**HIST 395: Material Culture**

**Spring 2018, Section 1**

**T/Th 12:30-1:45pm**

**CCC 231**

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Department of History Office: CCC 461

Office Hours: T/TH 2-3:30pm and by appointment

“Material culture is the study through artifacts of the beliefs–values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions–of a particular community or society at a given time.”

Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter”

**Course Summary**

Material Culture is a course about stuff: the historical significance, preservation, and general “thinginess” of everyday objects. It is designed to introduce students to the history, theory, and practice of material culture. Throughout the semester we will examine a range of artifacts, challenging you to develop a critical eye for analyzing history through the study of objects. Students will put these skills into practice by drafting reports of “mystery objects” for the UWSP Archives, creating a “cabinet of curiosity” for the Museum of Natural History, and writing submissions to [*Wisconsin 101: Our History in Objects*](http://www.wi101.org/)*,* a collaborative public history project run by the Wisconsin Historical Society.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students taking “Material Culture” will develop skills for analyzing and interpreting history to a general audience through artifacts.  Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

* Evaluate how interpretations of the past are developed, enhanced, or challenged through the study of artifacts
* Analyze the similarities and differences in studying artifacts compared to traditional written texts
* Complete an experiential learning project by writing object submissions to *Wisconsin 101: Our History in Objects*
* Reflect on the experiential project by recognizing both the theoretical and practical challenges of working with artifacts
* Collaborate by working in teams to produce an exhibition at the Museum of Natural History
* Conduct an in-depth analysis of an artifact through writing the history of a “mystery object” for the UWSP Archives

**Required Texts**

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (available for purchase at the UWSP bookstore)

Other assigned readings will be posted on D2L.

**Assignments**

**Participation:** Class participation consists of more than just regular attendance. It also involves coming to class prepared and engaged, bringing assigned readings, listening to fellow classmates and guest speakers, and actively contributing to class discussions. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Students may miss three classes before their final grade begins to drop 2% for each additional absence. It is not wise to use all of your absences early in the term in case you have legitimate reasons for missing class later. Arriving late or leaving early from class will be counted as one-half an absence. Students facing extenuating circumstances affecting their attendance (such as serious health issues, UWSP athletics, the birth of a child, military service, etc.) are encouraged to talk to me.

**Short Essays:** You are responsible for writing four short response papers (1-2 pages each) based on assigned readings as well as a fifth paper (3-4 pages) based on the book *The Age of Homespun.* Students are responsible for completing five essays and can choose to do a sixth for extra credit. Students will turn in both a hard copy and an online submission for every assignment. Submissions of all assignments will be deducted a full letter grade for every 24 hours they are late.

**In-Class Responses:** There will be a series of in-class writing responses to questions about the readings. I will grade responses on a plus-check-minus system. A check-plus indicates exceptional work, a check represents basic competency, and a check-minus signals incomplete, inaccurate, or substandard work. Students who are absent will receive a zero for their participation grade that day and will not have an opportunity to make up the missing work. Students can drop their lowest response score.

**Mystery Objects:** Archivists and curators frequently stumble across objects that they have no idea what it is, how it was, used, or why it is significant. You will research one such mystery object and write a comprehensive report detailing the artifact’s provenance and significance.

**History Day**: Given that this is an applied history class, students will have an opportunity to put their skills to use by evaluating the work of junior high and high school students participating in National History Day. Students will serve as judges by evaluating public history exhibits, papers, websites, documentaries, and/or performances.

**Cabinet of Curiosity:** Working in teams, students will install a contemporary “cabinet of curiosity” exhibit display at the Museum of Natural History. Students will be responsible for selecting objects, writing exhibit labels, designing panels, and promoting the display. Your peers will write evaluations regarding your contributions to the project.

**Wisconsin 101 Project:** Working individually or in teams, students will be responsible for writing the history of an object of regional historical significance for the Wisconsin 101 Project. Students will submit both a rough draft and final draft, with the intent of potentially publishing their object histories on the Wisconsin 101 website. Students will also deliver a presentation of their project during the last week of class.

**Assessment Breakdown\***

Participation: 20%

Short Essays: 15% (5% Age of Homespun response, 10% remaining responses)

In-Class Responses: 10% (divided evenly among responses)

Mystery Objects: 10%

Cabinet of Curiosity: 15%

History Day: 5%

Wisconsin 101 Project: 25% (10% rough draft, 15% final draft, and 5% presentation)

\*For students taking this course as a 500-level seminar, additional readings and projects may be assigned. Please see me for more details.

**Grading Scale**

A: 93-100

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69

D: 60-66

F: 59 and below

**Classroom Policies**

Students are expected to arrive on time and to be attentive and engaged during class. This means you are not sleeping, reading/working on other materials, using electronic devices, talking to your neighbor, or disrupting class in any way. Students will raise their hands for questions and be respectful of fellow students and the professor. You may disagree with another person’s comment or position, but do so with courtesy and respect. For more information on classroom expectations, see: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Academic-Misconduct.aspx>

All forms of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fraud, and unauthorized access to tests and assignments are strictly prohibited. Any words or ideas borrowed from another person or source, whether through a direct quotation or through paraphrasing, must be cited properly to avoid plagiarism. Please familiarize yourself with what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. Violations of the university’s code of conduct are subject to sanctions ranging from a failing grade for an assignment to disciplinary hearings or potential failure of the course. For more information on academic dishonesty, see: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf>

If you have a learning or physical challenge that requires accommodation, please contact the Disability and Assistive Technology Center as early as possible. They will then notify me privately of the accommodations that will facilitate your success in the course. Their office is located on the 6th floor of ALB, Voice: 715-346-3365, TTY: 715-346-3362.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP’s policies, see: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/ADA.aspx>

Computers and other electronic devices are not allowed in class without getting permission from me in advance. Studies have shown that students learn more and perform better by writing down the main ideas of lecture versus typing them. For more information, see the article in *Scientific American* entitled “A Learning Secret: Don’t Take Notes with a Laptop” (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>).

