**Historical Museums, Context and Practice (INF 388E, INF350G)**

Term paper topics, fall 2018

1) Choose one of the following foci, in the context of a specific historical museum, **located in Austin**, and come up with a proposal. Use your chosen museum as a reference point (you can use other museums as well for comparison); revisit it to deepen your understanding. If you plan to interview anyone, you will need to obtain IRB clearance.

2) For each focus, I have suggested a couple of generic questions that you might address (the generic questions will require narrowing and restatement to make them specific enough to do in your lifetime), but you may come up with one of your own within one of the foci.

3) You may choose to write *in opposition to* one of the foci or questions, as well.

Objects

 What makes an object “historical”?

 How do historical museums make use of objects?

 Does a historical museum need authentic objects?

 How are objects changed by being placed in a historical museum?

Stories

 How does a historical museum choose what stories to tell?

 Can the stories change over time?

 Where do historical museums get the stories they use?

 How may the stories in historical museums be contested?

Equity

 How does the makeup of the supporting community affect equity?

 How can a “mainstream” museum include minority stories?

 What museums strive for equity and why?

 Should all museums strive for equity?

Authority

 What constitutes a historical museum’s authority?

 How do museums create authoritative discourse?

 What is the role of historical research?

Who does it within or for the museum?

Audience

 What is the role of the visitor’s worldview?

 How do different audiences use museums?

 What do we think of as “right use” of museums? Who are “we”?

 Can historical museums compete with entertainment venues?

Papers should normally be formal research papers of around 15 double-spaced pages (text only—references and any illustrations you may wish to include may increase the length).

Alternative formats (discuss how you might do these in your proposal; note that I don’t think these alternatives will be any easier than a more conventional paper!):

* A guided tour of one of the museums we have visited, perhaps against the grain, critical, better? In the form of a podcast? It could be audio only or include video.
* An imagined historical exhibit making different use of artifacts from one or more of our museums: think of the model from the famous “Mining the Museum” exhibit. You’d need to list artifacts, work out the setting of the venue, create various levels of text, sketch designs, etc.
* An organized visitor study for which you 1) draft some smallish number of visitors, 2) accompany them on a visit to one of our free museums, 3) debrief them afterwards, 4) write up your results as a serious visitor study that examines why these visitors have had the visit they experienced. This will need an IRB approval (the kind for class work is discussed here: <http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/class_project.html> ) Pay attention to the “red flags” section to see whether you will need a more advanced IRB approval).
* A visitation profile (numbers, times, income, ethnicity, etc.) for each of the museums you evaluate and an essay exploring the differences you find.

Whatever form you choose, I want you to present a five-minute summary of your research to be presented on the last day of class, December 10, when the final product is due. I am asking you to submit a paper proposal on October 8, indicating the focus, the question, how you plan to carry out the research, and the format of the finished product, so I can provide you with feedback before you start your research and writing. If you want to include a tentative outline I will be happy to look at that as well.