

Field Methods in Historic Preservation



Surveying industrial buildings on the north riverfront of St. Louis, Missouri.

**HIST 409/609 | Spring 2026
Wednesdays | 4:00-6:50PM
Woodburn Hall 105**

Instructor: Dr. Michael Allen
Office: Chitwood Hall 220
Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:30 – 3:30PM
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INFORMATION

Description

Historic preservation is a field that spans activist movements, professional practices, law and bureaucracy, scholarly research and public policy. This term is specific to the United States of America; in other parts of the world the field is called “heritage conservation” or “architectural conservation.” In this course we will ground the use of certain historic preservation methods in the social and political histories of the field, balancing an understanding of why the field exists with what it can accomplish. We will hold the tools in our hands, but also question how it came to be that these are the tools that we use, and who decided that. Practical activities will include documentation of historic buildings and sites around our world of Morgantown, so all will leave with steps toward the skills that build practices in the field.

Learning Objectives

- Students will become familiar with historic preservation theory, law and practice.
- Students will learn about the creation and evolution of the professional, activist and regulatory fields of historic preservation in the US.
- Students will learn and apply methodologies for researching, assessing and writing about historic places.
- Students will learn and apply methodologies for historic materials conservation.
- Students will learn and apply project management skills.
- Students will develop skills to write effectively for professional audiences.

Office Hours

Office hours exist to support your learning, and not all learning can occur during the regular course time. I strongly encourage students to make use of individual meetings to cover questions, concerns and curiosities. I am amenable to meetings outside of office hours, including by phone or Zoom.

Academic Policies

Please familiarize yourself with WVU’s academic policies, including those pertaining to academic integrity and standards, inclusivity, weather cancellation, class recording, illness and mental health, among others. You can find these statements here:

<https://facultysenate.wvu.edu/resources/syllabus-policies-and-statements>

Course Delivery and Organization

This course is an in-person lecture and discussion-based seminar. Course material, including assignments, will be delivered via eCampus. I may amend the syllabus as the semester progresses to add activities and guests, but all assignments and readings are set by the creation of the syllabus.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is mandatory, but can be excused with instructor permission. Excuses will be made for health and mental health reasons as well as personal crises, and can be made for travel or activities

related to other courses or university activities. Please confer with me as soon as possible about any requests for an excuse, and do so *before* the session you would need to miss. Unexcused absences will proportionally affect the “Attendance and Participation” portion of your course grade. Due to the weekly meeting time, more than three unexcused absences for this course will result in an automatic “F” grade.

Use of Technology and Artificial Intelligence

While the use of electronic devices is necessary to access eBooks and PDFs, as well as to enhance learning by looking up things to share with the class or looking up terms and phrases (or translating if English is not your first language), it can be distracting if activity is unrelated to learning. I reserve the right to request that you put electronic devices away if I feel that your use is problematic.

The use of AI is not fully prohibited (except for the midterm exam as noted below) – but also not enthusiastically embraced. Generally, AI is useless for historic research, and even more so for regional or local histories. It has some application for historical research yet. Also, the carbon footprint of a ChatGPT query is ten times that of a Google search, so use of AI in mass actually threatens historic sites by negatively impacting carbon emissions. The use of ChatGPT to generate course writing is not allowed.

Assignments and Evaluation

	Number of Assignments	Points per Assignment	Percentage of Course Grade
Attendance and Participation		100 points	15%
Discussion Lead	1	100 points	10%
Reading Responses	4	25 points x 4 = 100 overall	20%
Midterm Exam (UG) Midterm Paper (G)	1	100 points	20%
Field Reports		33.3 points x 3 = 100 points	15%
Final Project	1	100 points	20%
	TOTALS:	600	100%

Midterm Grade

Assignment/Activity	Points
Attendance and Participation	43.75
Controversy Essay	100
Midterm Exam or Paper	100
Reading Responses (2)	50
Discussion Leads as Completed	<i>100 points per response</i>
	<i>293.75 (49% of course grade) + discussion leads as completed</i>

ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Lead

You are responsible for co-leading two class discussions in teams of two or three with other students based on assignments made in week 1. Each group of discussants should select a key theme or themes that occur in the reading list for the week, and provide some analysis of how those themes come across and why they matter to this course. There should be questions for the full class to answer, which can be placed throughout the discussion (highly encouraged) or at the end. Slides and visuals are strongly encouraged to help underscore points. External subjects can be brought into the discussion – if we are discussing reconstructed buildings/sites, for instance, and you want to talk to a site like Prickett's Fort you have visited, please do so! The goal of these discussion leads is to encourage open discussion and avoid any one person lecturing at length. They can be creative in format and tone. Presentations must be at least 30 minutes long (not including discussion).

