questions to them for addressing. Museum staff, for example, revamp historical exhibits or undertake an oral history project in response to a board directive. Impending events—anniversaries or offers of traveling exhibits or opportunities to develop collaborative ventures—demand projects. Public historians’ skills and knowledge of the discipline will be tapped to address such matters. They will be not able to walk away from such assignments or ignore them. They confront time, budget, and resource constraints not of their own making.

Schön contends that such work engages the discipline in the swampy lowlands of practice with its many constraints, not the high ground where his-

Historical practice and theory are either easily applied or where, if problems in application arise, the historians can move on to another project of their own choosing. Instead, the historian engaged in public historical practice must stay the course, taking on a situation that is perhaps ill defined and confusing. Sorting through the mess means making sense of it in new terms, structuring order, and establishing a situation on firmer if not higher ground so that resources and historical practices can create solutions. From the available materials of the situation, the public history practitioner constructs a framework. Problematizing the situation enables a frame or frames to be hypothesized to create a construct that will work.

Nicolas Maxwell, like Schön, was alarmed that “academic inquiry devoted to the pursuit of knowledge” failed miserably to address the world’s problems and conflicts. To create a more civilized world, Maxwell called for rigorous inquiry, a problem-solving approach, and a philosophy of wisdom (rather than a philosophy of knowledge) solidly rooted in a rational (i.e., wisdom-based v. knowledge-based) approach to solving issues and problems. “We need to acknowledge the problematic aim, make it explicit, and try to improve it as we proceed.” Complex, diverse, rapidly changing, interconnected aspects of a situation can only be addressed when evidence, theory, and research aims come together in the intellectual domain to create an outcome of value. History, he suggested, can bring to contemporary reality an awareness of the relevant past as an aid to rationally tackling problems in the present.15

Ernest Lynton explored applied disciplinary approaches by analyzing case studies where scholars described their applications of disciplinary knowledge. He observed:

Knowledge is not an inert commodity to be stored like the gold in Fort Knox, or dispensed like a patent medicine. If that were the case, then the dissemination and application of new ideas and techniques could be left to technicians and technology. Knowledge is different. It is dynamic, constantly made fresh and given new shape by its interaction with reality. Its application constitutes learning for the scholar, arising out of his or her reflection on the situation-specific aspects of the act of application. No two school systems, no two businesses, no two government agencies, no two community groups are identical. While the problems they face may share some basic elements, when the specific situation of each is illuminated in the light of pertinent theories and principles, it displays special features that call for an innovative and creative response tailored to its unique circumstances.

In examining how a professional applies expertise, Lynton explicitly structured the intellectual process that distinguishes the applied approach: the expert “takes a fresh look at every task, identifies what is situation-specific in each project and therefore chooses an approach that is in some measure

different from what has been tried before, reflects on the ongoing process, makes corrections as necessary, assesses the outcome, draws appropriate inferences to inform future work. As a result each instance . . . [has] an element of discovery and originality.” As they pursue a project, professionals “identify and respond to the singular aspects of a situation . . . [then make] a reasoned choice of goals.” With that decision in hand, the expert “chooses methods that fit that objective and are consistent with available resources.” As the project continues, the professional “reflects on her or his work, observing, assessing, and making adjustments as it progresses.” Learning about the research situation may bring a realignment in goals, or if evidence and data fail to be available, then a change is required in data gathering. Thus, professionals make adjustments in conversation with the situation and reset the research problem as needed. Professionals seek to reflect on why those adjustments are “necessary: the unexpected happened or the expected did not.” Embedded in projects lies a conscious, reflective “process of inquiry and learning.” Interleaved in projects exist moments for assessment “to evaluate results, draw inferences, and gain new insights.” These reflective moments not only refine and adjust the project but also affect the outcomes shared with the relevant publics or clients. Applied scholarship from this perspective “is a habit of the mind,” not carried out as “a recurring task according to a prescribed protocol, applying standard methodologies, . . . [but] is an approach to each task as a novel situation, a voyage of exploration into the partially unknown.”16

The systematic, practice-oriented, analytical approaches advocated by Schön, Maxwell, and Lynton interrelate. Taken together, their work resonates with the practical reasoning or practical wisdom that are based in Aristotle’s concepts about practical truth. If his concepts become the lens for this discussion about practice-based issues, that discussion takes on new dimensions, because he explicitly tied practical reasoning to ethically based action.

