

Self-Reflective Essay

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April 2012

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Throughout my time as a candidate for the PhD in Public History at Middle Tennessee State University, I have had many experiences both in the classroom and out that have shaped my degree, learning, and life. The residency year is the central component of my degree; it is the culmination of coursework and practical experience in a principal task undertaken throughout the academic year. The two semester residency year requires students to take on a project related to Public History that will help the student meet his or her requirements for the program and relate to future dissertation research and career goals. The residency is an integral part of the degree program because through it, among other things, students are able to gain hands-on experience in their chosen field and build their doctoral portfolios. In addition, monthly colloquiums and discussions added to the residency year through networking and camaraderie with the other candidates at this stage in their educational process.

As most historians will say, I can't recall ever *not* being interested in history. Some of my first exposures to the subject came from my family, my grandfathers in particular. Both had exciting stories from their pasts: growing up during the Great Depression, storming the beaches on D-Day, and even wearing "knickers" instead of pants. Additionally, my parents took me to museums, historic sites, and various cultural organizations as a child. Weekend trips to the American Museum of Science and Energy in Oak Ridge, Tennessee were part of a monthly routine, it seems. One of the most definitive experiences took place when I was in the fourth grade at Kingston Elementary School. I was in the Talented and Gifted program, and one series of educational activities we did centered completely on Ancient Egypt and Mummies. We watched a documentary in which Bob Briar created a modern mummy using historical techniques, made our own paper and

paste mummies, and learned basic hieroglyphs. I was hooked! My mom even claims that I wanted to mummify the family housecat; in my defense, she was an ill-tempered beast.

As I made my way through high school my best friend and I made regular trips to Knoxville to visit the McClung Museum at the University of Tennessee and various other places. I knew that when I got to college I wanted to do something with history; I just wasn't sure what. As an undergraduate at Middle Tennessee State University I was lucky enough to enroll in Dr. Charles Myer Phillips' United States History I course. Not only did Dr. Phillips remind me of my grandfather, but he also made the subject interesting, even to a person who prefers ancient and classical histories. My World Civilization II professor, Dr. Robin Hermann helped me to finalize my decision to be a History major. His class was fun, entertaining, and highly educational.

I always knew that I did not want to teach in a traditional classroom. I felt as many undergraduates probably feel: I wasn't sure what other career opportunities were out there for historians other than teaching. I sent emails and made phone calls to several historical organizations and sites throughout the Middle Tennessee area, and Anita Teague at the Sam Davis Home in Smyrna decided to call me back in for an interview in the summer of 2007. I was hired as a tour guide and docent for the SDH, and I was able to sign up for undergraduate public history internships and senior seminars with Dr. Brenden Martin. The year I spent working with the SDH and public history helped guide me towards where I am today. I worked with the public daily, created lesson plans for students on field trips, and I had a fabulous working relationship learning all about the ins and outs of museums. As graduation loomed closer, I knew I had to continue my education to get a job, whether I wanted to teach or not.

I chose the University of Memphis for my Master's program, largely because of their fantastic Egyptology and ancient history faculty and program. Under the directions of Dr. Peter Brand and Dr. Suzanne Onstine I built upon my historical foundation with more coursework on ancient Greece, Rome, and all aspects of Egyptology. I was even more thrilled upon my arrival in Memphis to learn that the university also offered a graduate interdisciplinary certificate in museum studies. My first semester I took an introduction to museum studies with Dr. Robert Connolly, and finally I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my career: I wanted to work in a museum.

When I moved to Memphis I immediately looked for a part time job to supplement my meager graduate assistantship funding. I was hired at the Pink Palace Museum as a Social Studies instructor. Luckily, I was able to translate my work at the Pink Palace into an internship to gain credit hours towards my interdisciplinary certificate. I also spent a minimal amount of time as a volunteer at the National Civil Rights Museum working in collections and with the registrar. Perhaps one of the most fortunate events of my time as a master's degree candidate was being hired as a graduate assistant at the C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa. Dr. Connolly who taught in the museums program is the director of the site, and as a rule his graduate assistants work in every aspect of museum life. My last semester at the University of Memphis and during the summer before I moved away from west Tennessee I was hired by Jacob Shock as an educational consultant at the Biblical History Museum in Collierville, Tennessee. I created educational programming for the museum and also directed an archaeological day-camp during the summer for students to learn the basics and methods of archaeology.

