

RESOLUTION ON ESTABLISHING AN M.A. DEGREE IN MATERIAL CULTURE AND PUBLIC HUMANITIES

WHEREAS, the Department of Religion and Culture and the Art History Program in the School of the Visual Arts jointly propose a multidisciplinary 30-credit hour master's program in Material Culture and Public Humanities. "Material Culture" is the study of material or physical objects, as well as the placement of those objects in a critical, theoretical, or historical perspective as the products of a distinct culture. "Public Humanities" is the use of humanistic research and perspectives to address timely public issues and concerns; and

WHEREAS, the degree prepares students for careers in community cultural organizations, museums, historical societies, humanities foundations, historic preservation, and governmental and non-governmental organizations, or for doctoral study in a variety of fields; and

WHEREAS, no other Material Culture or Public Humanities master's of arts program exists in Virginia or surrounding states; and

WHEREAS, combining the study of Material Culture and Public Humanities into a single degree program ensures that students will be sensitive to and engaged with public concerns and able to interpret material culture and other humanist research to a general audience; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech is uniquely suited for such a degree program by its proximity to numerous museums in Blacksburg, Montgomery County, Roanoke, and through its Alexandria branch and the Smithsonian Institution—by far the greatest repository of material culture objects in the United States and a leader in public humanities; and

WHEREAS, the M.A. in Material Culture and Public Humanities is clearly interdisciplinary and meets the updated Strategic Plan's goals of social and individual transformation, as well as the Strategic Plan goals of increasing the number and breadth of graduate programs in the humanities, fine arts, and social sciences; increasing interdisciplinary research and scholarship; broadening the base of domestic universities and colleges from which we recruit graduate students; and facilitating the establishment of new, appropriate interdisciplinary and international graduate degree programs;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the master's of arts degree in Material Culture and Public Humanities be approved.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the master's of arts degree in Material Culture and Public Humanities be approved and forwarded to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia for further review and approval with an expected effective date of fall 2011.

June 7, 2010

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

M.A. Degree in Material Culture and Public Humanities

Faculty in the Art History Program in the School of Visual Arts (College of Architecture and Urban Studies) and the Department of Religion and Culture (College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences) propose an M.A. in Material Culture and Public Humanities, a cross-disciplinary degree with two emphases designated by the degree's name. The degree prepares students for careers in community cultural organizations, museums, historical societies, humanities foundations, historic preservation, and governmental and non-governmental organizations. Some graduates may enroll in either the Ph.D. in Architecture Research in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies or in the Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought—ASPECT—in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences.

“Material culture” is the study of material or physical objects, as well as the placement of those objects in a critical, theoretical or historical perspective as the products of a distinct culture. Since it embraces any discipline in which objects are at the core, it is by its very nature interdisciplinary. It also incorporates, but is not limited to, art history, folklore, museum studies, interior design, architecture, industrial design, archaeology, anthropology, geography, history, and economics. Material culture analysis is most closely related to cultural anthropology or cultural studies. It does not attempt to place aesthetic value on the object but considers all objects, however mundane, to be representative of a particular culture. It ranges from material historically designated as “fine art” to applied arts, to tools, to railroads, to factories. It is musical instruments, but not music; books, not literature; scientific instruments, not formulas; theatrical posters, not plays; and rock carvings, not rocks.

“Public humanities” seeks to bridge the divide between academia and the public by encouraging dialogue between scholars and communities on cultural and social issues and educating humanists to present complex ideas to general audiences in engaging ways. The National Task Force on Scholarship and the Public Humanities has outlined a compelling case for “more scholars willing and able to relate their disciplines to timely public issues and concerns.” Influences such as migrations across national borders, population growth, information technologies, and consolidation of media and communications stimulate the need for three kinds of literacy in the twenty-first century that are dependent on the humanities: multicultural literacy, civic literacy, and community literacy, with its implications for understanding place and region. A graduate degree focusing on public humanities will allow students to develop their unique visions of applying humanistic research to advance multicultural, civic, and community literacy in social contexts.

Combining the study of Material Culture and Public Humanities into a single degree program ensures that students will be sensitive to and engaged with public concerns and able to interpret material culture and other humanist research to a general audience. While students may focus on either Material Culture or Public Humanities,

they share two core methods courses and a common Material Culture and Humanities in the Public Sphere course focused on humanistic paradigms and civic spaces.