Hava Tirosh-Samuelson summarized Aristotle’s argument about practical reasoning, addressing issues of virtue, knowledge, and well-being. Her explication of practical reasoning in relationship to virtue and ethics links to how public historians engage the public practice of the discipline. Programs must develop professional character traits in students that lead them to an ethically based practice. The final outcome of a project should achieve good in an ethical sense. Through repeated practice-oriented opportunities developed in assignments and projects incorporated within the curriculum,

16. Ernest A. Lynton, Making the Case for Professional Service (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1995), 7, 17, 25–27. Lynton pointed to the many forms that the professional application of scholarship takes: technology transfer, technical assistance, policy analysis, program evaluation, organizational development, community development, program development, professional development, expert testimony, or public testimony (p. 17). He conceived scholarly “activity as a continuum along which basic and applied research overlap and merge” when addressing specific situations (p. 25).
students learn to act ethically within concrete situations. Their developed skills must link naturally to the actions or the praxis of the discipline. Practitioner-based learning creates a “network of perceptions, reasoning, values, choices, desires, emotions, feelings, capacities, sensitivities, and actions.” The program thereby inculcates the needed habits of mind for the discipline, teaching students to be “critically reflective about . . . [their] actions.”17 They develop tool boxes of intellectual skills to engage ethically based practice.

A public history program based on this type of practice-oriented, ethically based conceptual model recruits students who bring to it a particular mind set. They are comfortable with ambiguity, have flexible minds capable of greater endurance, are intellectually agile, and are entrepreneurial. Students with this mental outlook will not be overwhelmed by the uncertainties they encounter but will have the capacity to maneuver and re-set the situation appropriately. Their confidence in practice will emerge from being prepared in a curriculum based in practical reasoning as a cognitive activity that engages their intellect, instructing them to comprehend situational complexities. They learn as developing reflective practitioners to draw on an expanding repertoire of knowledge learned in courses and linked to repeated practices incorporated into the curriculum as experientially based assignments, projects, and internships. They learn confidence in depending on their learning and knowledge, drawing on theory, constructing a logic of the situations they have before them in the curriculum or in external projects they take on, and relying on wisdom to instruct their emerging practice. Through this process they engage the complexities of the particular situations of their work and construct ethically grounded approaches for a solution.18

Thus students learn high-order skills of question asking and question framing as they refine their abilities to set and re-set a problem so that it can be shaped toward ethical ends. They realize that the outcome they fashion may follow learned approaches to common intellectual problems, or may fit outcomes within theoretical structures based in a repertoire of learned historiography and accumulated experience, or may improvise based on the dimensions of the situation, or may construct a nuanced flow of approaches drawn from a combination of improvisation, learning, experience, and theory to create the logic of a situation. A parallel practice would be the skilled musician who would draw on all of those elements to interpret and structure the performance of a complex piece of music. Because public historians recog-

18. See Tirosh-Samuelson, Happiness, 27–29. She avers that the practitioner must possess “the ability to recognize how particular circumstances fall under general categories,” and “to make intelligent decisions. . . . [Then] the . . . [practitioner] of practical wisdom . . . must rely on general principles” while “sensitive to the complexities of particular situations.” In this manner the practitioner appreciates, understands, and reflects on the complexities of particular situations, and practical wisdom leads to appropriate, ethical responses.
nize that their actions create real-world outcomes, they deliberate about actions in relation to their ends. It is here that action and ethical practice meet.

To summarize the conceptualization of public history practice: the practitioner operates abstractly; actions are based in cognition. A high degree of reflection during action occurs as a framework of historical analysis is constructed. In this process, actions and ends or outcomes are intrinsically linked. Learning, thinking, reflecting, and responding intersect as the practitioner works to establish intellectual control in a practice situation in order to create a disciplined approach that will lead to choices from which to select and determine outcomes. This framework of activity involves a stream of actions that fold in on one another, informing the practitioner through the process of reflective practice. In a team or collaborative environment, the work broadens, activities are shared, and choices are jointly negotiated. In this manner the fundamental principles of the discipline emerge from a practice that embraces learning drawn from the literature of the discipline and developed and honed originally in an experientially based curriculum. These learned principles create a coherent pattern of practice in the career paths followed by public historians who in their work must deal with and work through the tensions inherent in the concrete public practice of the discipline.

Academic public history programs teach the skills to navigate the swampy lowlands of practice, teaching how to problematize a situation in order to move forward. Students learn to draw a well-formed intellectual problem that creates intellectual order from the confusion of a situation so that the indeterminate yields a determinate situation. This does not mean finding “the answer” to the problem, but identifying a range of approaches that will yield concrete results. In practice, the messy historical topography of constituent groups, variant voices, contested history, financial constraints, limited sources, too much or too little or conflicting evidence, and so on is secured. Recent examples of the complicated, messy practice world that the public historian negotiates abound, including the Enola Gay controversy, issues surrounding the commemoration of 1492, repatriation and NAGPRA, interpreting Civil War battlefields, and interpreting the Little Big Horn battle site.

Creating a Practitioner-Oriented Program Based in Reflective Practice

Public history programs must illustrate the purpose of public history work across their curricula. Students need opportunities to experience a practitioner-oriented attitude about how the discipline functions beyond the classroom. Acquainted with the issues surrounding the production of history, they learn the power exercised in the public practice of the discipline, and the responsibilities and ethically based considerations that come with the application of the discipline in broad world practice. Programmatic requirements that sophisticate their talents, abilities, professional attitudes, and disciplinary knowledge base need to incorporate experiences with reflective practice.
Graduate work requires a public history career focus. Whereas the broad intellectual preparation of students has common characteristics, ultimately, the niche of historical practice necessitates specific preparation. Teaching-oriented work for secondary education includes a strong professionalization preparation, including instruction in pedagogy and experience in the classroom. Preparation for the professoriate includes a pattern of preparation in research, theory, the historiography of the discipline through readings courses and tutorials, seminars that prepare students to write article-length papers and chapters of theses and dissertations, participation at professional meetings to give scholarly papers and become part of association activities, preparation for and practice in collegiate-level teaching, and a capstone component that provides experience in preparing a monograph-length work.

