

**HISTORY 497CM/697CM:  
INTRODUCTION TO HISTORY COMMUNICATION (#HISTCOMM)**

LOCATION TBA  
THURSDAYS, 2:30-5:00  
4 CREDITS

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION:**

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**OVERVIEW:**

History today is communicated through a wide array of formats and across a growing variety of media platforms. Formats include narrative nonfiction, magazine articles, op-eds, and museum exhibitions, but also policy documents, blogs, podcasts, fiction and nonfiction film, twitter feeds, memes and other places throughout the culture, and audiences include policy makers, federal, state and local officials, educators, students, journalists, funders, pundits, commentators, social media followers, enthusiasts and those with only casual interest in History. The outcomes and risks associated with these communications have broad implications for society as well as historians and other history practitioners. Why communicate history in this various media? What are the consequences? What are the goals and motivations? What are (hoped to be) the outcomes? What does it mean to communicate history to different audiences through these channels? Who/what exactly is “the public?” How does one identify various “publics?”

“History communicators” are a new and emerging kind of history practitioner--experts trained in History as well as a range of multi-media, graphic arts and communication fields who use specialized skill sets to amplify their own work and/or the work of others. Students in this interdisciplinary course will explore the landscape and ecology of history communication (#histcomm), talk with some of the practitioners forging this new discipline, and both consider and practice ways in which historical insight has been and could be communicated beyond academic audiences.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the barriers to communicating history through traditional and emerging media
- Articulate the pro’s and con’s of communicating history through various media to different audiences
- Articulate the complexities of history communication in today’s world
- Cite examples of ethical history communication and compare and contrast with unethical history communication
- Gain literacy with several modes of history communication, including writing, film, audio and the Web
- Share history content with various non-expert audiences, including journalists, public officials, organizations and casual consumers
- Popularize an example of recent historical scholarship

During this course, students will

- Develop skills to communicate history
- Understand what it means to think historically
- Understand the ethics of communicating history
- Develop the agility, literacy and familiarity with the environments history is communicated across

- Learn pro's and con's of various media where history is presented
- Learn how to develop the intellectual self-confidence to have a public presence as a historian

## EXPECTATIONS:

To succeed in this class you will need to keep up with the reading, participate actively in class discussions, and complete your extended project. If at any time you are having difficulties with the material or the assignments, or just need to talk, please do not hesitate to come see me during office hours or make an appointment for another time to meet.

**Attendance & Preparation:** I expect you to be here, and to be prepared to contribute (not just listen to) discussion. There are occasionally good reasons to miss class, like religious holidays, medical mishaps, family or emergencies, but if you miss must something, please contact me to make arrangements. Also, you do us all a disservice by coming to class (this class or any other) unprepared. The success of any seminar is directly proportionate to the effort made by its members to create a lively, provocative discussion that investigates the week's topic with vigor. If anyone comes unprepared, the experience of everyone suffers as a result. Also, it signals to the rest of the room that you're content to coast on their time and effort, which is something no public historians want to do.

**Social Media:** I (@MarlaatUMass) will be tweeting content relevant to the course and strongly encourage you to do likewise. You should, if you are on Twitter, follow the hashtag #histcomm.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Formal requirements include: 1) completion of readings, and attendance at all seminar discussions and field trips, guided and self-guided; if you must miss something, make arrangements with me in advance; 2) short writing assignments; 3) a ca. 8-10 page final paper reflecting on the your experience with your "key text." (look for this symbol:



### Readings:

Some of our short readings are available on the **Moodle site** associated with the course; items easily accessible via J-STOR are found on the library website.

**Books** to be read in their entirety (or nearly so) include:

Books:

Lee Badgett, *The Public Professor*

Roy Peter Clark, *How to Write Short: Word Craft for Fast Times*

Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970*

Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*

## Semester-long assignment

Part of the skill set of history communicators is the ability to communicate in a range of voices. To practice that skill, you will choose a single, substantive, traditional work of history scholarship, of the kind typically assigned in History courses (referred to herein as your "**key text**") and revisit it several times over the course of the semester in a range of ways. You will become an expert in the content of the book you choose; the skill you will practice is taking that same content and translating it for a variety of audiences, genres and media. Read through the syllabus and see the various assignments so that you can be sure to choose an appropriate text (ask me for help choosing if you need it).

At the end of the semester, you will produce a work of history communication that translates your **key text** for an audience beyond the academy. This can take a variety of forms, depending on your aims and interests. It could be a series of podcasts; a video “documentary”; a series of Wikipedia entries; a policy briefing; a 3500-word *Atlantic* or *New Yorker*-style magazine article; a graphic novel/non-fiction narrative; or some other history communication project you propose (feel free to think outside the box; here’s another idea: <http://nyti.ms/2dGBmT9>). Each student will work out an individual plan.

