Museum Studies

Chair, Department of Anthropology
  • James G. Enloe

Coordinator, Museum Studies
  • Heidi K. Lung (Anthropology)

Undergraduate certificate: museum studies
Faculty: https://uiowa.edu/museumstudies/contact-us
Website: https://uiowa.edu/museumstudies/

Museum studies has a long history at the University of Iowa, with courses offered continuously since 1910. Iowa’s museum studies students have become directors, curators, educators, and exhibit specialists in museums throughout the country.

Museums embrace every aspect of human experience. Iowa’s Museum Studies Program reflects this multiplicity, and includes students from many fields, including American studies, anthropology and archaeology, art, biology, business, communication studies, earth and environmental sciences, elementary and secondary education, English, world languages, history, and library and information science.

Instructors for museum studies courses reflect the program's interdisciplinary nature. They include faculty members from anthropology, art and art history, business, history, library and information science, and other related fields. The University archivist for University of Iowa Libraries is an affiliated faculty member of the Museum Studies Program, as are the collections management specialists for the University’s Museum of Art, Museum of Natural History, and Old Capitol Museum.

The Museum Studies Program holds academic memberships with the American Association for State and Local History and the Iowa Museum Association. These connections offer museum studies students opportunities for internships, professional networking, and career development. In addition to offering a wide range of on-campus courses, the certificate also can be earned online with a growing number of online courses.

The Museum Studies Program is administered by the Department of Anthropology.

Programs

Undergraduate Program of Study Certificate
  • Certificate in Museum Studies

Facilities

Museum studies students have access to a wide variety of museums and related resources, including the following University of Iowa museums: the Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Art, the Old Capitol Museum, the Medical Museum, and the Karro Athletic Hall of Fame.

The Museum Studies Program maintains close connections with a number of local, community-based museums and organizations, including the State Historical Society of Iowa, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, the African American Museum of Iowa, the Iowa Children’s Museum, and the Johnson County Historical Society.

The University of Iowa Collections Coalition, consisting of 19 collections and collection-support organizations, is an essential resource for the Museum Studies Program. It provides museum studies internships, directed study projects, opportunities for site visits, and volunteer experiences for students as well as guest speakers.

Courses

Museum Studies Courses

MUSM:2850 Museums and Social Justice 3 s.h.
Exploration of museums as institutions that frame social justice, promote equity of access through social bridging, and at times, address and challenge social ills directly through exhibits and programs; case studies and dialogue.

MUSM:3001 Introduction to Museum Studies 3 s.h.
Overview of museum history, function, philosophy, collection, and curatorial practices; governance and funding issues; exhibition evaluation and audience studies; examples from Museum of Art, Museum of Natural History, Old Capitol Museum, and Medical Museum. GE: Social Sciences. Same as ANTH:3001, EDTL:3001, SIED:3001.

MUSM:3003 Natural History Research Collections 3 s.h.
Techniques, methods, and issues specific to natural history research collections; practice in preparing and cleaning specimens; role of natural history specimens in modern scientific research. Recommendations: basic understanding of the diversity of plants and animals and natural history museum collections, MUSM:3001 or MUSM:3200, and BIOL:1411 or BIOL:1412; or other experience. Same as EES:3003.

MUSM:3004 Exhibition Planning 3 s.h.
Preliminary work for and process of developing museum exhibitions; history of exhibit design, evaluation, budgets, teams and team member roles, working with community and special interest groups, methods of production and display; students research a topic, choose artifacts and images, and create a narrative and exhibit script. Prerequisites: MUSM:3001.

MUSM:3090 Topics in Museum Studies 1 s.h.
Systematic and analytic methods used for research in physical collections; tutorials in collection building, curation, and preservation; designed by members of the University of Iowa Collections Coalition. Same as EES:3090.

MUSM:3100 Historic House Management and Preservation 3 s.h.
Management, preservation, interpretation, and basic operations of historic structures and the museums they serve.

MUSM:3105 Engaging Museum Audiences 3 s.h.
Effective audience engagement requires museums to meet visitors halfway; employing learning theories, knowledge of audience, and innovative examples from the field; students investigate a variety of approaches that are visitor-centered, interdisciplinary, and locally focused. Prerequisites: MUSM:3001.