Instruction in public history, on the one hand, ensures that students learn the intellectual dimensions of the discipline. A purposeful interweaving of traditional seminars and historiographical courses introduces disciplinary literature and explores historical arguments over time. Students become skilled researchers, learn basic historiography of their areas of specialization, and become acquainted with how to work in research materials, uncover original sources, and locate collections. On the other hand, public history students must become actively and consistently engaged in discovering and learning how to relate the thinking of the discipline to the types of topics and situations that will emerge from their practice. Specifically, how will they deal with audience issues (especially, a contested history or conflicting voices projecting from the past)? How will they handle a wide range of professional situations (e.g., from working at historic sites to museums or historical research offices)? How will they work with professionals from their own or other disciplines, particularly the latter, who will likely introduce quite different intellectual approaches?

Because public history professionals will probably change positions over their careers, their work needs to be conceptualized as an abstract cognitive process rather than the skill set for a particular venue. This instructional approach differs significantly from preparing students to enter the secondary classroom or the professoriate. Students must learn how to bring disciplinary thinking to bear on the multifarious tasks of public practice. Embedded in the core of the public history curriculum lies a concrete experiential dimension to assist students in making the transition to the broader world. This experiential facet teaches students strategic skills to link their knowledge to the variety of tasks they are likely to take up in their respective career paths. They move from learning the discipline’s knowledge base to an intellectual consideration of how that knowledge engages the discipline in the world. This experiential aspect incorporates public practice elements: the internship, a capstone project, volunteer work in a historical museum, a contract historic preservation project, or work at a historic site.

Experiential work should fold into instruction and anticipate the future work of public practice as reflective practice. How to address reflective prac-
tice as “public” history becomes a significant question. Donald Schön’s ideas about introducing reflective practice into a curriculum are especially helpful. Students learn how to be comfortable working in situations characterized by high degrees of ambiguity and where history may be contested. Those who will succeed in this work need to have flexible mind sets, be ready to develop varied skills, and be capable of sorting through conflicting views and interests as they prepare to enter work situations and develop projects where the history is contested, where no ready answers exist, and where no standard procedures may suffice—that is, ready for conditions of uncertainty.19

Simon Schama comments about the historians’ need to confront the problem of certainty in their work. Dead certainties, as he suggests, remain unwarranted speculations. Thus public history practitioners must become skilled in “forever chasing shadows.” They must deal comfortably with the “inability ever to reconstruct a dead world in its completeness, however thorough or revealing their documentation. . . . they make do with other work: the business of formulating problems, of supplying explanations about cause and effect. But . . . certainty . . . remains contingent on their unavoidable remoteness from their subjects.” The historian is left with “uncertain ends, indeterminate consequences.”20

A Washington Post writer raised this issue of indeterminateness another way. In an article entitled “Rethinking the Unthinkable” he asked: “The National Park Service is making a monument out of an old nuclear missile site. But how do you interpret history so recent it may not be over yet?”21 Dwight Pitcaithley, former chief historian for the National Park Service, recently addressed the matter of confronting contentious pasts at historic sites:

We should not shy away from controversy, but embrace it. Historic sites, if they are to say anything of importance, will not build interpretive programs around the goal of affirming assumed truths, but the goal of encouraging the visiting public to think differently about what they thought they knew about the past and about how we understand the past, how history is constructed. Some topics are controversial precisely because they are important to us as a society, and historic sites should serve as public forums for the civil discussion and exploration of those topics.22

Michel-Rolph Trouillot advances a different discussion about the troublesome nature of certainty, contested pasts, and silences. He suggests that history’s practitioners must confront silences consciously constructed into the narra-

tive. “Any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly.” Trouillot notes that “silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments,” moments (important to the discussion here) that are controlled in some measure by the public practitioner of the discipline: “the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).” His prime example: he argues that the Haitian Revolution was generally silenced in Western historiography because the “revolution was unthinkable even as it happened” (a rebellion led by astute slaves that succeeded) and that this historiographical suppression was accompanied by conscious silencing in “the production of sources, archives, and narratives.” He argues that oral tradition largely preserved the alternative construction of how the revolution emerged and who its leaders were and that this tradition must be tapped to overcome historiographically driven silences.

Thus the public history curriculum engages students in preparation for public history practice and thoroughly grounds them in a disciplinary knowledge base and in honed application skills “adequate to the complex, unstable, uncertain, and conflictual worlds of practice.” The challenge becomes designing a professionally oriented practitioner program for graduates who will enter diverse career paths, “indeterminate zones of practice,” yet who must make sense of confusing situations or work out “useful integrations of conflicting views and interests.”

