PRR 451, PARK INTERPRETIVE SERVICES AND VISITOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS
Vander Stoep, Spring 2006 -- 3 credit hours (lecture plus lab)
Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies
Michigan State University

CLASS:	TuTh 10:20 – 12:10 plus outside lab work & field trips	**INSTRUCTOR**: **OFFICE**: **PHONE**:	Dr. Gail A. Vander Stoep Natural Resources Bldg. 136 517-432-0266 (office)
CLASSROOM:	Natural Resources 19	**MAILBOX**:	Natural Resources Bldg 151
OFFICE HOURS:	by appointment	*(sign up in slot on weekly calendar posted on office door; be sure to leave phone # so I can contact you if I can't meet you at that time)*	
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INTRODUCTION

Interpretation is a communications tool or process that helps to develop a park (or other resource site – zoo, nature center, historic site, museum, etc.) visitor's/user's interest in, enjoyment and understanding of an area, including its natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources. This is accomplished by revealing meanings of and relationships between these resources through the use of original objects, firsthand experience, and illustrative media in a manner relevant to the visitor. Related fields may include environmental education, outdoor education, museum studies, conservation education, and folklore.

> The current National Association for Interpretation definition:
>
> *Interpretation is a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the inherent meanings in the resource.*

Techniques and media run the gamut from non-personal techniques (such as exhibits, brochures, signs, self-guided trails, videos, films, interactive web or computer programs) to a variety of personal techniques (such as talks, guided walks or tours, campfire programs, roving interpretation, storytelling, music, puppetry, theater, slide programs, guided field activities). Advantages and disadvantages are associated with each type of interpretive media. It is an interpretive planner's job to assess and evaluate all relevant variables in selecting the most appropriate and effective strategy for a given situation and target audience.

In this course we will focus on *personal interpretation*, but will consider planning of non-personal interpretive media as well. Additionally, we will discuss visitor information systems to understand how individual interpretive programs are integrated with a broader information and experience context and how they can be used to meet a variety of objectives.

Four primary goals of any interpretive program are to:
• enhance the visitor experience by assisting the visitor or target audience in developing an awareness, appreciation and understanding of an area, its resources, and related issues;
• accomplish various management goals of the sponsoring agency or organization (often by guiding visitor behavior or changing attitudes), to include development of stewardship ethic & behaviors;
• promote public understanding of the agency or organization's goals and objectives, often to gain public support;
• aid development of positive public relations through offering quality programs, services and experiences.

Often meeting these objectives includes enhancing the social interactions and experiences of your visitor groups (families, couples, youth groups, tour groups), so facilitating positive social interactions should be incorporated in interpretive experience development.

The **purpose of this course** is to expose students to the underlying principles of interpretation (communicating to visitors/audiences in a positive, understandable manner while they are involved in leisure/ recreational activities), to be able to explain and work within a visitor information system to assure effective, efficient and appropriate development of interpretive communications and experiences, and to provide you opportunities to plan, develop and implement programs using a variety of interpretive techniques. In many cases, you will be allowed to choose topics of interest to you.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY
A **major responsibility of any interpreter** is to be able to research specific background information on any particular program topic, then to develop an appropriate program for presenting this information in the most interesting, relevant and effective way possible to a specific targeted audience. The underlying intent of this course is to provide you with as much hands-on experience as possible, to allow you to explore a variety of media and topics, and to improve your interpretive skills. There will be a major focus on self and peer critique as well as critique of interpretive sites/programs rather than on grades (see Student Evaluation section). Another focus will be on learning the interpretive communications *process*, not specifically the *content*, though you are expected to thoroughly research the content for your programs. Thus, I will not be "teaching" history or natural history topics. You will do your own research and will be able to, for most projects, select the topics in which you are most interested.

You will be expected to participate actively in all parts of the class and to work on improving your own skills. I will gladly work with you during planning stages of any project. (It is YOUR responsibility to schedule appointments with me.) REMEMBER, interpretive program planning is a *process*, not just a *product*. This means that ongoing evaluation and revision are critical components of what you do. **Professionalism** and **social contribution** are major components of program development and delivery.