## Graded Work

Participation	20%
Assignment: traditional, academic, 800-word review of your key text	12%
Assignment: 3-minute oral briefing	12%
Assignment: infographic	12%
Assignment: storyboards	12%
Assignment: 1-minute radio clip	12%
Final project	22%

## Policies

### Accommodation Statement

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

### Academic Honesty Statement

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent ([http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)).

## CLASS SCHEDULE

This is the intended schedule for this course, though I reserve the right to make adjustments, if necessary, as the semester progresses.

### Week 1 (Thursday, Jan 26): Introduction: History Communication Today

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How is history being communicated today?
- What do/could History Communicators do to improve this landscape?

#### *Activities*

##### Read:

- “The Genesis” and “The Latest” (plus enough browsing to understand this page) at <http://www.jasonsteinhauer.com/history-communicators>
- Harry Klinkhamer, “Where are the citizen historians?” <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/where-are-the-citizen-historians/>

##### Listen:

- “Historically Thinking,” Al Zambone interviews Jason Steinhauer: <http://historicallythinking.org/episode72/>

##### Assignments

- ✓ Browse the twitter feed #histcomm
- ✓ Watch the videos filmed at UMass posted at <http://www.jasonsteinhauer.com/history-communicators>

## Part I: Historical Thinking in Public

### Week 2 (Thurs Feb 2): The Historian’s Craft/What is Historical Thinking?

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How do people beyond the discipline of history understand what history is? What misconceptions might audiences bring to engagement with history or historians?
- What IS historical thinking?

#### *Activities*

##### Read:

- Wineberg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (Ch 1, available at [http://www.temple.edu/tempress/chapters\\_1400/1518\\_ch1.pdf](http://www.temple.edu/tempress/chapters_1400/1518_ch1.pdf))
- Andrews & Burke, “What Does it Mean to Think Historically?” *Perspectives*, Jan 2007 <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/what-does-it-mean-to-think-historically>
- Whisnant et al, *Imperiled Promise*, pages 16-19 [accessible on OAH website]
- Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (intro; this is an e-book available through the library)

##### Listen:

- Joshua Piker, “How Historians Work,” & John Demos, “How Historians Write,” on Ben Franklin’s World: <http://oieahc.wm.edu/lapidus/doinghistory/index.cfm>

##### Assignments:

- ✓ What do laypeople think historians do? Find three people outside the field, and ask them this question. Come to class ready to share and discuss their responses.

- ✓ Draft (and bring to class enough copies to share) an 800-word review of your key text. Use as a model the reviews found in the back of any issue of the *American Historical Review*.



### **Week 3 (Thurs Feb 9): History of Media and Media Forms**

Guest: **Kathy Roberts Forde**, UMass Journalism

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How can understanding the history of media in the US help us engage media as historians?

#### *Activities*

Read:

- Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (preface, conclusion, & chapter 3, "Putting the News in Newspapers, 1833-1850")
- Barbie Zelizer, ed., *Explorations in Communication and History* (Please choose 2 of these 4 options, but **grad students should read all four**: ch. 1 (John Durham Peters), ch. 2 (Paul Starr), ch. 4 (Susan Douglas), and ch. 12 (Robert McChesney).

### **Week 4 (Thurs Feb 16): The History of Historians in Public, from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century narratives to today's graphic non-fiction**

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- What roles have historians played in American public life?
- What can we learn from how historians have engaged media in the past?
- What are the ethical implications for historians engaging a range of publics?

#### *Activities*

Read:

- Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970*

#### **Assignment:**

- ✓ 2-page proposal for your semester-length project. We will spend part of this class period discussing your plans.

### **Week 5: Media Literacy (Thurs Feb 23): 5 Steps to Critical Media Engagement**

Guest: Allison Butler, UMass Communication Dept; Director, Media Literacy Certificate Program

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How do attention bias, retention bias, confirmation bias, and other factors shape the way audiences consume historical insight in the media?
- What do historians need to understand about media literacy to engage audiences in historical inquiry?

#### *Activities*

Read:

- Buckingham, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Chapters 1 & 4; I will distribute pdfs)

Explore:

- ❖ Case studies of topical issues as they play out in a range of media [TBA, depending on the news this week]

## Part II: Practice

### Week 6: (Thurs March 2): Pulse Communication: From Headlines and Tweets to Data Visualization

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How can complex historical arguments, ideas and content be conveyed succinctly and accurately in both words and images?
- How do writers engage and retain the interest of their readers?