Virginia Tech is uniquely suited for such a degree program. Its proximity to Roanoke means an exposure to available subjects for a study of material culture, from the industrial base to the railroad infrastructure to the Taubman Museum of Art, Harrison Museum of African American Culture, Virginia Museum of Transportation, Historical Society of Western Virginia, History Museum of Western Virginia, Science Museum of Western Virginia, and the O. Winston Link Museum. Those institutions also provide opportunities for the study and practice of public humanities. In addition the College of Architecture and Urban Studies' Alexandria location is a perfect stepping stone to the Smithsonian Institution, by far the greatest repository of material culture objects in the United States and a leader in public humanities. Locally, Smithfield Plantation, Solitude, the Blacksburg Museum and Odd Fellows Hall, Wilderness Road Regional Museum, the Andrew Johnston House, the Glencoe Museum, and the Montgomery Museum provide additional sites for student study and practicums.

Proposed Graduate Curriculum

The M.A. in Material Culture and Public Humanities would be the first graduate degree in both the Program in Art History (School of Visual Arts) and the Department of Religion and Culture. It would be constructed largely out of existing graduate courses. In the first year of this 30-hour program, students will complete 18 hours, including 9 hours in the core (two methods courses and a course in Material Culture and Humanities in the Public Sphere), and a topics course related to their selected emphasis. Students will enroll in additional courses offered by the two participating colleges and recommended for enrollees. In the second year, students will either complete a six-hour practicum in the public sector or write a thesis (six hours), in addition to other electives. It is expected that students planning on further graduate study will write a thesis and students intending to enter the field upon graduation will do an internship or practicum.

Learning Goals

After taking the two core methods courses (Art/Hum/Rel 5104/5204), students will be able to identify and explain the major historiographic divisions in the study of material culture and public humanities; distinguish the major theoretical frameworks that shape research in those disciplines; contribute to an analysis of objects through the lens of gender or the politics of visual representation; employ theoretical modes commonly utilized by scholars in folklore and anthropology; apply theoretical frameworks to research problems in material culture and public humanities and evaluate their usefulness in discussing material objects and the role of humanities in the public sphere.

In addition, students will be able to apply fundamental skills from the individual disciplines that constitute the interdisciplinary subject of material culture and public

humanities; explain the value of different types of physical evidence; identify and use basic search tools for research in material culture and public humanities; articulate the wider sociological and art historical context of material object; formulate research questions and hypotheses; assess the different audiences for research in material culture and public humanities; apply the theoretical frameworks in material culture and public humanities to specific objects; construct a comprehensive bibliography for a research topic and use bibliographic software to organize the bibliography.

Evidence of Student Demand

In April 2010, a survey was taken to gauge prospective interest in the degree. The survey was sent to students on the Program in Art History listserv (art history majors, minors and interested students) and the Department of Religion and Culture listserv. Ninety-three students responded.

The survey asked the students' current level of education, major, and chance of seeking a graduate degree in the future. Of the respondents, 77% said it was very likely or likely that they would pursue a graduate degree. Of those students, 50% said they would consider a graduate degree in Material Culture and Public Humanities. As a reason, 83% cited interest in the field or job opportunities; 88% were interested in either in-state or out-of-state institutions.

The program is expecting to enroll 25 students in the two-year program and graduate about 10 students per year by the target date of five years after initial launch.

Evidence of Occupational Demand

Graduates with an M.A. in Material Culture and Public Humanities may find jobs in museums, historical sites and similar institutions, as well as in advocacy, grant-making, and civic organizations. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics *Occupational Handbook*, the occupational outlook for the category, "Archivists, Curators, and Museum Technicians" is "much faster than average, which indicates a projected employment increase of 20 percent or more, although there is keen competition for such jobs."

Wage and salary jobs in advocacy, grant-making, and civic organizations are "projected to increase 14 percent over the 2008-18 period, compared to 11 percent growth projected for all industries combined." Civic and social organizations will "experience increased demand as the population grows and as people continue to value the interests and connections they make as part of these groups. In particular, as the population ages and as more people enter retirement, demand for organizations that cater to these individuals will increase."