Another focus of this course is on **critical thinking**. This involves research, analysis, decision making and the ability to explain and justify your decisions in a clear, logical fashion. Many times, particularly in recreation resource management and interpretation, there are no single, simple correct solutions. Rather, there are multiple alternatives, each with its own implications (both positive and negative). Your task will be to select the "best" alternatives, then develop the most appropriate interpretive programs/media to support your decisions, context and needs.

COURSE OUTCOMES
This course is designed to help you to:
1. understand principles of interpretation, communications, and public relations in recreation, park, zoo, aquarium, museum and other leisure or natural/cultural/historic resource settings, and to apply them to course assignments;

2. develop the ability to plan and execute various types of interpretive and public relations projects (working individually and in small groups), using topics and resources appropriate to your field of interest;

3. develop the ability to evaluate application and effectiveness of interpretive programs/ projects;

4. practice, through role-playing situations, giving spontaneous interpretive programs and reacting to unexpected situations;

5. appreciate and apply the use of interpretation and public relations to help achieve park, recreation, museum or other management objectives;

6. integrate interpretive projects or programs within a broader information system to assure effective marketing, efficient use of resources, and effective programming;

7. develop an awareness of the needs of special market segments (such as elderly, disabled, children, ethnically diverse) using parks and their interpretive services;

8. develop a professional approach to interpretation and become involved in professional interpretive activities;

9. enhance personal observation skills;

10. contribute to society (local, home or other area) through class projects and service learning;

11. be able to discuss current, relevant issues facing interpreters;

12. improve communication abilities in written (including spelling, grammar, punctuation and professional layout) and oral modes, including visual aids.

WRITING EMPHASIS

While this course is not a designated writing course, it includes a major writing emphasis because all interpreters, whether front-line or managers or planners, are required to write extensively, and expected to write well. Therefore, much attention will be paid to the actual writing components of all your projects. Most projects involve writing components different in style from typical term papers. Some of the writing will be technical (planning documents), some will be interpretive (actual writing for programs or products), some will scholarly (e.g., issue paper based on personal research). Regardless of format, all written work is to be professional, with attention paid to structure, clarity, grammar, spelling, etc. One element critical to improving writing is opportunity to revise your work. Such opportunities will be provided as much as possible. Feel free to request additional critique from peers & instructor.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS

Knudson, D.M., Cable, T.T., and Beck, L. 1995. *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc. (available through NAI: members for $45, non-members for $56, plus $5 S&H *OR* as part of the six-book library set [see costs at bottom of this page])

Brochu, L. and Merriman, T. 2002. *Personal Interpretation* (plus CIG workbook). Fort Collins, CO: National Association for Interpretation. (available through NAI for $20)

Professional Presentations: Oral and Written: available at: http://www.prr.msu.edu/PRR351/PRR351.htm.

Other readings required, as assigned, from sources such as:
Sharpe, Grant W. 1982. *Interpreting the Environment* (2nd edition). New York: MacMillan.

Ham, Sam. 1992. *Environmental Interpretation*. Golden, CO: North American Press.

Lewis, William J. 1981. *Interpreting for Park Visitors*. USA: Eastern Acorn Press.

Tilden, Freeman. 1967. *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press.

Beck, L. and Cable, T.T. 2002. *Interpretation for the 21st Century*. State College, PA: Sagamore Publishing.

Cornell, Joseph. 1998. *Sharing Nature with Children*. Nevada City, CA: DAWN Publications.

All the above, except Sharpe, are part of the six-pack of classic interpretation books, which includes the Knudson, Cable and Beck text, and are available through NAI for $120 plus $10 S&H (members) or $146 plus $10 S&H (nonmembers).

POLICY ON LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND MAKE-UP EXAMS
- Assignments are due at the *beginning* of class on the scheduled due date. Late assignments will not be accepted except in extreme, justifiable circumstances.
- Presentations that are due and scheduled to be presented during a specified class period may not be made up.
  Emergency situations, if presented to the instructor *prior* to the *day* of the presentation [if possible], are the only exceptions.
- If there is an exam, make-up exams will be offered in emergency situations, but *only* if an excused absence is obtained prior to the *day* (not hour) of the exam time.