The museums certificate at the University of Memphis and all of the work I was able to do during my two years in Memphis provided me with excellent hands-on experience in museums. My resume was bolstered with several museums, various types of experience from collections to programming, and I made several incredible networking contacts. Still, I knew that I would need to continue on to someday get the dream career. During my last semester at the University of Memphis I began to look back to my undergraduate alma mater; there I began my foray into public history so there I decided to continue.

I was admitted to the MTSU Public History program as a doctoral student for the Fall 2010 semester. The program does have a concentration in museums management, but the larger topic of public history was a benefit to me as someone who wants to branch out into any and all aspects of generating interest in history with the public. I knew from previous experience that the program would be a wonderful fit for me, and I moved back to Murfreesboro hopeful about furthering my academic and professional careers in a familiar town and university.

Historiography of Public History and the Residency Project

Historiography is an integral part of any history educational program, and Public History is no exception. The historiography of public history was first introduced in the Introduction to Public History course in Fall 2010. All of this was important to me in teaching both general education students in World Civilizations I during the Fall 2011 semester and later in the Spring 2012 semester as I taught history majors and minors the finer details of public history as an introductory course. Teaching a survey course poses many challenges and triumphs, as I detail throughout this semester. However, teaching this course would be unfathomable without a background in historiography and the

historical process. The way that teaching and thinking about history has changed throughout time, the different theories and schools of thought, and developments through research and scholarship had a great impact on the course that I taught to undergraduates.

World Civilizations was an interesting class to teach with students from varying backgrounds and interests. The expanse of information that is covered in that course, prehistory to circa 1500 C.E., also creates challenges in imparting information, deciding what the most important aspects are, and keeping students interested. I used public history as often as possible to keep students interested in the subject matter.

Historiography was of particular interest in teaching Explorations in Public History. In the introductory class, I posed the question, “what is public history?” to my students; responses were varied and complicated, so as an introduction to the course I gave a historiographical presentation to the class. The introductory lecture featured questions such as, “how old is public history,” “is public history a new phenomenon,” and “what exactly *is* public history.” I then explained to the class that perhaps public history as a field goes all the way back to the first archivists at the Library of Alexandria, the first archaeologists of Egypt and Mesopotamia, ancient and possibly even prehistoric art, and the first oral historians. This led to a lively discussion about who the public is, what a “valid” history is, and many more questions.

For the first week of class my students read several selections to give them an idea or ideas about what public history is and also helped them foster their own definitions of the field. The first selection was the National Council on Public History Website article, “What is Public History?”¹ This article includes definitions, and a redux article by Cathy

¹ National Council on Public History Website, “What is Public History?”, accessed 3/29/2012.

Stanton. Additionally, students were encouraged to look at NCPH discussion boards to see what other public historians were saying about the issues. Students were also required to come up with their own interpretation of what public history is.

Students also read James Cuno's "The Crux of the Matter" from the introduction of *Who Owns Antiquity?: Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage*.² This article was of particular interest and sparked such questions as Who owns the past? What are some issues involved in believing someone can own the past? Can anyone own the past? What problems might historians, especially public historians have because of the idea that the past can belong to someone? Of particular interest in this article is the historiography of archeology and public history as they relate to cultural repatriation and cultural heritage.

Lastly, students read Ronald J. Grele's, "Whose Public? Whose History? What Is the Goal of a Public Historian?" from *The Public Historian*.³ This article is a bit older being written in 1981 when the field of public history was first being introduced. The students were able to pick up on this and realize the historiographical essence of the article as relates to the field today. Additionally, the students realized that public history and public historians still have a long way to go to reach all of the goals and ideals set forth in the article.

As for the way the historiography relates to my dissertation, the information I will uncover in my dissertation research is seemingly groundbreaking. I have yet to find resources or articles specifically related to teaching people with learning disabilities in museums. My research and consequent articles and dissertation should pave the way for

² James Cuno, "The Crux of the Matter" in *Who Owns Antiquity?: Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008).