MUSM:3120 Museum Origins 3 s.h.
History of museums; origin, character, and evolution into content specific institutions; anecdotes and personalities; how museums influenced society and their continuing relevance to a technological world.
MUSM:3125 Museums in a Digital World 3 s.h.
Digital technologies streamline internal museum processes while exponentially increasing the capacity of individuals to engage with museum collections; explores the digitized strategies and systems that democratize access and enhance museum visitor experiences.

MUSM:3131 Museum Evaluation and Visitor Studies 3 s.h.
Students explore evaluation theory, methodologies, and practical application through case studies and hands-on activities from all types of museum experiences (e.g., programs, exhibitions, wayfinding, interpretive technology) from both staff and visitor perspective. Prerequisites: MUSM:3001.

MUSM:3200 Collection Care and Management 3 s.h.
How a museum's management policy relates to its administrative, legal, and ethical obligations to its collections; acquisitions, deaccessions, collection use, data standards, storage environment, health, safety, documentation. Same as EES:3200.

MUSM:3215 The Museum of Today and Tomorrow: How Museums Enhance the K-12 Classroom 3 s.h.
What do museums have to offer teachers? How are they relevant to social studies, math, English, and science teachers? Students are put in charge of answering these questions and build their knowledge about art and innovative teaching strategies in the K-12 classroom and museum, practice designing lessons around a work of art, and apply their knowledge about art and curriculum into interactive online modules; students work directly with art on campus in the Lindquist Art Collection in the College of Education and the University of Iowa Museum of Art. Same as EDTL:3215.

MUSM:3237 Politics of the Archaeological Past 3 s.h.
How control over management of material remains of the ancient past, and representations of that past, intersect with the identity of diverse groups, including archaeologists, Indigenous peoples, national governments, collectors, ethnic minorities and majorities, museum curators; struggles for control of the archaeological past at different scales (artifacts, skeletal remains, sites, imagery, narratives) and in different regions of the world. Same as ANTH:3237.

MUSM:3500 Nonprofit Organizational Effectiveness I 3 s.h.
Operational and financial aspects of nonprofit management; mission and governance of organization; strategic planning for effective management, including finance, budget, income generation, fund-raising. Same as ENTR:3595, MGMT:3500, NURS:3595, RELS:3700, SSW:3500.

MUSM:4080 Museum Internship arr.
Work experience in functions, departments, and programs of the sponsoring museum related to museum's overall mission and museum field in general.

MUSM:4081 The Art Museum: Theory and Practice 3 s.h.
Introduction to different aspects of art museums; emphasis on roles of art historians, especially curatorial practice; current and historical theories and practices of art exhibitions; varying debates of the politics of display; art museum professions; the many facets of art exhibition preparation; the University of Iowa Museum of Art collections. Same as ARTH:4081.

MUSM:4082 Distance Learning Museum Internship arr.
Work experience in functions, departments, and programs of the sponsoring museum related to museum's overall mission and museum field in general.

MUSM:4130 Museum Literacy and Historical Memory 3 s.h.
Concepts and methods for understanding the role of museums in shaping knowledge and collective memory of history; institutionally based exhibits and collections, historical markers and public monuments, public holidays and events, media and artistic works that interpret the past; how events, people, and civic ambitions are memorialized and how memories of them are shaped; appearance of museums and related practices in the non-Western world after 1850. Same as HIST:4130.

MUSM:4150 Introduction to Grant Writing 3 s.h.
Comprehensive training in grant proposal writing; basics of project development and management; core principles for writing small and large proposals to public and private funding sources; finer points of grant writing to increase competitiveness of future proposals and applications; for students with limited grant writing experience. Same as EALL:4130.

MUSM:4200 Advanced Collection Care 3 s.h.
Builds on MUSM:3200; types and materials of museum objects and their care; storage and preservation of paper, books, photographs, works of art, electronic media, textiles, furniture, archaeological artifacts, and natural history specimens; collections project and hands-on practice in preservation techniques, enclosures, and supports; for students planning museum careers or professions that require care of collections. Same as EES:4200.

Collaborative work to recreate one exhibition from the University of Iowa Museum of Art that took place before the flood of 2008; creation of content that contributes to a virtual museum experience; introduction to digital tools commonly used in design of exhibitions; recreation of historical exhibitions based on documentary photographs in museum and University archives and research on the premise of the exhibition and objects on view; how digital artifacts might be used in different contexts; use of museum and digital environments as labs for lifelong and distance learning. Same as EDTL:4210, INTM:4210.