ACADEMIC HONESTY
"*Academic honesty is central to the educational process and acts of academic dishonesty are serious offenses within the University community. Suspension from the University could be the consequence for acts of academic dishonesty.*" (see web version of 2004 Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide: Academic Honesty section in box and section 1.00, Protection of Scholarship and Grades). Such violations will not be tolerated. Any student in this class found to be in violation of University academic honesty regulations automatically will receive, at a minimum, a failing grade on the project or in the course.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:
  plagiarism (any time you use ideas or information from another source, even if not directly quoted, you must cite the source)
  cheating
  fabrication
  facilitating or allowing dishonesty (of or by someone else)

For further information about University academic honesty policies and appeal procedures, consult Article 2 (Academic Freedom for Students: Academic Rights and Responsibilities) of the 2004 Spartan Life handbook on the web site (available in .pdf format):

http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/index.htm

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

Time Management:
Throughout the semester you will be working on more than one project at a time. Plan early, budget your time wisely and do not to get behind. Falling behind is the *faaaastest* way to feel as if you're drowning! Doing all the work for major projects at the end of the semester, when you have other projects and exams in other courses IS NOT FUN nor conducive to QUALITY LEARNING. Develop a personal PERT or GANT chart.

Protecting Yourself:
You will be given various handouts and assignment sheets . . . *once*. You are responsible for all material, so you should have a notebook or folder in which you keep all materials.

Also, it's a good idea to keep a photocopy of any assignment you turn in – just in case of loss or miscommunication. This helps protect you and your work. Also, keep ALL your work and critique sheets until *after* you receive your grade report.

Other Expenses:
During this course you will incur expenses in addition to textbook/reading packet costs. You will need supplies to help you properly and appropriately develop and present projects. Specifics will depend on final choice of projects and field trips. Those choosing CIG certification will incur those costs also (see separate information sheets). Budget your finances to cover course materials. Suggestions for cost-cutting and cost-sharing will be given during the course.

<u>Typing of Assignments</u>:
All assignments (unless in-class or otherwise indicated) must be typed. This will give you a digital back-up copy of your work. Both IBM and Macintosh labs are available across campus. BE SURE YOU ALWAYS KEEP A COPY OF ANY WORK THAT YOU TURN IN (and save everything beyond when you receive your grades).

<u>Communication</u>:
Communication (what interpretation is all about) is a two-way street. You are being critiqued frequently, by yourself, by your peers, and by me. I'd like to know how I'm doing, too. Suggestions or support, I'd like to know how the course is going. There are some things that are changeable mid-stream. If you have questions, please ask. Remember that I have office hours and will schedule an appointment with you if you cannot make it during scheduled office hours. THANKS.

NOTE: Other sections of the syllabus that will be distributed after class discussion about course content and focus, and grading structure preferences, will include:
  • Student Evaluation & Grading System Information
  • Specific Course Requirements & Projects
  • Detailed Course Schedule

STUDENT EVALUATION

Usually the majority of class members are PRR majors who are committing themselves to a people- and interpretive communications-oriented profession (including environmental education, museum education, history interpretation, zoo education). Non-PRR majors are assumed to have similar interests and commitments. Therefore, it is assumed that each class member is interested in and concerned with improving personal interpretive communication skills and will commit to the necessary study and participation involved (which means attending and participating in all classes . . . and arriving on time). Additionally, all work is to be submitted ON TIME and to be in a professional format (see ***Professional Presentations Guidebook*** on the web: http://www.prr.msu.edu/PRR351/PRR351.htm).

Based on the strong preference of the class members, you will be critically evaluated rather than directly graded on your work (although a traditional "grade" must be given at the end of the course). This means that the majority of your critique will be in the form of written and verbal comments, including questions to challenge you. Because the intent of this course is to help you learn and to provide opportunities for oral and written communications practice, grades will not be emphasized. Therefore, if all course requirements (as described below) are met, you will automatically receive a grade of at least "2.5."

