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Teaching Fieldwork in the Preservation Distance Learning Program at Goucher College

You have seen the advertisements. A splashy color photograph of a laptop computer resting on the arm of a deck chair set against white sands and azure sky and sea. The copy reads: "Attend university classes from anywhere and complete your degree online." Although far from the techno-hip image presented in these advertisements for online learning, preservation education at Goucher College does enable students to pursue independent study from anywhere in the country while maintaining contact with professors through communications technology. In addition to their independent work, students attend two, two-week residencies and a three-day thesis defense at Goucher during the course of the program. Tailored for working adults who cannot attend a traditional, campus-based graduate program, Goucher College began offering the nation's first limited residency master of arts in historic preservation in August 1995. This summer two students successfully completed the course of study and received their MA degrees.

Many of the students in the Goucher program are focused, highly motivated people who are

working toward job advancement or need the credentials for a career shift. Some students already have years of experience working in historic preservation at the local level and are adding the master's degree to their professional qualifications. Others work in the legal, computer, architectural, and engineering fields and are charting career changes or enhancing their job skills with applications to historic preservation. Likewise, most of Goucher's faculty hold adjunct positions and work full-time in jobs in historic preservation and public history.

Fieldwork is a part of the core instruction in preservation at Goucher College and to date 11 students have taken the course. They have produced projects that range from traditional preservation documentation, such as National Register of Historic Places historic district nominations and Historic American Buildings Survey reports with measured drawings, to web pages and guidebooks geared toward cultural tourism. The course goals are traditional, applying skills in identifying, describing, analyzing, and documenting historic properties using recognized standards and guidelines for historic preservation projects. However,

this course may stand apart from more traditional fieldwork courses because of the individualized tutorial instruction, necessitating extensive one-on-one communication, and the challenges that distance-learning places on both parties if the project is to have any value to the students and their communities.

Fieldwork at Goucher builds on a required preservation documentation course. The first course (HP611) allows stu-

Covered Bridge, Franklin County, featured as part of a web site devoted to the historic resources of Canal Winchester, Ohio. Photo courtesy Kathryn F. Green.



The Atlantis Hotel, built in 1903, at Kennebunk Beach, Maine. Historic photograph used in a history and guidebook prepared about the resort. Photo courtesy Collection of Rosalind Magnuson.



dents an opportunity to explore their interests in documentation activities. The second course (HP612) provides a foundation for professional work and on several occasions has led to a student's employment for contracted services. Instruction and communication for the Fieldwork course comes in the form of an orientation meeting at Goucher, frequent email, and regular telephone conversations to discuss the progress of the work and any questions or problems that arise. Assignments are sent by attached files in email, faxed, or mailed and returned by the instructor with comment and critique in a similar manner. This semester a web board will be used—a special online area set up for the class, accessible to the instructor and students. Students in the same class often live thousands of miles from their classmates, so a team survey effort, a traditional method of introducing students to fieldwork in historic preservation, is not possible. Fieldwork projects have emanated from the workplace. Several students have selected fieldwork projects that meshed with the work programs of their preservation concerns or were the initial phase of contract work for cultural resource services with city, county, state, and federal agencies. Many others volunteered their time and effort to address an issue of concern to their community related to the preservation of historic resources.

A common goal stressed in all of the fieldwork projects has been public use of the information developed during the semester. The end product must thoroughly document a historic property and be accessible to a general audience. Some students have developed illustrated brochures presenting the essence of their research. Goucher students have made an impact in their communities with their fieldwork projects because they often live and work in the communities from which they design their projects. Examples include studies for

the waterfront expansion of the Greenwich Village Historic District in New York City, or the creation of a historic district for an ironworker's linear village in Churchtown, Pennsylvania, to explain the need for and benefits of preservation planning. Other students have produced a scripted slide presentation depicting the problematic economic and social issues surrounding the preservation of privately owned open space in Alexandria, Virginia; a web page introducing the agricultural

historic resources of Canal Winchester, Ohio; a study of the historic resources of Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska; a boater's guide to historic steamboat era resources along the St. John River in northern Florida; and an illustrated history and walking tour of Kennebunk Beach, Maine. Student research and documentation for a HABS/HAER fieldwork project on a historic community in Port Gamble, Washington, has encouraged the owners to rethink development plans and view the surviving company town as a highly marketable asset.

From the instructor's perspective, a remarkable outcome of the course is the challenge of providing guidance and innovative solutions for a diversity of independent fieldwork projects, located in any one semester from Alaska to Florida. Reviewing research designs and assisting motivated students with the development of projects rooted in community service is very rewarding. It also prods the faculty to learn basic Internet skills, to facilitate communication around busy schedules and different time zones. Many of us once took pride in mastering word processing programs and staying current with the updates. Five years from now it may be just as common to create software for your course, to post photographs and drawings on the web, and commonly be using jargon like "distance learning" and "asynchronous" (anytime/anywhere) when referring to graduate education for historic preservation professionals. There is no question that "online learning," although relatively new, are buzz words in higher education. Perhaps teaching and attending that class from a deck chair on the beach is on the horizon.

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