To prepare to enter these “indeterminate zones,” students need to learn applied techniques focused on problem framing, implementation, and improvisation where they “build their repertoires of skills and understandings.” They need to become “adept at handling situations of uncertainty, uniqueness, and conflict.” Courses in the research and writing of the discipline build an important repertoire of monographs and other readings for the student that provide illustrations (in effect, case examples) of how historians have framed questions and pursued topics. These case examples serve as way marks for students to draw on in their later practice. Traditional courses teach how to critique this historiographical repertoire and how to relate historical literature within historiographical frameworks. Other courses as well as workshops help students learn through simulation projects incorporated into courses, in-

ternships, contract work, and volunteer work in designing projects, producing them, and adhering to the working methods and standards of the discipline. Senior practitioners as faculty, speakers, adjuncts, and intern supervisors mentor students in understanding the practice side of the discipline outside the academy. The entire process parallels musicians who practice basic scales, learn a foundational repertoire of works with teachers who surround that experience with reflective conversation about technique and interpretation, give performances early in their training before distinctly supportive audiences, build an extensive repertoire of ever more challenging works, develop and master more sophisticated techniques, and attend master classes where reflective conversation is open and of paramount importance and value.

In a public history program, students construct an intellectual framework of techniques Schön defines as reflection-in-action that enables them to probe problems; determine their shape, qualities, and elements; and apprehend their characteristics. Students become familiar with knowing-in-action, i.e., the know-how practitioners evidence in intelligent action that is spontaneous and skillfully executed in the performance of professional tasks. If skilled in this technique, they learn that research procedures follow observed clues and adhere to the values, strategies, and presumptions of value to the discipline. Knowing-in-action becomes a dynamic and structured process, eliciting conjectures that are refined through increasing awareness of a project’s resources, audiences, and purposes and appreciation of its intellectual dimensions—a process akin to what Lynton described as the protocol of applied practice. Practitioners develop in a project what Schön calls a conversation with the situation, the dynamic aspect of understanding the problems which take place in the action-present of a project as it is happening. Practitioners conclude by reflecting-on-action; this reflection becomes an active, integrated part of the analytical framework; it returns them to their repertoire of accumulated experience and to their historiographical base of knowledge. This dynamic reflective sequence leads to molding and shaping answers for the situation. It illustrates this entire procedure of reflecting-in-action and needs to be incorporated and taught through an array of assignments and projects of a curriculum.  

In creating practice situations, students need to experience what it means to think and act historically, that is, as historians. Courses set out ideas about what constitutes thinking historically. The writings of various historians used in the curriculum illustrate practice, and students should discuss the historical frameworks of analysis used in those different writings. Students must practice thinking historically for themselves. In traditionally based tracks, the seminar paper, the historiographical essay, and the thesis or dissertation provide rich examples of practice in pursuing research, summarizing arguments, or learning to develop a monograph. For public practice, this

equally important work must be recast in terms of how to focus historical skills for work in an array of settings. The many forms this work takes is daunting to anticipate, yet students need to be prepared to participate as they enter those workplaces. Thus a curriculum incorporates class projects that parallel workplace assignments to demonstrate how to think historically in a range of circumstances. Therefore, the abstract cognitive preparation for that varied work needs to be identified and incorporated into public history courses. Students must learn from an ethically based viewpoint that means and ends need to be conceived interdependently in projects, and that inquiry is a transaction with the situation in which knowing and doing become inseparable.28

In courses, completing short case studies, analyzing examples of projects (failed or successful), and working through practice-oriented materials focus on the dynamic aspects of situational practice, illustrating for students how to think historically during a project and thereby introduce practice in the reflective process. Interspersing individual and group work helps students comfortably learn to raise questions, develop an intellectual flexibility in the give and take of ideas, and sharpen their analytical techniques and presentation skills. Simulation projects help students comprehend the work of question-asking and question-framing firsthand. It is one thing to read about the importance of asking operational, well-framed questions and another actually to develop a set of questions to carry on a project and present it publicly for scrutiny, either independently or in a group.29 Exactly what it means to craft historical questions becomes clearer as students engage in project work. Through this process, students learn the protocol of developing a problem-solving approach, distinguishing between inside and outside views of a project, and matching internal expectations with the external signs of competence that other professionals look for to signal that a rigorous analytical process is in place.30 They also learn to contextualize their work within larger intellectual frameworks and link it to examples drawn from the historiography of a topic. As a result, students grasp the entire process of beginning and ending a project.31 In conventional areas of programs, the seminar paper illustrates this process, as does a completed thesis. Public history students need to see a wider range of project opportunities and conceive their particular mission as participants within larger projects. They need to undertake the development of a sophisticated knowledge of the practice early.