³ Ronald J. Grele – "Whose Public? Whose History? What Is the Goal of a Public Historian?" *The Public Historian*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter, 1981), pp. 40-48.

others interested in pursuing the inclusion of learning disabled people in museums and historic organizations.

Therefore, there is essentially no real historiography on this particular topic. There is information on physical disabilities and on students and the arts, but searches for information about museum programming or exhibits in relation to students with learning and developmental disabilities have yielded no results. As for dissertation and theses, there do not appear to be any written by historians or from the point of view of the museum. A view from museums is particularly important for the field of public history; if they are to be truly public institutions, they must address all audiences.

No real evidence of others attempting this is obvious from looking at conferences, blogs, internet interactions, and other sources. When these ideas are mentioned to other museum professionals it seems obvious that this area is the next frontier to approach in reaching out to the community of people with disabilities.

Colloquium Readings, Pedagogy, and Professional Practice

Sam Wineburg's *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*⁴ was the most influential and interesting book that I read not only during my residency year but probably in my entire academic career. The author approaches several questions I have wondered about both in my studies and in the beginning of my residency such as why people study history at all, what history can teach us not just about the past but about humanity and ourselves, how history should be taught, and what exactly history's place is outside of the classroom. Wineburg's analysis of how people learn, and how history has been taught in the past is enthralling. Additionally, the questions he asks, such as why to study history

⁴ Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*. (Temple University Press, 2001).

and what students should learn from their history classes, were intriguing and thought-provoking, I taught my first class in a “traditional” classroom. I wish that I had read this book a lot sooner, as both an educator in museums and historical sites, and as a new teacher of college-level survey history.

In planning for my own World Civilizations I course, I wanted to introduce my students to the global culture through the class and stories that can be found throughout ancient and classical history. I wanted to focus on the connections of cultures through themes to humanize the people and civilizations we talk about. Additionally, critical thinking and questioning are ground stones for my course structure. Explaining to my students that the people in the past are foreign to us and some of the things they did were strange is not difficult; students often bring that up in class and claim that they find something about ancient cultures “weird.” I often tried to relate the actions and values of people from the past to my students here in the present.

Wineburg claims that “strange” history that excludes people and does not engage others.⁵ I keenly felt this with World Civilizations which many people find to be foreign. However many people have an inexplicable love for Ancient Egypt as evidenced in popular culture, museum exhibitions, Halloween costumes, and countless other venues. Perhaps in the case of Egypt the strangeness is what is appealing. In my class I tried to appeal to the interesting “strangeness” of each culture or group that were studied in an effort to engage students in conversation and thinking about these people, or even to get them to remember any little detail about these people from the past. In class we asked such questions as, what

⁵ Ibid.

will people in the future think about our civilization? Will we be considered strange by people looking back to the past in which we live?

Related to this strangeness is also the development of feelings of kinship and relationship to people in the past that we study. A movement towards learning about humanity and social history is evident in the past several years, and perhaps because of this familiarity and my own personal training, social history is what I enjoy the most.

Primary sources have been another resource I have used in my World Civilizations class. Wineburg included an anecdote of a teachers' workshop that explored the classroom textbook and *The Midwife's Tale*.⁶ Many students, and surprisingly their teachers, believe that the textbook tells facts and "how things were." Bias is ignored and students and their teachers do not often think to question the textbook's story. *The Midwife's Tale* was previously seen as trivial information, in spite of the important bits about daily life and people that can be gleaned from it. I hope that this will continue to change as we strive to personalize the past. One of the most important things I tried to get across to my students was that they CAN question everything: the textbook, authors, and even their instructors.

Finally, there are three other concepts from Wineburg's book that I particularly enjoyed. Wineburg's explanation of context and strangeness through Marco Polo's excerpt on unicorns/rhinoceros is a great example of people interpreting what they see and learn through their own knowledge and ideas.⁷ It is an important thing to remember both in my own personal studies and in teaching undergraduates. Presentism, viewing the past through the lens of today, is another important concept for me. Trying to get students to remove themselves from the present and look back is a hard thing to do. When we covered

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

the Mayans and bloodletting rituals this was particularly evident. My students were appalled and could not understand why people let mutilation and “torture” happen. It was hard to explain to them that their worldview and religions were different, and that perhaps the people who were being sacrificed or who were mutilating themselves to give blood to their gods did so willingly. At the same time, I tried to explain that they were people and not that different from us even though they seem so strange. I used the analogy of wrestling or cage fighting today and even the ancient Romans and gladiators to explain the allure of seeing executions. At the same time, there was a difference in Mayan culture because of the religious meanings behind sacrifice and bloodletting rituals. Lastly, this chapter introduces context; this word is from the Latin “to weave together.”⁸ History and context are inextricable, and historians and teachers must connect the past into a pattern to understand what happened, why it is important, and what we can learn from it.