In Virginia, the occupation description for "curator" most closely resembles the professions for the degree's graduates: "Administers affairs of museums and conducts research programs, directs instructional, research and public service activities of institution." The latest figures available show:

Occupational Employment Projections in the United States for Curators for a base year of 2006 and a projected year of 2016 ¹

Occupation Code (SOC)	Occupational Title	2006 Estimated Employment	2016 Projected Employment	Total 2006-2016 Employment Change	Annual Avg. Percent Change	Total Percent Change
254012	Curators	10,362	12,772	2,410	2.1	23.3

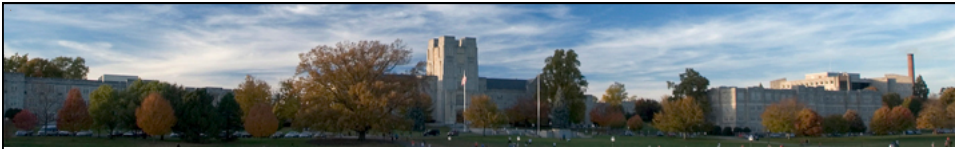
According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment as an archivist, conservator, or curator usually requires graduate education and related work experience.” The MA in Material Culture and Public Humanities provides such experience through the option to pursue an internship in a museum or other organization and develop a project and report.

Current examples of job openings where a graduate with an M.A. in Material Culture and Public Humanities could apply include: Director of Museum Collections and Exhibitions, Kentucky Historical Society; Director of Museum Programs, Fairfield Museum (CT) and History Center; Director of Interpretation and Education, Stratford Hall, Montross, VA; Director of Education Bayou Bend Collections (TX); Associate Editor/Interpretive Manager, Princeton University Art Museum; Curator of Education, Public Programs, University of Notre Dame.

Program Resources

The proposed program draws primarily on existing coursework and engages faculty in the two host departments. Extensive new resources are not required to launch or sustain the program at this relatively modest size.



¹ Source: Projections Team / Micro Matrix System



M.A. in Material Culture and Public Humanities


Interdisciplinary Graduate Program
proposed by
the Program in Art History (College of Architecture and Urban Studies)
and
the Department of Religion and Culture (College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences)

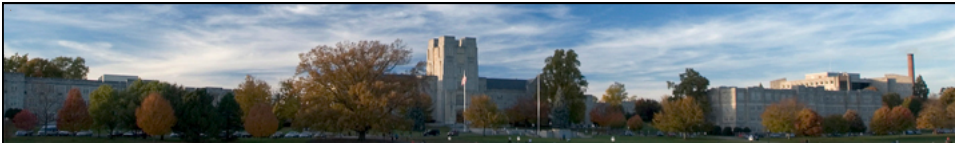
L. Bailey Van Hook, Ph.D., Program in Art History
Elizabeth C. Fine, Ph.D., Department of Religion and Culture



“Material Culture”

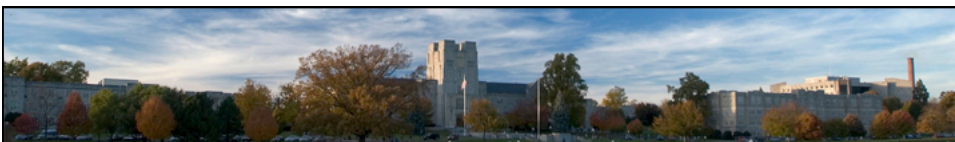

- The study of material or physical objects, as well as the placement of those objects in a critical, theoretical or historical perspective as products of a distinct culture
- Ranges from material historically designated as ‘fine art’ to applied arts, crafts, tools, railroads, factories
- Musical instruments, but not music; books, not literature; scientific instruments, not formulas; theatrical posters, not plays; and rock carvings, not rocks






“Public Humanities”


- Seeks to bridge the divide between academia and the public
- Encourages dialogue between scholars and communities on cultural and social issues
- Educates humanists to present complex ideas to general audiences in engaging ways
- Allows students to develop their unique visions of applying humanistic research to advance multicultural, civic, and community literacy in social contexts



Rationale



- The National Task Force on Scholarship and the Public Humanities has outlined a compelling case for “more scholars willing and able to relate their disciplines to timely public issues and concerns.”
- The program meets the university’s strategic goals:
 - Increase the number and breadth of graduate programs in the humanities, fine arts and social sciences;
 - Increase interdisciplinary research and scholarship; and
 - Facilitate the establishment of new appropriate interdisciplinary and international graduate degree programs.
- There is no degree in either discipline in the state of Virginia or even the region.