Programs build in reflection-in-action experiences between instructors and students through class projects. Simulation projects (e.g., developing an interpretive plan for an exhibit or a historic site) offer reflective opportunities

29. David Hackett Fischer’s Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970) contains a long section (part I) on the importance of good question framing that can be illustrated through using case studies or simulation projects.
30. Schön, Educating, 87.
for students collaboratively to propose a design and then report on and interact with the instructor as the client, supervisor, or director. Authentic projects taken on by classes for agencies offer similar opportunities for discussion among students and clients. Students learn from the instructor how to engage the situation and the client-based project. The process involves interweaving questions, instructions, advice, and criticism. A “Ladder of Reflection”—an integrated, structured process—emerges: “When telling/listening and demonstrating/imitating are combined, as they usually are, they offer a great variety of possible objects and modes of reflection that can be coordinated to fill the gaps inherent in each subprocess. Questioning, answering, advising, listening, demonstrating, observing, imitating, criticizing—all are chained together so that one intervention or response can trigger or build on another.”

In a project, as an action is completed and the process moves on to reflection, a process ladder is created. Moving up and down or laterally offers an integrated process of reflecting. It is not enough to say that such a ladder must be incorporated into a class project or piece of contract work. At the end of such an exercise, the instructor must stop and require the group to reflect on what it has just done, making evident exactly how they have been thinking historically, reflecting-in-action, and engaging this ladder protocol. They need the practice to be made evident.

The reflection-in-action process in developing a project expands student capacities by linking a work context to designing a cogent history project in conversation with peers and instructor and fitting the project into the situation in terms of resources, talent, and time. Constructing meaning out of a project, searching for an organizing metaphor, imposing discipline on a project design, and discussing this work openly become important tasks for understanding and appreciating the dimensions of the reflective process. Taken as a whole, projects become another part of the student’s repertoire and accumulated learning in the discipline, available for later use in a new project situation. For example, when parallel situations appear, students come to recognize common aspects, link them to earlier projects, and consider whether similar responses will assist in understanding their new work, through what Schön calls a “seeing-as” and “doing-as” approach. Thus project opportunities must be built into public history programs through short assignments, short or lengthy case studies, simulation projects, and actual work for clients. Public history seminar papers, theses, and dissertations offer concrete opportunities to develop such work.

In juxtaposition with one another, this network of practice opportunities forms a public history laboratory experience situated within a program. Incorporating public history practitioners as instructors, clients, workshop leaders, and project reviewers enhances this laboratory-like experience and maintains it on a disciplinary base. As beginning practitioners, students “learn to

32. Schön, Educating, 114.
conduct frame experiments in which they impose a kind of coherence on messy situations and thereby discover consequences and implications of their chosen frames. From time to time, their efforts to give order to a situation provoke unexpected outcomes—‘back talk’ that gives the situation a new meaning. They listen and reframe the problem. It is this ensemble of problem framing, on-the-spot experiment, detection of consequences and implications, back talk and response to back talk, that constitutes a reflective conversation with the materials of a situation: this “design-like” model illustrates and parallels the professional public practice of the discipline.  

Schön offers a particularly instructive model about how a teaching situation might work where the goal is teaching how to think within a disciplinary framework, pursue a project in holistic fashion, and work within the situation with an expert. The model is a master class in musical performance. A cello student and a master (Pablo Casals) worked initially on a performance. The student was required to “reproduce every detail of performance, achieving exact copies of the master’s sounds by mimicking his every procedure and gesture. . . . [The student] learned in perfect detail how to construct one performance, with its bowings, fingerings, phrasings, and emphases.” Then Casals told the student just to listen. The student commented: “he played through the piece and changed every bowing and every fingerling and every phrasing and all the emphasis within the phrase . . . a performance which was heavenly, absolutely beautiful. And when he finished, he turned to me with a broad grin on his face, and he said, ‘Now you’ve learned how to improvise in Bach. From now on, you study Bach this way.’” The lesson? At the initial stage, the task was mimicry, to learn one acceptable way to perform the piece. Once this was demonstrated in detail, the object was to expand the student’s horizon of possibilities of performance. What was learned? “Not that there are two right ways to perform the piece but that there are as many as the performer can invent and produce—each to be realized, phrase by phrase, through a precise coordination of technical means and musical effects, each to be achieved through painstaking experimentation. . . . [The master] opened up possibilities [for the student] to explore . . . through his own reflection-in-action.”

34. Schön, Educating, pp. 157–58 (italics mine). Several key features emerge: students learn to respond to the design situation when they impose an order or frame that later needs to be re-focused; similarly, as they work, they need to conceive of their entire project and think holistically about it. Imposing a discipline or structure on their work creates both desirable and undesirable results; the process opens up ideas therefore about how to shape and reshape a work to accomplish the best results. The value of laboratory-like projects and case studies stems from introducing them at the outset of a student’s work. Students learn from the outset about framing questions, sources, evidence, arguments, audiences, and resources. In a larger sense, the program itself emerges as a reflective model of activity. Schön, p. 163.

