

**THESIS PROJECT GUIDELINES  
PUBLIC HISTORY  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SACRAMENTO**

**INTRODUCTION**

The thesis project marks a student's culminating experience in the public history program. Usually the thesis project grows out of work done during a student's internship. Students should identify a thesis project as early in their career as possible, and no later than the end of the second semester of internship, at which time the student will complete the **thesis petition and prospectus** signed by their project advisor, a second reader, and the public history director.

The thesis project should be based on original research and contribute to the student's particular field of specialization. It should address a clear need and demonstrate the student's professional expertise. Students are expected to use a combination of traditional historical sources, professional literature, and specialized professional methodologies.

Generally, the thesis project is divided into two parts. The main body of the thesis addresses the project need and relevancy, historic context, and methodology (professional practices). The appendix comprises the specific project – archival finding aid, oral history transcripts, national register nomination. The first part should be approximately 50 pages in length. The length of the appendix will vary depending upon the type of project a student undertakes.

Students may enroll in thesis project credits (**History 500b**) after all coursework is complete (with no incompletes on their transcript).

**PETITION AND PROSPECTUS**

The thesis petition and prospectus are due at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of internship. The petition should include a working title and brief abstract of the project. It needs to be signed by both readers and the public history director. If your second reader is not a faculty member, you need to make sure an electronic copy of his or her c.v. is on file with the public history director.

The prospectus is a 3-4 page essay that demonstrates your understanding of how the project will develop. It should begin with a clear description of your project including a statement of need and the relevant professional approach you plan to take. The prospectus should include a chapter outline and a one page bibliography.

**ARCHIVAL PROJECTS**

Archival projects usually entail the processing of a collection and development of a finding aid. Students should choose a collection in consultation with their site

supervisor and the public history director. Manageable collections range from 30 to 40 cubic feet of records with a mixture of materials and preservation issues. The institution should have clear title to the collection. The collection should not be too obscure or it will be difficult to complete the research on the collection history. Completion of the project includes fully processing the collection, writing a finding aid, and digitally encoding the finding aid for inclusion in the Online Archive of California.

The first part of the thesis project should include a statement of need, a discussion of methodology and professional practices, a history of the collection, and a historical context chapter.

Examples of high quality archival projects:

Deborah Bahn, "Out of the Ashes, into the archives: processing the rediscovered California State Land Office records." (2008)

Carson Hendricks, "The Bob McCabe collection: the historic projects of Bob McCabe, architect at the Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center." (2004)

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION / CRM PROJECTS**

Projects in historic preservation and CRM come in two main types – nominations to the national, state or local registers of historic places, and cultural resource assessments for environmental impact reports. Students should choose their project in consultation with their internship supervisor or employer and the public history director. Completion of the project includes full documentation of the site or district through appropriate architectural description, statement of significance, and historical context. Appropriate DPR-523 or NPS-1090 forms need to be filled out completely. Photographs or architectural drawings should be included as needed.

Students may receive university credit for their projects before sites are listed on the appropriate register of historic places, but we do expect follow through with the city preservation office or the Office of Historic Preservation.

Part one of the thesis must include a project description, statement of need and relevancy, and appropriate engagement with the professional literature in the field to demonstrate professional proficiency.

Examples of high quality projects:

Steve Melvin, "National register of historic places: evaluation of the Sacramento International Airport, Sacramento County, California." (2007)

Eric Johnson, "Preservation of the Berkeley Hillside Club." (2003)

## **MUSEUM PROJECTS**

Museum projects are usually either exhibits (in-house or web) or curriculum units designed to supplement existing exhibits. Appropriate projects should be chosen in consultation with the internship supervisor and public history director. Web-based exhibits may be developed outside of an existing museum or collection. Exhibit projects should include the identification and display of appropriate artifacts as well as development of a complete exhibit script. Any publicity or promotional material may be added to the appendix if appropriate. The exhibit does not need to have opened in order for a student to complete the project for his or her degree.

Curriculum units should represent a substantive contribution to the museum or historic site educational offerings, such as an Environmental Living Program or camp curriculum. If a smaller unit is developed, then students are expected to address a minimum of five sites or exhibits. Curriculum units need to meet California history standards for the fourth grade.

The front end of museum projects needs to describe the project, explain relevancy and need, and explore the professional methodologies and issues relevant to the project.

Examples of high quality museum projects:

Michelle Atkinson, "Dining with the Knights : old governor's mansion formal dining room renovation project." (2005)

Heather McCummins, "Education in museums and state parks." (2005)

## **ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS**

Oral history projects usually develop in consultation with the oral history faculty. Students are expected to conduct 4-10 interviews for a total of 10-20 hours. A minimum of three interviews must be transcribed. Summary tables of contents should be developed for the remaining interviews. The appendix should also include interview questions, release forms, and any deeds of gift.

The first part of oral history projects should include a statement of need and relevancy of the project, a discussion of the methodology used to develop the project, and a discussion of the historical context of the interview subject.

Examples of high quality projects:

Paul Ferrell, "What's your story: the 1997 Sequoia and Kings Canyon oral history project" (2000)

Cynthia Tofflemier, "Placer County government : oral history project" (2004)

## **CHOOSING YOUR FACULTY READERS**

All three public history faculty members are available to serve as readers on your thesis project. A CSUS faculty member must serve as first reader, but your site supervisor can serve as second reader if he or she is willing. Keep in mind the following areas of expertise when choosing your faculty readers:

Dr. Simpson:            archives, historic preservation/CRM, museums

Dr. Castaneda:        museums, oral history, historic preservation/CRM

Dr. Ettinger:         oral history, museums, historic preservation/CRM