

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

HSS Student Bursary Project Advert 2023/24

Project title:

Who are the publics in public history?

Summary/explanation of the project:

This project investigates how various stakeholders – students, lecturers, heritage professionals – imagine ‘the public’ in public history, providing qualitative data through which to explore not only the values and assumptions which underpin public history as a field of knowledge, but also the barriers and exclusions which shape its practice.

Project lead:

Dr David Geiringer, Lecturer in Public History & Heritage

School of History

d.geiringer@qmul.ac.uk

Aims and context of project:

In the last five years, ‘public history’ has emerged as a major focus in the teaching, research and impact agendas of universities. This HSS Student Bursary Project will support ongoing research into the ideas and assumptions which underpin ‘public history’ as a field of expertise, foregrounding the voices of those involved in public history work, education and funding. It is often claimed that public history represents a democratisation of historical knowledge – extending beyond the academy to engage a wider constituency of the population as audiences, participants, collaborators and creators (Keen, 2016). If this is the case, then which publics are participating in public history and which remain marginalised? The broader aim of the project is to deepen and diversify the way public history is understood and practiced, developing more inclusive and community-led approaches to public history pedagogy and collaboration.

There remains very little research into how the public are being imagined and constructed in public history work. I propose that the successful student will co-design and manage an online survey which investigates how various public history stakeholders understand ‘the public’. The data will help answer 3 research questions:

1. Who are the imagined publics in public history?
2. How do these publics vary between different public history stakeholders?
3. To what extent does class, race, gender, age, sexuality, and disability intersect with participation in public history?

This bursary project will provide the foundations for a larger project on the underlying politics of public history. It will serve as a ‘pilot study’ for an AHRC Curiosity Award application under the title ‘Locating the public in public history’ (intended submission date:

September 2024). The successful candidate will be acknowledged in relevant outputs from this project.

Project work and outcomes:

The student will co-design and manage an online survey (via Microsoft Office Forms) which examines how various public history stakeholders understand 'the public'. In our first meetings, the student and I will co-design an online questionnaire, developing questions which are accessible and productive, and plan a dissemination strategy.

The student will then work on gathering responses from three relevant groups: a.) students across UKHEIs b.) lecturers involved in the teaching of public history c.) public history and heritage professionals (e.g. curators, archivists, community heritage workers, funding body representatives, media and cultural producers). The student will identify routes through which to promote and distribute the survey, creating mailing lists for the three stakeholder groups and publicising through social media (using, for example, the SoH Twitter account). The student will also manage the Excel Spreadsheet which records the responses, reporting back on response rates and targeting groups which require further promotion.

I will support the student (through an initial meeting and fortnightly check-in sessions) by offering guidance on how to start contacting these groups, 'snowballing' the networks of respondents and social media engagement.

After the survey closes, the student will write a short report on the main themes which emerge from the responses. This report will form the basis of a blog post which the student and I will co-author for the RHS website on the different publics invoked in public history.

Outcomes:

- A small qualitative dataset on how public history practitioners imagine their publics.
- A short report on the major themes/patterns/ideas which emerge from the responses.
- An RHS blog post.

All work on the project can be completed remotely.

Potential benefits for successful applicant:

- Deepen insights into the intellectual, political and economic forces which shape 'public history'.
- Develop skills in designing and managing a qualitative dataset.
- Gain experience in blog writing for wider, public audiences.
- Build knowledge of professional networks in public history and heritage sectors.
- Strengthen written communication skills.

Student skills and knowledge required:

This project is suited to level 6 & 7 students (3rd year UG and PGT)

- An interest in public history.
- Familiarity with Microsoft Office Forms, Excel, and email correspondence.
- Good communication skills for contacting stakeholder groups – the ability to compose polite, professional and persuasive emails is vital.
- Good writing skills, specifically the capacity to co-write a blog.
- Some experience with using social media platforms.

Start date and work pattern:

The start date for the UG project is flexible, but will be as soon as possible after 8 Jan 2024.

The student is anticipated to work flexibly while the survey is open.

One-to-one meetings will comprise six hours of the project time, with the suggested schedule:

Phase 1 – Co-designing and publishing survey = 6 hours.

Phase 2 – Survey active (promoting and disseminating survey/monitoring results) = 40 hours.

Phase 3 – Report and blog writing = 30 hours.

Total hours: 76

Students must submit applications to Alicia Barnes, Research Officer (a.barnes@qmul.ac.uk) by 12 noon on 1 December 2023. Each School will make its own arrangements for selecting student applicants; these may include interviews if considered appropriate.

We anticipate that funding will be disbursed in two instalments, both subject to confirmation by the academic project lead that the student has been working appropriately.

The first instalment (40% of the award) will be paid no earlier than the end of February 2024; the second (60% of the award) will be paid upon overall completion.