35. Schön, Educating, pp. 177–79. In like fashion, simulation projects can be pursued in classes. Instructors engage a group or student in a project which conforms to particular guidelines that must be adhered to, e.g., a client-based museum project. In the end, though, through a discussion of the outcome, the instructor can show different ways a project might be pursued with equal success. Or a class can be divided into groups with each pursuing its own outcome on the same project. Presentations at the conclusion can be used to discuss the process. Another
It is particularly important for students to learn that such a constructed, practice-oriented situation defines what high-order practice in the applied side of the discipline means. In one sense, students learn to survey and use all available relevant historiographical material at hand and draw on the theoretical base of the discipline in fashioning the research questions and setting out the research design and plan. They bring to bear those skills in research and evaluation learned in traditional research and writing courses as well as in the public history courses. At the same time, students learn the limits of developed knowledge and the edges of the discipline where original research awaits. If that original work advances the project, then they need to pursue that research vigorously as a focused project engaged in discovery. If the project does not require that, they exercise control over the project through high-order creative application of the existing knowledge of the discipline. It is important in projects to assist students in learning to differentiate how and when to rely on the existing literature in the discipline skillfully and effectively to accomplish projects and to launch new research only in the areas where it is clearly required. Making sense of messy or indeterminate situations, therefore, calls for high-order knowledge of the discipline and devising strategies to use that knowledge to impose order and design.

Public history programs have developed this protocol based on the learned experiences of the directors. Reflective practitioner approaches which exist in subtle ways in the curriculum must be made theoretically and methodologically explicit through a conscious emphasis on practice-based reflective work. The public practice of the discipline defines what public history is. Reflective practice is one key element of that practice and what “public” history implies. In the absence of a public historical literature on what “public” means, programs have gradually incorporated critical practice components into the curriculum but failed to make them explicit or to define them theoretically. One vital dimension of historical practice differentiating public historians from their colleagues in the academy is their need to engage in reflective practice in shaping projects and tapping the knowledge base of the discipline. Programs need to teach the components of reflective practice as a core facet of the curriculum.

way to do this is to have instructors bring their own work in progress to a class and discuss different designs possible to achieve the objectives of the project and to have the class develop a critique of the work. The purpose remains: students learn how to work on a single project employing different strategies within the same contextual framework to achieve a successful outcome.

It is important to build into a program’s offerings experimental moments where students learn to function under unsettled conditions. They need to develop work where no right answers exist but merely the potential to develop strategies leading to successful outcomes (i.e., like the Casals example). From that base they then can establish procedures to implement the work. The project work structure addresses how to do something instead of what to do. That is, it is important for them to conceive how to approach a problem systematically and bring a practice-oriented approach to bear on the tasks, not just the application of knowledge. In this manner they sort through the ambiguities of a situation, imposing order, so that they can create meaning and understanding. They learn to state the uncertainties, to clarify any puzzlement, and to probe the dimensions of the project situation in order to create understanding and to think theoretically.
A Programmatic Illustration of Reflective Practice

Public history programs need to integrate a reflective practice orientation into each phase of the curriculum. Students should encounter this approach as they begin their course of study. At Arizona State University, the required introductory course on public history methodology bases its approach on an applied history premise. It offers both subtle and explicit aspects of reflective practice through a variety of opportunities. At the outset of the course, readings prompt one-page written assignments that are discussed in a collaborative learning environment at each class session. Students work in small groups, assigned when they arrive at class. Each group receives a specific question or questions to discuss and has a rotating leader, recorder, and time keeper. The groups post an outline on a flip chart with each member presenting some facet of the work and engaging discussion with other class members and the instructor about the points presented. Such structured reflective practice modes begin at the first class session.

In addition, from a holistic point of view, the readings over the course comprise a set of case examples illustrating issues and controversies important to the professional practice of history. Students leave the course having discussed a set of case examples that illustrate and problematize key aspects of public history work. Some class assignments utilize case studies drawn from Richard Neustadt and Ernest May’s Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers. The actual case studies are used rather than relying on the summaries and analytical discussions that May and Neustadt explore in the book. Through the cases, students examine a series of historical techniques and learn and practice approaches to doing historical analysis: for example, analogizing; learning how to examine the history of an issue across time to explore how the history it projects constrains and constrains its later development and analytical treatment; exploring an organization’s history to learn how a group or institution’s history and organizational culture influence and constrain subsequent choices; as well as discussing its history. Other assignments in the course examine different types of historical writing and ask students to define and compare each. In the discussion, for instance, about writing local history, approaches like those advocated by Joseph Amato in Rethinking Home compose the base of the discussion, particularly in contrast to the approach of David Kyvig and Myron Marty in Nearby History.