This means that **all** of the following must be met:
 • you attend all classes and labs (only one unexcused absence allowable);
 • you arrive at class ON TIME (by the time roll is checked);
 • you participate actively during class;
 • you complete all assignments to a minimum "accepted" level (meaning all components of projects, as indicated on assignments, are included and presented in the required formats)*;
 • you turn in all assignments on time (or present on scheduled date);

*NOTE: Unacceptable projects will be returned for one revision at your option. The instructor also is willing to review and comment on drafts of your project BEFORE it is due; however, it is your responsibility to schedule appointments and allow enough time for instructor to review drafts. All project revisions must be turned in within one week of their initial return to you.

Grades will be calculated as follows:
All students will begin with a base grade of 2.5 (80%), basically equivalent to a check (✔). If all the above requirements are met at a minimum level, you will receive a 2.5. Your grade can be ***improved*** to a 3.0, 3.5 or 4.0 by performing above or well above average on the majority of your projects – in other words, getting "double checks" or "check pluses" on your assignments. Your final grade can be ***lowered*** 1) for frequent tardiness or absences, or 2) by failing to turn in/present a project on time and performing below the "acceptable" level. Remember that you will have an opportunity to write and justify an assessment of your own learning and project development.
To give you an idea of equivalency (for those more comfortable with traditional grades), you can consider ✔ = 2.5, ✔✔ = 3.0, ✔✔✔ = 3.5, ✔✚ = 4.0. A ✔✔✔ is very good, but with some small limitation. Different assignments are "weighted" differently (major vs. minor assignments).

Things that will cause a project to be assessed as "unacceptable" or "below the acceptable level" (✔-) include, but are not limited to:
 • incomplete assignment (some items or components missing, or not well developed),
 • not all issues or elements (as indicated on assignment sheets) addressed,
 • projects not typed (required unless otherwise instructed, or an in-class project),
 • incomplete self- or peer-critiques.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. *Assigned readings from the text and others as assigned.* Non-text readings either will be handed out to you or will be available for check-out from instructor. Articles may be read in the AV lab or may be photocopied (student's expense) for reading at home.
   You must be prepared to discuss and apply readings in class.

2. *Active participation in classroom activities and in discussion based on the assigned readings.* It is suggested that you come prepared with questions or specific discussion issues related to the readings. This will help you analyze and synthesize what you are reading. Additionally, you will be participating in hands-on in-class activities, interacting with guest speakers, and developing and presenting projects.
   Active class participation assumes on-time attendance in all class sessions.

3. *Presentation* (20 minutes) to class: overview of interpretive media type (with partner).

4. *Completion of assignments/projects* (some individual, some small group; some consist of multiple phases). All papers and projects must be professionally written and presented. (See guidelines in the ***Professional Presentations Guidebook*** on the web*.*) The standards are excellence and professionalism! You are encouraged to develop projects for "real" use, if at all possible.
   • Personal observation log (Cube World), plus theme identification, interp stories/analogies
   • Pre- and post-field trip writings
   • 15- to 20-minute interpretive presentation (used for CIG certification review)

5. *Experiential Learning: Interpretive site evaluations* based on personal visits OR *written/oral report* on participation in NAI regional workshop OR *written/oral report* on service learning

6. Participation in written and verbal *self- and peer-critiques*

7. FOR C.I.G. students only: complete the open-book NAI CIG exam (graded at the national office)

Class Field Trips:
During the semester we will be involved in field trips, several local and one all-day Friday field trip to Kalamazoo area. We will need to arrange carpools to reduce costs. When we do not use MSU vehicles and you share a ride with someone, you may want to contribute a few $$$ to help cover gas costs.

Grades will be determined on the following basis:

Assignment	Major or Minor
1. **Class attendance and participation in in-class activities, class field trips** (including pre- and post-trip writing, see #4)	**M**
2. **In-class "interp media" talk** (includes partner/self-critique)	m
3. **Observation Log and "Interp Themes, stories, analogies"** plus Gadget Bag/Box	**M**
4. **Pre- and post-field trip writings** (writing for learning)	**M**
5. **Service Learning** (10 hours, site/project of your choice; contract) OR 2 **interpretive site visits** w/ in-depth **critiques** (on your own) OR participation in NAI R4 workshop *(oral and written presentation required for all options)*	**M**
6. **Final presentation** (for CIG); includes self-critique	**MM**

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES (optional)

Project Wild, Project Wet, Project Learning Tree, Project Fish
  (several offered during spring break)

Other NAI workshops (will distribute info sheets)

Other conference participation, as you "find" and identify as relevant

NOTE:
To give you a sense of the numerical grades associated with semester grades (which ultimately will have to be used), see the following chart.