The MC&PH Degree – Why at Virginia Tech?


- Opportunity to study region's industrial and Appalachian base
- Local and VT resources: Smithfield Plantation, Solitude, Odd Fellows Hall, Kentland, Wilderness Road Regional Museum, Glencoe Museum
- Proximity to Roanoke: Taubman Museum of Art, Virginia Museum of Transportation, History Museum of Western Virginia, Science Museum of Western Virginia, O. Winston Link Museum, Harrison Museum of African American Culture
- Through the College of Architecture and Urban Studies' Alexandria location, proximity to Smithsonian—greatest repository of material culture objects in U.S. and leader in public humanities
- Internships available at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities



The MC&PH Degree Program


- 30 credit hour M.A. program
- 2 emphases:
 - Material Culture
 - Public Humanities
- Courses chosen among existing courses in College of Architecture and Urban Studies or College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences that are appropriate to emphases
- 15 credit core including 6 credit practicum or 6 credit thesis depending on whether student wants to enter job field or a doctoral program





Prospective Students

- Graduates with bachelor's degrees from Virginia Tech and from other institutions in Virginia, the United States, and abroad
- Mid-career professionals in the arts and humanities, in particular from Southwest Virginia and Appalachia, but also from Northern Virginia at the College of Architecture and Urban Studies' Alexandria location
- Steady state enrollment of approximately 25 students over a two-year period



Survey of Current Undergraduates in Art History or Interdisciplinary Studies


Question:
What is the chance you would seek a graduate degree in the future?

77% responded "very likely" or "likely"

Question:
If you are anticipating a graduate degree in your future, would you consider an M.A. in Material Culture and Public Humanities?

50% responded "very interested" or "interested"





Reasons for Interest in MC&PH Degree

Question:

What are your reasons for an interest in an M.A. in Material Culture and Public Humanities?

- 49% interest in the field
- 34% job opportunities
- 17% foundation for advanced (Ph.D.) degree

 VirginiaTech
Invent the Future



Anticipated Placement of Graduates

- Community cultural organizations
- Museums
- Historical societies
- Humanities foundations
- Historical preservation
- Governmental and non-governmental organizations
- Ph.D. programs in history, humanities, and design disciplines

 VirginiaTech
Invent the Future



Current Typical Job Openings for Graduates


- Director of Museum Collections and Exhibitions, Kentucky Historical Society
- Director of Museum Programs, Fairfield Museum and History Center (CT)
- Director of Interpretation and Education, Stratford Hall, Montross, VA
- Director of Education, Bayou Bend Collections (TX)
- Associate Editor/Interpretive Manager, Princeton University Art Museum
- Curator of Education, Public Programs, University of Notre Dame



Strategic Program Goals


- Development of instructional, research and outreach partnerships between Virginia Tech and community programs, museums, and arts and humanities agencies
- Graduation of highly qualified professionals who make significant contributions to their communities and interdisciplinary research





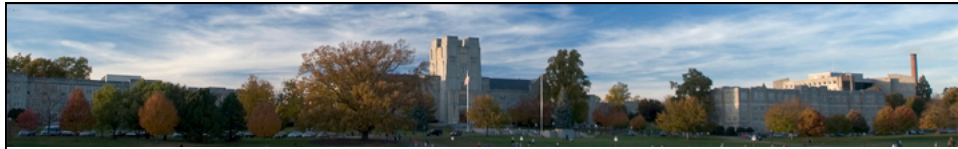
Resources

- Program is completely made up of existing courses, faculty, and facilities
- Standard graduate tuition rates apply
- Program budget reflects costs consistent with projected tuition revenue following start-up period



Thank you





Presentation prepared by:

L. Bailey Van Hook, Ph.D.
Professor of Art History
Chair, Program in Art History
School of Visual Arts
College of Architecture and Urban Studies
vanhook@vt.edu

Elizabeth C. Fine, Ph.D.
Professor of Humanities
Director, Humanities Program
Department of Religion and Culture and
Department of Communication
College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences
bfine@vt.edu