The second section of this book is called, “Challenges for the Student.” Chapter 3 again looks at reading history and understanding the bias that is present in all writing and sources. Wineburg suggests having the students think aloud as they read. I have experimented with this to some extent in my own classroom with group primary source interpretation. Next time we do a similar activity I will try to explain to my students that, “The comprehension of text reaches beyond words and phrases to embrace intention, motive, purpose, and plan- the same set of concepts we use to decipher human action.”⁹ School texts and their expected level of trustworthiness are somewhat disturbing: students take the text at face value. They often believe that the textbook is *the* source. Students, and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sam Wineburg. *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001): 67.

sometimes teachers, reason that the text is written by nameless important editors, so it must be true.

Students must be taught how to decode the text and ask such questions as what is the author really trying to say? What is the author's purpose? Students should engage with the text, and they should not just read it. This raises a question to myself about my own class and methods. I require students to read the text before coming to class so that we can engage in discussion about the concepts they read about that relate to my lecture for each day. I have built in five pop quizzes to the semester to make sure that my students are doing their homework and coming to class prepared. The tests are made up of five multiple choice questions that cover the bigger concepts and important "facts" from the pages they were supposed to have read. They are designed to make sure the students are doing the readings and to judge their reading comprehension. Perhaps they are learning to list useless facts, but perhaps reading comprehension and actually looking at the text is the first step to analyzing the words they read.

In many classrooms it seems that there is no interpretation of history but rather the presentation of a chain of "facts." To me this immediately raised the question, "are there really any facts?" Students also do not ask *how* something happened, just know that it did. Instructors and history teachers should strive to explain the implications of each "fact."

Also in this chapter Wineburg claims that in many classrooms knowledge is detached from experience; how can we incorporate more experiential learning into secondary education and college-level survey courses? Many students do not come to school with a motivation to learn. This brought to mind the concept of "edutainment" that has been discussed in museum classes and conferences I have attended in the past five

years. It is still somewhat controversial; are we entertaining or educating our students? Does it matter as long as students are engaged and learning something? If edutainment can happen in museums and institutions of informal learning, can it or does it already appear in classrooms? Perhaps some of the experiential learning concepts can be brought into the traditional classroom to engage students and help them learn in another way.

In my own class I have developed four homework research assignments to try to engage students at their level using entertainment. The first assignment, which was generally well-received and successful, asked students to think of three references in popular culture to ancient, classical, or world history. Many of their examples were things I had not even thought of, and we were able to open discussion on whether or not we can learn anything from popular culture, the motives of advertisers or writers who use popular culture, and the validity of historical content found in popular culture. I hope that this, and the future assignments in the class, gets my students thinking about history in the sense of their everyday lives rather than as the distant and strange past that is presented in the textbook.

This book helped spark a lot of thoughts on my own study of history and how I taught the students in my World Civilizations class. I have often wondered why exactly it is that I study history and what I want my students to learn through my class. I do not necessarily want them to learn dates or a chain of chronological events, but rather I want them to understand the bigger concepts, critical thinking, globalization and worldview changes, how to study for a test, how to think critically, how to be a citizen in a global world, and to some degree empathy and understanding of difference in culture throughout the world. I wish I had more time to plan and to give them more resources that are “fun.”

Next time I teach this course I want to give the students more hands-on and interactive opportunities instead of just lecture with powerpoint slides of pictures.

*Public Benefits of Archaeology*¹⁰ also sparked several ideas for my future career and my residency project of teaching undergraduates. The first chapter explains that archaeology is a shared vision; people do archaeology not just for the professionals, but also for the public to use and value. The author explains that the purpose of this book is to illustrate, promote, and enhance public benefits of archaeology.¹¹

Many of the topics in this first chapter particularly related to the way I taught Explorations in Public History. Levin states, “there is no single public and no single past;”¹² this was an essential part of the first two weeks of introducing students to public history. Through archaeology and empowering local groups by supporting local heritage and cultural heritage diverse opinions and ideas can be heard.