4.0	=	93.0% - 100.0%	Much Above Average
3.5	=	88.0% - 92.9%	
3.0	=	83.0% - 87.9%	Above Average
2.5	=	78.0% - 82.9%	
2.0	=	72.0% - 77.9%	Average
1.5	=	66.0% - 71.9%	
1.0	=	60.0% - 65.9%	Below Average
0.0	=	below 60%	Much Below Average

COURSE SCHEDULE (Spring 2006)

DATE	TOPIC	TO HAVE READ (by class today)	ASSIGNMENT DUE
JAN 11 TUE	Intro activity; Student Introductions Expectation discussion; begin syllabus review; Developing the course Discuss activity & barriers to communication	-----	-----
JAN 13 THURS	Discuss course ideas; Discuss "why interpret?" (ch 1, 2) Roles/contexts of interp: "Interp Type" talks (ASSMT 1); present starting 1/25/05 Discuss NAI CIG option (intro PowerPoint) Discuss "Service Learning"	Handout article	Bring written list of *your* class ideas
JAN 17 TUE	DECISION re: CIG (bring check, forms) Interp overview—VIDEO Introduce ASSMT 2 (experiential learning)		Decision re: CIG – applic. + check/CC
JAN 19 THURS	Catch-up day (clarifications) Observation Activity (aerial) Introduce "Cube World" observation journals		Contract/decision: Service Learning Site visits/crits
JAN 24 THURS	History of Interpretation (role play tour) Review updated course content, syllabus Begin thinking of "talk" topic (give assmt)	ICNR ch 1,2 IOH Ch 1-3 PI pp 2-22	:
JAN 26 THURS	Start "Interp Type" talks (ASSMT 1) (student presentations; self-critique due one week after presentation) Describe verbally "cube world" observation sites (Check 1)	ICNR ch. 11, 14 ICNR ch. 10, 13	"Interp Type" talks/handouts; Contracts: ServLrn; ID "cube" obs sites
JAN 31 TUE	Cont. "Interp Type" talks (ASSMT 1)		"Interp Type" talks/handouts
FEB 2 THURS	Cont. "Interp Type" talks (ASSMT 1) Why we interpret (values: visitors/mgmt) In-class "Time Capsule" activity (choosing content)	ICNR ch. 8 ICNR ch. 3, 4	"Interp Type" talks/handouts
FEB 7 TUE	Final "talk" (music); "Cube World" observ.; Ranger Raunche; Interpretive planning process ("knot"): Tilden's 6 & other interp. principles; audience-interactive threesome, motivations, Maslow's hierarchy Assign presentation (for CIG: talk)—idea due 2/14 In-class "Time Capsule" activity (choosing content)	ICNR ch 5, 6 PI pp 23-34	-----

NOTE: HO = handouts
NOTE: NAI Region 4 Workshop, March 21-23, Holland, MI (optional course activity)