In all of these situations, small groups work on specific questions to present ideas and develop reports. Thereby, students learn to strengthen their strategies to discuss ideas in small groups and become comfortable in articulating

ideas with their peers as well as within the larger class setting and with the instructor, who works with the small groups and participates in the larger reporting session. The last phase of the course introduces students to the elements inherent in crafting a proposal, specifically proposing a project in response to a hypothetical request for proposals for a client. For example, a recent set of RFPs focused on upcoming statehood anniversaries, e.g., centennials in Arizona (2012) and New Mexico (2012) and the bicentennial of Louisiana (2012). These RFPs asked students to design and present a commemoration proposal: developing a thesis statement, outlining a broadly conceived project, and addressing specifically selected outcomes. This complex assignment presents students a series of tasks to sort and discuss within groups of three or four. Each group works on a specifically assigned anniversary to present a response to the RFP. Students work with the instructor, who serves as the client for each case, developing the response as a grant proposal with a budget and discussion of outcomes. The task is to present a vision for the whole commemoration and illustrate features that individuals in the group have designed. For the final presentation, each group formally presents its proposal to a panel of experts. Normally, the panel is composed of the instructor and four or five practitioners, e.g., a consulting historian or staff members from the state humanities council, the state library and archives, a history museum, a preservation office, a local agency, and so on. The panel reads the various proposals in advance, hears a succinct but formal group presentation, and then engages each group in a discussion of the proposed project.

During the five preceding weeks of project work, the groups have access to the instructor and a public historian on the department’s staff, and they draw on outside expertise and advice from professionals in developing the written proposal. This simulation project offers a rare opportunity for students to propose a large project, develop and structure an outcome of importance to each member of the group, and review the intended outcomes in conversation with professionals from the field. This capstone assignment illustrates the applied orientation of the course, draws on and invokes the skills emphasized over the semester, and offers concrete experience in reflective practice. It also introduces students to the possibilities of proposal preparation and offers extraordinary opportunities to work collaboratively in a small group to lay out a project design and carry it through to completion for presentation before the group review panel, all within a safe environment where skills can be nurtured, developed, explored, and critiqued. In pulling together a proposal and discussing pros and cons with a review team that offers its own critique, suggestions, and support for the work, the concepts of reflective practice become an integral part of the proposal process. Thus throughout the various assignments, reflective practice becomes an inherent, natural part of the students’ perception of how public historians work and what public history practice means.

In a class on historians and preservation, students take on an actual (as opposed to simulation) project as a team consulting for a particular agency, of-
Office, or group, such as a city preservation office, a historic neighborhood association, a parks department, a neighborhood association interested in creating a historic district, or another entity which is interested, for example, in interpreting a site, creating a historic walking tour, or doing interpretive planning for an event. In this situation, the students talk regularly with the client; design the project, engaging in regular conversations among themselves as well as with the instructor; read generally to learn the context of the topic; and contact other individuals relevant to the work of the project. At the end of the semester, the group meets with the client in a formal session to present its proposal. In this wrap-up segment, the project’s design and execution come under careful review and scrutiny. Two outcomes for this work are especially important for the students in the class: first, their discussion and the report ultimately shape the client’s thinking about the subject and the subsequent work that will take place; and second, the students leave with a concrete project in their repertoire that they have developed and articulated with a client. Again, this process offers a midway point between the students’ world of learning about public history and practicing it, supporting them as they learn to work with clients and design an actual project.

In a third class, the public history seminar, class members develop an individual project that they will research over the course of the semester, producing a paper and presenting it to the class in a format consistent with the nature of the topic. Other projects in the class sharply differ. For example, students work on a land-use history. In conjunction with the staff of a local historical archive, they learn what constitutes the elements of a good land-use history, what resources and evidence are required, and what comprises the basic design and implementation features of a land-use history project. Then they work as a group on the history of a particular site selected for the class. They divide up the tasks, assign the work, and go about the work of constructing an actual land-use history. Visitors to the class develop a discussion on how to do such a project and show the scope of work that needs to be done; the students translate this into the specific project. After reviewing public records, and in some cases conducting oral histories, the students produce a written report for the group and present it to the instructor. The local practitioners who have helped advise and train the students review and comment on the report along with the instructor, in a reflective conversation with the class.

The course on historical administration specifically examines aspects of reflective practice and utilizes Schön’s *Reflective Practitioner* as a text for the course. The book’s discussion establishes the foundation for a semester-long discussion about ways to incorporate reflective practice into work situations. The rapidly growing Phoenix metropolitan area of 3.5 million people serves as the urban model for class assignments, which are developed to explore how cultural institutions can be conceived within the context of the metropole and its array of cities. David Carr’s *Promise of Cultural Institutions* pairs with Richard Florida’s *Rise of the Creative Class* to initiate discussion on how to consider cultural institutions conceptually and define their changing au-
diences in a contemporary context.38 Readings in Peter Senge’s The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal’s Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership, and Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler’s Museum Strategy and Marketing: Designing Missions, Building Audiences, Generating Revenue and Resources frame class discussion.39 Projects in the class address specific urban demographic analyses and draw on the reports of ASU’s Morrison Institute, which publishes several urban studies helpful in developing SWOT analyses and shaping an environmental scan of the metroplex from a cultural institution’s perspective.40 Readings including Kevin Guthrie’s New-York Historical Society: Lessons from One Non-Profit’s Long Struggle for Survival, Sally Griffith’s Serving History in a Changing World: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in the Twentieth Century, and Catherine Lewis’s The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum provide a foundation for comparative discussions throughout the course.41 Because a collaborative learning approach underpins the work of the class, ample opportunities exist to engage in reflective practice and explore its dimensions with the class through assignments and case studies.