Another particularly impactful chapter from this book was Chapter 14: “Myths, Lies and Video Tapes – Information as an Antidote to Social Studies Classrooms and Pop Culture.” This chapter claims that history curriculum is made up of myths, lies, and videotapes. The way history is interpreted in popular culture is an interesting discussion, and one that I have had with both classes I taught as a part of my residency. As the author points out, archaeology is one part of historical study that shows the “real” history with “warts and all.”¹³

History is also constantly changing and new ideas are developing, especially with archaeological findings. One way I imparted this knowledge to my students was by having

¹⁰ Little, Barbara J., ed. *Public Benefits of Archaeology*. University Press of Florida, 2006.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 169.

students bring in recent articles and findings for extra credit. Through this, the class and I learned all kinds of new things. Archaeologists provide new data that is valuable and sometimes overlooked by historians and especially teachers.

In reading *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America's Changing Communities*¹⁴ I had several questions related to my own work and especially to teaching undergraduates. I wondered, how does memory affect how students learn in the classroom and the museum? Are memories about the historical events at sites as important as personal memories, and how can those two things be reconciled? What is collective memory. How does all of this work when there are many histories, and no one can "own" history? Many of these questions were answered by my Explorations in Public History class through our many readings and discussions. In many topics this idea came up, from oral history and cultural repatriation, to popular culture and museum exhibit fabrication.

Another very relative reading assignment from the colloquium was the Spring 2005 edition of *The Public Historian*¹⁵. Reading this sparked many ideas and thoughts about my dissertation process, and it also led to several professional development opportunities that I will detail further on in this essay. The main points that I took away from the reading were that sensitivity and awareness are lacking among museum professionals and public historians in general. Additionally, the Americans with Disabilities Act has been embraced by many organizations, but most organizations are not thinking beyond that. Many

¹⁴ Levin, Amy K., ed. *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America's Changing Communities*. AltaMira Press, 2007.

¹⁵ *The Public Historian*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring 2005). Special issue on "Disability and the Practice of Public History," Susan Burch and Katherine Ott, guest editors.

organizations have not yet reached out to welcome different groups to their museums or organizations. Inviting these groups to ask *them* what should happen is an integral part of community relationships, and this also gives the community a sense of ownership.

From this reading assignment and the colloquium discussions, I was able to write a presentation paper for a panel at the Tennessee Association of Museums. Additionally, with help from Dr. Rebecca Conard and several others, Middle Tennessee State University will host a workshop for cultural organization professionals that will help train them in sensitivity and awareness. The panel and workshop also help organizations identify underserved groups at their organization and create a list of problems and strengths.

The final book read in the residency colloquium was *The Reflective Practitioner* by Donald Schon.¹⁶ One of the main points that Schon makes is that to be successful as a reflective practitioner, a person must think and reflect while in action. Being aware and knowing what one is doing while it is happening is essential. Ways that this might be accomplished include journaling, thinking aloud, self-evaluating, and taking time each day to think about the day and its events. This is something I like to pride myself on having done throughout the program and my daily life. Reflective practice was an integral part of my master degree program.

Schon's book never focusing particularly on Public History as a field, but much of the material is relatable and valuable to graduate students, all fields of study, and perceptive practitioners. Many of the things he mentions may be seen as common sense; some of the ideas are even considered to be innate parts of one's life and practice. However, Schon provides four constants in the process of reflection in action. The first, media, language,

¹⁶ Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action*. (Basic Books Inc., 1983).

and repertoires used by the practitioner,¹⁷ could include in the practice of public history such things as: listening, observing, knowledge of history, material culture, synthesis and analysis of historical information, communication, and many more. The second constant is appreciative systems.¹⁸ In Public history appreciative systems include not only text, facts and figures, but also interdisciplinary and empirical data and evidence. These systems and constants are not always tangible but we can use evaluative tools to come to a conclusion.