DATE	TOPIC	TO HAVE READ (by class today)	ASSIGNMENT DUE
FEB 9 THURS	(finish "leftovers" from Feb 7); R & L brain; learning styles, sequential interp; evaluating your audience/audience analysis;	ICNR ch 7	Idea for interp. presentation
FEB 14 TUES	Tangibles/intangibles; meanings; interpretive equation; personal style; enjoyment/relevance	PI pp 35-42	Written idea for talk (incl. audience)
FEB 16 THURS	Work on CIG exam (in groups); *due March 14* If not doing CIG, work independently on presentation		bring all books; (GVS copies also available)
FEB 21 TUES	Themes, sub-themes, story elements; Relating themes to interpretive purpose Review planning/outline, using AV & objects and effective use of PPt	PI pp 44-66 PI pp 68-91	-----
FEB 23 THURS	Interpretation for children (*PPt*); Child development: cognitive, physical, social; Environmental Education/school curricula Guided Field Activities (intro to examples)	McDonough HO EEd articles (HO) ICNR ch 7, 8,10	draft plan, out-line: presentation
FEB 28 TUES	Field Trip: Potter Park Zoo: Ocean Exhibit (guests: Gel Alvarado, Tracy McMullen): Exhibit planning & evaluation		-----
MAR 2 THURS	Guided Field Activities demo—scent trails Final instructions for planning document Quick update: Observation Journals		Ck 1: obs.jour.
MAR 7 TUES	**SPRING BREAK** -	- - - - - - - - - - - -	-
MAR 9 THURS	**SPRING BREAK** -	- - - - - - - - - - - -	-
MAR 14 TUES	Guests: *SisBro* (Laura & Robert Sams) Technology & Interp (esp. use of video: MS-B results; video production & design; integration with other media)	Visit web site: www.sisbro.com Read abstract (LS MS project)	*CIG exams due*
MAR 16 THURS	Turner-Dodge: History Museums: Balancing Interpretation with Preservation & Archives (programs and exhibits; alt. philosophies) Guests: Liz Homer, Mike Smola		
MAR 21 TUES	Questioning techniques; use of voice Demo of effective program ("MI Wolves") (Short class to allow travel to Holland, MI R4 Wksp)		Final PD/ outline, present
MAR 23 THURS	NAI Region 4 (Holland, MI) No Class (work on personal projects, site crits)		

DATE	TOPIC	TO HAVE READ (by class today)	ASSIGNMENT DUE
MAR 28 TUES	Interpretive Talks: Present (split labs?) (self-crit due within 1 week)		Final PD/ outline, present (for those assigned this day)
MAR 30 THURS	Interpretive Talks: Present (split labs?) (self-crit due within 1 week)		Final PD/ outline, present (for those assigned this day)
MAR 31 FRI	*FIELD TRIP* *Kalamazoo Nature Center (nature centers: beyond programs – research, outreach, administration)* *Binder Park Zoo*		
APR 4 TUES	Interpretive Talks: Present (split labs?) (self-crit due within 1 week) Practice "interp stories/analogies" for journals		Final PD/ outline, present (for those assigned this day)
APR 6 THURS	Interpretive Talks: Present (split labs?) (self-crit due within 1 week) Quick update: Observation Journals		Final PD/ outline, present (for those assigned this day) Ck 2: obs.jour.
APR 11 TUES	GVS NERR (work on own: site crits, NAI) summary/program presentations		
APR 13 THURS	Present NAI program summaries/site crits		NAI prog rvws/ site crits (written & oral)
APR 18 TUES	Impression-5 Science Center (exhibits for children, alternative education models, writing—role and how) related to learning styles	ICNR Ch 9, 11 rvw ch 7	------
APR 20 THURS	Using the arts in interpretation: music-puppets-magic	ICNR Ch 15 (rvw)	------
APR 25 TUES	Spont interp/visitor center work (video)	ICNR pp. 251-256	------
APR 27 THURS	Sharing journals/interp stories, analogies Sharing interpretive "gadget bags" (my house?)	ICNR Ch 20	Obs Journals
MAY 3 **WED** 10:00-12:00	(exam period)		Personal evals. Course evals

* Class Field Trips: See next page

Class Field Trips: (this can be done on computer or written in Observation Journal in separate section)

BEFORE: Write 2 questions related to main topic, plus one other.
AFTER: For each field trip, write an essay that describes main experiences, observations, and "big lessons learned" (related to specific trip theme, plus others you identify)

EXAM PERIOD: Wednesday, May 3, 10:00–12:00 (exam week is May 1-5, 2006)
NO FINAL EXAM in this class; however, will use this date to do course evaluations and write personal evaluations

HAPPY END-OF-SEMESTER.
HAVE A WONDERFUL SUMMER BREAK.

Decoding Symbols for Reading Assignments
PI = Personal Interpretation (Merriman & Brochu)
ICNR = Interpreting Cultural and Natural Resources (Knudson, Cable, Beck)
PP = Professional Presentations: Oral and Written (available via PRR 351 website at
     http://www.prr.msu.edu/PRR351/PRR351.htm
IOH = Interpreting Our Heritage (Tilden)