Public historians are also invited to campus to work with students. The program brings three practitioners to campus in the spring, each for five days. They each teach a short course on a topic drawn from their work experience, immersing students in discussions about the issues and trends important in their practice of the discipline. In these courses, we expect the discussions to illustrate again the value of structured discussion based in reflective practice.

40. A SWOT examination of an organization juxtaposes external and internal environments, focusing on the forces and conditions that characterize each. A SWOT discussion will explore external environment threats and posit opportunity analysis. Opportunities are identified for probing if the threats can be managed successfully. In this assessment of the external environment (uncontrolled by the organization) for Threats and Opportunities, the analysis evaluates the internal environment’s capability to respond on the basis of internal resources. In this evaluation, the internal environment (which organizations do influence and can change) is investigated for gradations of Strengths and Weaknesses. An organization’s SWOT yields “an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses in relation to its opportunities and threats.” Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler, Museum Strategy and Marketing: Designing Missions, Building Audiences, Generating Revenue and Resources (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 71–79.
The visiting public historian and the students have extended opportunities to engage in highly interactive, focused discussions.

In addition to course requirements, each student completes a minimum 320-hour internship. Occasionally, these occur during the semester but more commonly during the summer. The ideal project begins with well-stated goals and clear objectives about the work and the outcomes. The immediate supervisor provides conversation and supervision as the student begins project work. Internships usually develop in one of two ways. In some cases, internships come from offices that routinely offer opportunities to incorporate interns into their work, e.g., historic preservation offices, historical museums, state parks, the state archives, or the university archives. At other times, the internship begins as an idea from a student who wants to focus on a particular aspect of public history practice or from a potential supervisor who has a project in mind but has not yet developed it into an internship project. In these cases, where projects are not drawn from a customary pattern, the projects offer interesting opportunities for reflective practice to ensure that the work follows the objectives of the internship. Yet, in each case, internships should emerge from a series of reflective conversations that structure the project’s goals and design. This approach has yielded valuable internships on historic preservation projects, website work in cooperation with local archival offices, work in collections departments at nearby museums, project work with the state humanities council, and so on.

At the conclusion of the internship, a supervisor’s evaluation and the student reflective paper provide written capstones. The most successful internships conclude with the intern, the supervisor, the public history program faculty member, and other site participants joining in reflective discussion about the entire process. Students learn to evaluate their work constructively, offer retrospective comments about their projects, talk about difficulties and successes, discuss and evaluate where the work might have gone and the choices made to determine the structure and outcomes of the project, and bring closure to the project in a discussion with the supervisor. These conversations can often be extraordinarily useful exercises and avenues to future projects and other contract or internship work. This internship work transitions the student into a work environment outside the university classroom, linking learning to practice in a workaday situation where practitioners serve as supervisors to assist students in this important feature of the curriculum.

The thesis or dissertation constitutes the other significant opportunity to develop a practice-oriented document. Students can use these traditional features of a program to develop a strong capstone that is solidly based in the work of public history. Administrative histories, institutional histories, exhibit projects, historic preservation projects, and documentary editing projects all make excellent thesis and dissertation projects. In some cases, material for such capstone experiences can emerge directly from internship projects. In other situations, the work can be conceived as illustrative of public history work: a discussion of scholarly publishing issues, an administrative history for
the park service, a context study for a preservation office, the history of a his-
toric neighborhood, and a historic site study. As appropriate to the topic, the
outcome can directly mirror future public history work and draw in public
history professionals to the discussion to locate source materials and to offer
ideas about the implementation of the work. At the defense, these profes-
sionals can participate in the conversation and introduce interesting dimen-
sions to the discussion. For example, discussion of a history of a local museum
or cultural agency can include the staff and director. Similarly, the director
or staff from a historic preservation office might be invited to a defense in-
volving a context study for historic preservation. As appropriate, public his-
tory professionals can be included on the academic committee as well.

The professional practice of the discipline beyond the academy’s classrooms
needs to blend naturally into the essential features of the curriculum. Stu-
dents, faculty, and practitioners thus become members of the discussions about
public practice. The applied features of the discipline interrelate naturally and
systematically in the student’s academic experience. Just as in professoriate-
based preparation where visiting faculty, visiting faculty speakers, academic
conference presentations, and professional association work become inter-
woven in the preparation of future members of the professoriate, so likewise
must public history practice and professionals be embedded into experiential
features of public history curriculum. Reflective practice thereby becomes
seamlessly integrated into each student experience, both logically and sys-
tematically. It assists linking theoretically based discussions with consciously
developed ethically based practices and outcomes-oriented, audience-based
work. Reflective practices based in applied approaches in the discipline can-
not be left to happenstance and casual moments. They require determined
effort, specifically focused, permeating the curriculum.

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