History and Contemporary Society

Throughout the residency, contemporary society and the relevance of history and particularly public history to people today has been an important discussion. Teaching World Civilizations I was one way that the link between history, context, historical thinking skills, and more was made clear. Though I do hope that students from World Civilizations I will always remember what makes up a civilization or what most religions have in common, I realistically believe that they will forget most of this knowledge unless they actively engage themselves in historical study. However, I do believe that the critical thinking and research skills they learned through homework assignments will remain with them throughout their academic and professional careers.

The learning outcomes for Explorations in Public History are a bit more optimistic and courageous. They too are learning critical thinking and research skills that are invaluable, but I hope that they also take away from the course that there are many opportunities for people who hold a history degree and that they understand and appreciate the intricacies of public history institutions and public history practitioners.

¹⁷ Ibid., 270.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Contemporary society as a whole seems to tend to appreciate history in waves and crests. Popular culture and other sources indicate that people do have some interest in the past. However, the means taken to that end are many times questionable. My hope is that these sources will spark an inspiration for that person to learn more through visiting museums, archives, or other cultural organizations.

Then and Now: Doctoral Studies and Personal Professional Development

As I stated in the introduction to this personal narrative of my doctoral program, I came into public history as a museums practitioner. I had practical experience, a bolstered resume of museum work, and an extensive knowledge of current and past museum practices. I also had a great historical context background of Ancient and Classical history; having graduated from a history program as well as an interdisciplinary museums program I had the knowledge of historical research methods and historiography needed to succeed in a doctoral program.

However, as I learned throughout my time in the MTSU Public History program, there is always room for improvement. Now having completed coursework and the residency program, I feel that I have even more context of history especially in ancient world history and all aspects of public history. Personal coursework with Dr. Dawn McCormack in which I had readings I was interested in and discussions about deeper issues in Egyptology, especially as it relates to public history, was something I never had the opportunity to take advantage of during my master's degree program. Similarly, Dr. Stacey Graham led a selected studies of the classical world in which we related the past to current issues of public history and material culture.

Coursework honed my research skills, and my residency gave me the new skill set of teaching undergraduates the value of world history and public history. I learned all about this public history field as a whole as opposed to the more narrow field of museum studies. Through coursework, but especially by teaching an introduction to public history, I really saw the connections that can be made through all aspects of public history. For example, media and technology can be used to impart knowledge on the masses through documentaries as popular culture, but the images shown in the film can bring to light information about material culture, the people interviewed for the film are subjects of oral history, and sometimes archaeology and therefore cultural resource management is needed to get to the bottom of a story for such a documentary.

Additionally, the program gave me the opportunity to make my own voice heard among my peers and other professionals in the field. I attended my first conferences thanks to support from the Public History program and the Association of Graduate Students in History. After building confidence, I was also able to chair and present on panels at the American Association for Popular Culture in the South in New Orleans, Louisiana and the Tennessee Association of Museums Conference in Memphis, Tennessee. I served as a session chair at the Popular Culture in the South Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana and also presented a paper at the same conference titled, "What Can Lady Gaga Teach Us About the French Revolution? Social Media and Public History." In March I presented at the Tennessee Association of Museums annual conference in Memphis as part of a panel on accessibility and sensitivity in museums. From this platform at the TAM conference I was able to make contacts regarding my dissertation research and projects mentioned below.

Perhaps most importantly the residency year and doctoral program in general helped to inform my dissertation. Readings from courses, especially the *Public Historian*,¹⁹ gave me a historical context for the dissertation and ideas for completion. Discussions in the residency colloquium also led to a workshop that is still in development. I am currently researching, planning, and coordinating a workshop and mini-conference to be held at MTSU in the fall of 2012. This event is being sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History and several other organizations throughout the area. The theme is accessibility, sensitivity, and disability awareness in museums, and the target audience is museum professionals, museum educators, special education teachers, and graduate students. Additionally, I scheduled Krista Flores of the Smithsonian Accessibility program and Karen Wade from the Homestead Museum in Los Angeles County, California to widen the scope of the workshop and to attract new audiences to our programs. The workshop will not only inform my dissertation research, but it should also be a great opportunity for MTSU and the History Department to get very positive publicity.