#### *Activities*

Read:

- Roy Peter Clark, *How to Write Short: Word Craft for Fast Times*
- Clive Thompson, “The Surprising History of the Infographic,” <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/surprising-history-infographic-180959563/>
- “The Beautiful History of Infographics,” <http://www.copypress.com/blog/the-beautiful-history-of-infographics-infographic/>
- “100 Years of Infographics from National Geographic” <https://www.fastcodesign.com/3067134/100-years-of-brilliant-infographics-from-national-geographic>
- “The 100 Best Infographics:” <http://www.creativebloq.com/graphic-design-tips/information-graphics-1232836>
- “Top Tips from Experts on What Makes a Great Infographic:” <https://www.easel.ly/blog/top-tips-from-experts-on-what-makes-a-great-infographic/>

Review [in the Reserve room at the Library, for examples/inspiration]:

- Edward R. Tufte, *Envisioning Information*
- Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence*
- Lupi and Posavec, *Dear Data*

#### Assignment

- ✓ Develop an infographic that conveys insights from your key text 

### Week 7 (Thurs March 9): Experts, pundits & journalists

GUEST: **Edward O'Donnell**, In the Past Lane

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How do/can/should historians talk about their work to non-specialists?
- What is the role of historical expertise in understanding current events?
- What are the elements of a good interview? What does the interviewer need to do well, and what does the interviewee need to do well?

#### *Activities*

Listen:

- ◇ Listen to 2 episodes of Ben Franklins World: 1) my episode, on *Betsy Ross and the Making of America*, and a second episode of your choosing

- ◇ Listen to 2 episodes of In the Past Lane, of your choosing: <http://inthepastlane.com/>
- ◇ Listen to 2 episodes of 15-Minute History, of your choosing:  
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/15-minute-history/id574907639?mt=2&ign-mpt=uo%3D4>

### **Week 8 (Thurs March 23): Synthesizing, distilling & “brevitizing”**

GUEST: **Audrey Altstadt**, UMass History Department

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How do or can historians influence policymakers?
- What is the history of historians’ role in policymaking?
- What are the elements of a policy briefing?

#### *Activities*

Read:

- Lee Badgett, *The Public Professor*
- “Azerbaijan: US Energy, Security and Human Rights Interests,” Testimony of Dr. Audrey L. Altstadt Fellow, Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center (Feb 2015)  
<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA14/20150212/102956/HHRG-114-FA14-Wstate-AltstadtA-20150212.pdf>

View:

- ◇ #histcomm videos produced by Jason Steinhauer

**Assignment:**

- ✓ Using your key text, prepare a 3-minute oral briefing for your fellow students 

### **Week 9 (Thurs March 30): History in Film**

Guests: **Martin Norden**, UMass Communication Dept; **Erik Ewers**, Film Editor, Ken Burns Productions

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How do fiction films shape the way Americans understand History?
- What roles can/do/should historians play in crafting films?

#### *Activities*

Read:

- Mike Chopra-Gant, *Cinema and History: The Telling of Stories* (selections)
- View: (film excerpts TBA)

### **Week 10 (Thurs April 6): Producing Historical Graphic Nonfiction**

Guest: N.C. Christopher Couch, UMass

#### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- What are the elements of effective visual storytelling?
- How can historians engage visual media to convey their messages?

### *Activities*

Read:

- Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*

Scan 2 of the 3 below [RESERVE]:

- ❖ Ari Kelman and Jonathan Fetter-Vorm, *Battle Lines: A Graphic History of the Civil War*
- ❖ Lauren Redniss, *Radioactive: Marie & Pierre Curie: A Tale of Love and Fallout*
- ❖ Jonathan Fetter-Vorm *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb*

### Assignment:

- ✓ Create 12-15 frames of graphic nonfiction grounded in your key text



## **Week 11 (Thurs April 13): Audio Media: Historians on the Radio**

GUEST: **Steve Waksman**, Smith College historian of music and public historian on WRSI

### *Learning Goals/Questions*

- How can historians engage audio media to share their expertise?
- What are the strengths of audio formats in comparison to other formats, and what are the limitations?

### *Activities*

Listen:

- ◇ at least 2 episodes of Backstory Radio (<http://backstoryradio.org/> -- also peruse the site's blog)
- ◇ Listen: WRSI segments for Black History Month/Women's History Month, Steve Waksman

### Assignment:

- ✓ Write and Record: a 1-minute radio segment grounded in your key text 

**Week 12 (Thurs April 20): NO CLASS: Workshop time to develop your semester-long projects**

**Week 13 (Thurs April 27): Putting it All Together: You as a History Communicator**

Presentation of final projects!