Reading Responses

You are required to submit four reading responses for the course readings. These essays are meant to be critical reflections on the authors' arguments, framing, and positions but really should lead with your own expression of how you think about the works. That is, tell me what's on your mind, not what's on the author's mind. I encourage drilling deep into two texts rather than skipping across more. Responses should be 300-600 words long. These responses can include any assigned readings ahead of the due dates. They are due according to the schedule on the syllabus.

Midterm Exam/Paper

Undergraduate students will complete a mid-term exam which will consist of essay questions requiring critical analysis of course readings. The exam is open-book but AI is strictly prohibited. The exam will open in week 6 and be due in week 7.

Graduate students will propose a topic for a midterm research paper in week 5 to be submitted in week 7. This paper can respond to any topic addressed by course readings, lectures and activities and must be 4,000 words in length.

Field Reports

There will be three Field Reports which will be worksheets corresponding to field activities undertaken in the second part of the semester. These reports will assess the application of field methods. These will be distributed prior to field work and completed on hard copies during course time according to the dates listed on the syllabus.

Final Project

The final project will consist of actual field work and research advancing a real-world historic preservation project in and around Morgantown or nearby. Projects will be distributed to teams where specific roles will be assigned to students. The goals of the projects will be delivering useful products that create historic preservation skills in students. The details of the final project will be discussed

before the midterm point with an assignment sheet specifying the work, and teams will be created then.

Optional Pittsburgh Field Trip

There will be an optional Saturday field trip to Pittsburgh in April. This trip will encompass several sites and activities that will highlight course themes. Attendance on the trip will be able to be substituted for one of the required reading responses. The trip will be a carpool experience in which students may incur fuel and food expenses, but any admissions or fees will be covered by the department. Details will be discussed in week four.

Late Work/Extensions

Late work will be reduced by half a letter grade (5 percentage points) for each day that it is late. Extensions will be granted on a case by case basis, without judgment. I encourage you to reach out if you anticipate failing to make a deadline, as it is best for both of us to know that in advance (and for you to get an extension).

Grading Scale

A+	98-100%	B	83-86%	C-	70-72%	F	59-0%
A	93-97%	B-	80-82%	D+	67-69%		
A-	90-92%	C+	77-79%	D	63-66%		
B+	87-89%	C	73-76%	D-	60-62%		

READINGS

All articles, book excerpts and other documents will be posted on eCampus.

Recommended Reference for Field Work

Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture* (New York: Knopf, 2015). *Instructor has copy.*

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 14): Introduction

Introductions

Introductory Lecture: *What the People Want*

Week 2 (January 21): No Class, Instructor Traveling

Week 3 (January 28): The Origins of Historic Preservation

Reading:

Ann Pamela Cunningham, "To the Ladies of the South (1853)," *Historic Preservation Theory: An Anthology: Readings from the 18th to the 21st Century* (Sharon, Conn.: Design Books, 2023).

William Morris, "Manifesto for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings," *Historic Preservation Theory: An Anthology: Readings from the 18th to the 21st Century* (Sharon, Conn.: Design Books, 2023).

John Ruskin, "The Lamp of Memory," *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849; New York: The Noonday Press, 1961).

Bonnie McDonald, "To Do Historic Preservation Right, We Need To Move Beyond Our Fixation on Historic Material," *Next City* (January 10, 2024)

<http://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/historic-preservation-improve-move-beyond-historical-material>

Week 4 (February 4): Early Historic Preservation Practices

Reading:

Whitney Martinko, *Historic Real Estate: Market Morality and the Politics of Preservation in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020). Chapters 1, 3 and 4.

Randall Mason, "Historic Preservation, Public Memory and the Making of Modern New York City," *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

Reading Response #1 Due

Week 5 (February 11): Architectural Conservation

Reading:

Jukka Jokilhto, "Conservation," *A History of Architectural Conservation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

Steven W. Semes, "A Brief History of Preservation Philosophy," *The Future of the Past: A Conservation Ethic for Architecture, Urbanism and Historic Preservation* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2009).

Françoise Choay, "Seven Proposals on the Concept of Authenticity and Its Use in Historical Heritage Processes," *Historic Preservation Theory: An Anthology: Readings from the 18th to the 21st Century* (Sharon, Conn.: Design Books, 2023).