On campus I have served as an active member of the Association of Graduate Students in History and as the PhD representative to the Public History Committee. For the 2012-2013 school year I was elected as the president of the AGSH. I have served on several committees for the Graduate Student Association, and I was also elected to serve the 3,000 graduate students at MTSU as President for the GSA. For the 2012 Spring semester, I served the students within the College of Graduate Studies as a Senator in the Student Government Association. At the same time, I have maintained memberships and

¹⁹ *The Public Historian*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring 2005). Special issue on "Disability and the Practice of Public History," Susan Burch and Katherine Ott, guest editors.

participation in several professional organizations including Phi Alpha Theta, Tennessee Association of Museums, the American Association of Museums, National Council of Public History, Southeastern Museums Conference, the Association of Academic Museums and Galleries, and the Inter-Museum Council of Nashville.

I can say with all honesty that teaching public history is the single most rewarding, educational, and fun experience I have had in my time as a PhD student at MTSU. Studying abroad in Toronto was incredible and I got some great field work experience and great portfolio builders, classwork and time spent with my fellow graduate students is educational and fun, and it goes without saying that conferences provide some of the best networking opportunities, learning experiences from other professionals. Teaching World Civilizations I was also a great experience, and imparting my knowledge of Ancient History to undergraduates was a learning experience for me as well as my students.

However, there is something about teaching students who care about the subject, are passionate about public history, learning, and the field in general that made me look forward to teaching, planning, and going to class every week. In planning for teaching Explorations in Public History, I knew that the students would be a very different audience from that in World Civilizations I. The course is a 3000 level class, which means that many upper-division students are enrolled and also that many of my students are history majors.

Through my residency year and the doctoral program in general I was able to take part in many professional development opportunities, especially conferences, hone my research and communication skills, and work on organization and planning as well. Essentially, I ended up absolutely loving something that I never thought I wanted to do.

This is, of course, a lesson for all aspects of life, but particularly in academic or professional work – why not try something new? You never know what might happen.

Residency Dynamics: Self and Mentor

Throughout my residency I learned a lot about myself, and I also received valuable lessons from both of my mentors, Dr. Dawn McCormack and Dr. Brenden Martin. For the Fall 2011 semester while teaching World Civilizations I (HIST 1110) Dr. Dawn McCormack served as my mentor. Dr. McCormack has a background in Anthropology and Egyptology, and she holds a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2008 she was hired as an Assistant Professor of History at Middle Tennessee State University. She has taught World Civilizations in the past; she also taught the course in Fall 2011. We met to discuss syllabi and potential class lectures, and I met with her regularly throughout the semester to discuss problems and concerns as they arose. Dr. McCormack taught me several teaching and professional skills. I learned from her how to relate to students and work with various groups of people. Understanding the college student is a difficult lesson, even though I was in their shoes at this same university only four years ago.

Dr. Brenden Martin was my professional mentor during the Spring 2012 semester. Dr. Martin has taught public history and museums studies at MTSU since 2001. He previously served as the Director of Public History at MTSU and has also taught HIST 3110 in the past. As my mentor he helped construct the course framework and syllabus and answer questions and concerns I had throughout the process. We worked on this throughout the fall semester and continued to meet while I taught Explorations in Public History. Dr. Martin observed my class lectures and discussions, and our meetings

afterwards gave me confidence that I was making a difference and teaching these students valuable skills and lessons. He also gave me tips on making the lectures more interactive and bringing more students into the conversations.

Most importantly throughout this process, I learned that teaching is fun. I also gained more of a love for different aspects of world history and public history. Teaching an introduction to the Public History field gave me more knowledge about archives, historic preservation and cultural resources management than I had previously. I also learned that organization is key to success, and one can never prepare for everything. One of the hardest lessons for me was beginning to tell people, “no.” College students come to the table with a lot of baggage and problems, and sometimes it is hard to tell them that they are not quite meeting expectations. Standing my ground with students my age or older, and not falling victim to tears or threats taught me a lot about myself as a professional and students as a group.

Final Reflections

In summation, I have come a long way from that girl who loved to hear her elders talk about their childhoods and built papier-mâché mummies. Through the undergraduate program at MTSU to the master’s program at the University of Memphis I developed my skills and curriculum vitae. However, without the doctoral program in Public History at Middle Tennessee State University, I would not be where I am today as a professional.

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