I hold regular office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-3:30pm (461 CCC). During this time, my priority is to talk to students about any questions or concerns they may have. I truly enjoy meeting with you to hear about how things are going. If you are struggling, stop by and let’s chat. If you are unable to meet during office hours, email me and we will set up an alternative time.

*Please note that the syllabus is subject to change and assignments may be added. Given that we are working on actual community projects, our schedule may adapt based on the schedules and needs of our partners.*

**Week 1: Course Introduction**

January 23: Course introduction and syllabus review

January 25: Defining Material Culture

**DUE:** **Bring to class three objects that represent yourself. Come prepared to discuss why you selected them.**

**Week 2: Ethnographic Objects**

January 30: Archaeology

Readings Due: James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten* (D2L)

February 1: Ethnography

Readings Due: Mary Jo Arnoldi, “Herbert War’s ‘Ethnographic Sculptures’ of Africans” (D2L); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography” (D2L)

**Week 3: Everyday Objects**

February 6: Domestic Objects

Readings Due: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, The Age of Homespun, pp. 3-74

February 8: Textiles

Readings Due: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, The Age of Homespun, pp. 142-73, 208-47, 413-418

**DUE: Age of Homespun Essay (D2L and Hard Copy)**

**Week 4: Cabinets of Curiosity**

February 13: Wondrous Objects

Readings Due: Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (D2L); Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder* (D2L)

February 15: Objects of Exchange

Readings Due: Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (D2L); Charles F. Montgomery, “The Connoisseurship of Artifacts” (D2L)

**Week 5: Mystery Objects**

February 20: Object Labels

Readings Due: Robert Friedel, “Some Matters of Substance” (D2L); Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (D2L)

February 22: Mystery Objects (Meet at the Archives)

**Week 6: Global History**

February 27: Global History

Readings Due: [History of the World in 100 Objects](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/a_history_of_the_world.aspx) (online)

March 1: NO CLASS (NATIONAL HISTORY DAY)

**DUE: Participation in National History Day**

**Week 7: Objects of Conflict**

March 6: Objects of Warfare

Readings Due: Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (D2L)

**DUE: Mystery Objects Assignment (D2L)**

March 8: Objects of Racism

Readings Due: Robert R. Weyeneth, “The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Problems of Preserving the Problematical Past” (D2L)

**Week 8: Technological Objects**

March 13: Objects of Technology

Readings Due: Robert B. Gordon, “The Interpretation of Artifacts in the History of Technology” (D2L); Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (D2L)

March 15: Visit Natural History Museum

Readings Due: [Menominee Clans Story](http://www4.uwsp.edu/museum/menomineeclans/) (online)

**Week 9: Wisconsin 101 Project (dates subject to change)**

March 20: Wisconsin 101 Workshop Part 1

Readings Due: [Wisconsin 101 Website](http://www.wi101.org/)

**DUE: Cabinet of Curiosity Installation**

March 22: Wisconsin 101 Workshop Part 2

Readings Due: Readings on Central Wisconsin History (TBD)

**Spring Break**

March 27: No Class

March 29: No Class

**Week 10: Artistic Objects**

April 3: Art History

Readings Due: Stephen Weil, “Reduced to Art” (D2L); James Cuno, “The Object of Art Museums” (D2L); Clement Greenberg, “Avant Garde and Kitsch” (D2L)

April 5: Visit Carlsten Gallery and Collections

Readings Due: [Carlsten Gallery Website](https://www3.uwsp.edu/art-design/Pages/Exhibitions/carlsten.aspx)

**Week 11: Objects of Consumption**

April 10: Consumerism

Readings Due: John Cotton Dana, “The Gloom of the Museum” (D2L); Lizabeth A. Cohen, “Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American-Working Class Homes, 1885-1915” (D2L)

April 12: Authenticity

Readings Due: Jane Maclaren Walsh, “Crystal Skulls and Other Problems: Or, ‘Don’t Look It in the Eye’’ (D2L)

**Week 12: Contemporary Objects**

April 17: Collecting Present-Day Objects

Readings Due: Graham Bowley, “In an Era of Strife, Museums Collect History as It Happens” (D2L); Other Readings TBD

April 19: Wisconsin 101 Workshop Part 3

**Week 13: Visual Objects**

April 24: Visual Culture

Readings Due: J.R. Miller, “Reading Photographs, Reading Voices: Documenting the History of Native Residential Schools” (D2L); Chris Toumey, “Truth and Beauty at the Nanoscale” (D2L)

April 26: Media Museum (Meet at the Archives)

**DUE: Wisconsin 101 Rough Drafts (D2L and Hard Copy)**

**Week 14: Digital Objects**

May 1: Meetings with Instructor to Discuss Wisconsin 101 Project

May 3: Objects of the Digital Age

Readings Due: Roy Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era” (D2L)

**Week 15: Class Presentations**

May 8: Class Presentations of Wisconsin 101 Project

May 10: Class Presentations of Wisconsin 101 Project

Final Exam: Wednesday, May 16, 10:15-12:15pm, CCC 231

**DUE: Wisconsin 101 Final Drafts (D2L and Hard Copy)**