Week 6 (February 18): Historic Preservation as Regulatory System

Reading:

William J. Murtagh, "The Preservation Movement and the Private Citizen Before World War II" and "Government and Preservation Since World War II," *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2006).

Thomas F. King, "Repeal the National Historic Preservation Act," *Bending the Future: 50 Ideas for the Next 50 Years of Historic Preservation in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016).

David Hamer, "Development of the Concept of the Historic District," "Urban History in the Historic District," and "History That Is and Is Not Represented," *History in Urban Places: The Historic Districts of the United States* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998).

Suggested Reading:

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

<https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/nhpa.pdf>

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-10352/pdf/COMPS-10352.pdf>

National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15* (1998).

https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB-15_web508.pdf

Sample National Register Nomination and Section 106 Report

Reading Response #2 Due

Week 7 (February 25): The Uses of Historic Preservation

Reading:

Stewart Brand, "Preservation: A Quiet, Populist, Conservative, Victorious Revolution" *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

Dolores Hayden, "Contested Terrain" and "Place Memory and Historic Preservation," *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995).

J.B. Jackson, "To Pity the Plumage and Forget the Dying Bird," *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

Undergraduate: Midterm Exam Due

Graduate: Midterm Paper Due

Week 8 (March 4): Historic Preservation Silences and Exclusions

Reading:

Kofi Boone, "Black Landscapes Matter," *Ground Up Journal* 6 (2020).

Kathleen Powers Conti, "Beyond the Absence: Recovering the Architectural Imprints of Slavery at Virginia's Berkeley Plantation," *Architectures of Slavery: Ruins and Reconstructions* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2025).

Erica Avrami, "Victimizing and Valorizing," *Second Order Preservation: Social Justice and Climate Action through Heritage Policy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024).

Suggested Reading:

Kyshia Henderson, Samuel Powers, Michelle Claibourne and Sophie Trawalter, "Confederate Monuments and the History of Lynching in the American South: An Empirical Examination," *PNAS* (October 11, 2021).

<http://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2103519118>

Week 9 (March 11): Style Wars, Culture Clashes and the Recent Past

Reading:

Rem Koolhaas, "Preservation is Overtaking Us," *Future Anterior* 1.2 (Fall 2004).

Robert Bevan, "Style Wars/Culture Wars," *Monumental Lies: Culture Wars and the Truth About the Past* (New York: Verso Books, 2022).

Michael R. Allen, "Trumpism, Neoclassicism, and Architecture as Propaganda," *PLATFORM* (May 17, 2021).

<https://www.platformspace.net/home/trumpism-neoclassicism-and-architecture-as-propaganda>

Elizabeth Blasius, "Stonewall: Movement, Monument, Myth," *MAS Context* (June 16, 2025).

<https://mascontext.com/observations/stonewall-movement-monument-myth>

Reading Response #3 Due

Week 10 (March 18): No Class, Spring Break

Week 11 (March 25): Socially-Responsive Practices

Reading:

Bonnie McDonald, *The Relevancy Guidebook* (2023).

Kristal Buckley, "Heritage Work: Understanding the Values, Applying the Values," *Values in Heritage Management: Emerging Approaches and Research Directions* (2019).

<http://www.getty.edu/publications/heritagemanagement/part-two/4/>

Charlotte M. Caldwell, "'What is a Civil Rights Site?': Re-conceptualizing the Preservation of Black American Heritage," *Center for the Preservation of Civil Rights Sites* (2020).

<https://cpcrs.upenn.edu/initiatives/what-civil-rights-site-re-conceptualizing-preservation-black-american-heritage>

Frederic Jameson, "Nostalgia for the Present," *Historic Preservation Theory: An Anthology: Readings from the 18th to the 21st Century* (Sharon, Conn.: Design Books, 2023).

Week 12 (April 1): No Going Back: Managing Change

Reading:

Stewart Brand, "Vernacular" and "Shearing Layers," *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

Chris Wilson, "Place Over Time: Restoration and Revivalism in Santa Fe," *Giving Preservation A History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

Caitlin DeSlivey, "Palliative Curation: The Death of a Lighthouse," *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Reading Response #4 Due

Field Report #1 Due by end of next day

Week 13 (April 8): Field Work

Activities TBD

Field Report #2 Due by end of next day

Week 14 (April 15): Field Work

Activities TBD

Field Report #3 Due by end of next day

Week 15 (April 22): Field Work

Activities TBD

Week 16 (April 29): Conclusions

Working Presentations by Teams

Week 17 (May 6): Final Work Due

Final Projects Due by End of Day