

HSPV 6600 Theories of Historic Preservation 1

Fall 2025 / First half of the semester / 0.5 CU
Thursday 8:30-11:15 / McNeil 395 (3718 Locust Walk)

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Office hours Wednesday 2-4pm ([Calendly](#)) and by appointment (send me an email)

“The retention of old things has always been a central ritual in human societies.”
George Kubler, The Shape of Time

“The key to the heritage enterprise is valorization (mise en valeur)....”
Françoise Choay, The Invention of the Historic Monument

“To accept one’s past – one’s history – is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it.”
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time

“Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must be dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective.”
Rachel Carson, Silent Spring

Why do we preserve old things and places? How do heritage and preservation work in contemporary society? How do we make decisions about what and how to preserve? And how do we organize ourselves to do so? These basic questions drive the inquiries of this course in theories of preservation.

Theories are the models we construct to understand the world. And we must understand the world – in its material, aesthetic, social, historical and contemporary aspects -- before intervening in it. Theories are essential to constructing the subject of our work, stimulating intellectual debate, defining the profession – informing practice in all senses. Theories are used to explain, to direct, and to predict phenomena. In addition to constituting the practice of preservation intellectually, preservation theories relate practices to underlying ideas and overarching social realities. Theories map the terrain of preservation with respect to larger societies, and suggest ways we can navigate through it. Theories are an essential, critical tool for the development of the profession (practically, culturally, intellectually) and of professionals.

Preservation is informed by ideas from many fields – from ancient parables about authenticity, to Ruskin and Viollet’s positions on architectural restoration, to urban theorists’ myriad models for combining new and old buildings, to political-economic concepts of public good and the role of markets, to theories of collective memory and cultural change, to the progressive politics of decolonization and social justice.

The preservation field has produced theory to support its particular professional briefs: the performance of materials and buildings; the interpretation of history and art; the function of settlements and urbanism; and the roles and uses of preservation in civil society. The need for theory, though abiding, has changed dramatically over time. There is a long, complex, and disparate

history of preservation theories; and in recent years, preservation theory has become frankly divergent. This subject is complicated!

In this course, we'll look critically at many kinds of theory related to historic preservation. Owing to the multidisciplinary nature of the preservation field, preservation theory is drawn from outside the field as often as within it. Sometimes theorization addresses preservation explicitly, sometimes the connection is implicit (relating to culture more broadly, to social and economic dynamics affecting historic environments, and so on). We'll be concerned with studying traditional theory illuminating the fabric- and narrative-rooted origins of the field; we'll also explore more recent critiques, values-based and other alternative theories relating preservation to broad economic, cultural, social, political and environmental dynamics. In the end, we'll build a core of ideas from which each of us constructs our own approach to preservation theories.

The work of the Theories course will consist of lectures, reading assignments, writing assignments, posing questions, and a variety of in-class discussions and exercises. There is one exam, in the final class session. We'll read and discuss classic texts as well as more recent works. Most weeks we'll spend some time debating contemporary issues and cases as a means of exploring deeper theoretical questions.

HSPV 6600 is the first half of the required theory sequence in preservation. Foundational ideas will be the focus – this will involve serious study of the history of preservation as well as contemporary developments. In the second half of the course – offered as HSPV 6610 in the second half of the spring semester – each week will take on a more specialized topic highlighting recent (and future) theoretical developments often with the participation of guest speakers.

Learning objectives for this course (and its continuation in HSPV 6610) include:

- Gain familiarity with a broad spectrum theories of preservation – explanatory, normative and predictive; humanistic, political, and scientific
- Establish literacy with key preservation concepts and contemporary issues: the built environment, history and historiography, the construction of heritage (the usable past); significance, authenticity, integrity, levels of intervention; the points of connection and conflict between preservation and design, economic development, public policy, and culture and creativity
- Understand the historical evolution of the historic preservation field, actively decolonizing our historical perspective on the field
- Understand the canonical literature on historic preservation theory and history – as well as critical, reformist and alternative perspectives
- Understand and constructively critique the central role of values-based preservation theory in contemporary practice and scholarship
- Understand different epistemologies applied to practicing historic preservation
- Develop the ability to construct and deconstruct arguments about preservation theory and connect them clearly to practical phenomena, issues, projects and decisions – in other words, developing your own theoretical framework
- Practice debating positions on preservation issues (whether site-specific or policy/political/societal)
- Develop an ethical sense of preservation practice, advocacy and research.

CLASS SCHEDULE – Fall 2025

CLASS	DATE	TOPIC
1	Aug 28	Central questions and foundational ideas: What is preservation? How does it work? The nature of the field, the need for theory, this before-and-after moment
2	Sep 4	Values, fabric, collective memory: Values-based theory; framing a social theory of preservation
3	Sep 11	Histories of Preservation: European canons to global discourses
4	Sep 18	Histories of Preservation: US from the 19 th into the 21 st century
5	Sep 25	Recent and Alternative Theories: Sustainability, materiality, community, experimentation
6	Oct 2	Theory in Practice: Policies, Public Issues, and Ethics
7	Oct 16	In-class Exam: New research directions; theory in allied fields; planning HSPV 6610

A FEW PRACTICAL NOTES:

Class sessions will be held in-person, on campus.

Keep in mind this is a half-semester course: after seven sessions this time slot will switch to HSPV 6240 Digital Media.

Your coursework on Preservation Theories resumes in the Spring semester with another seven sessions (0.5 CU) of HSPV 6610 in the second half of the Spring term. HSPV 6610 will explore five specific issues and cases in greater depth studies. These may include critiques and refinements of values-based preservation theory; decolonizing histories of preservation and heritage; cultural landscape theory; economic thinking and preservation; social justice as a driver of preservation practice; historic preservation in contemporary Asia; design, urbanism and preservation; interpretation, public history, museums and art; experimental preservation and art practices; ecological theory, the environmental movement, climate crisis, and sustainability; ethics and other issues in professional practice; ruins, curated decay, iconoclasm and other “preservation” alternatives to heritage treatment; and the future of the preservation field.

Materials for each class session will be available on Canvas, organized by each weekly session – readings, slides, recordings, supplemental material, assignment information.

In most class sessions, we will take time for exercises, quizzes, short writing assignments, or other interactive work. Please make sure you have paper, pencil/pen, and laptop/tablet ready to use in class should the need arise.

My office hours: I have Wednesday 2-4pm set aside for individual appointment times. This will also relate to my responsibilities as department chair, so if those time slots are filled you can always send me an email to set up some time to talk. I’m always happy to meet one-on-one with anyone for

any reason (in person or by Zoom/phone). And we can chat after class or whenever you see my office door open.

I will set date/times for two review sessions in between Classes 6 and 7 – in consultation with the class – to prepare for the exam taken during the last class meeting.

The topics, schedule, and specific activities in the schedule are subject to change. Expect the occasional adjustment – depending on the interests of those in the course, opportunities to include guests, or new ideas and issues that may come to light as the course develops.

READINGS FOR EACH CLASS SESSION

Required reading for each class meeting is listed below. All works will be available through Canvas as a pdf or hyperlink – or in some cases through PennLibraries’ collection of ebooks or reserve readings. I encourage you to buy some of the books, but won’t require it.

Class 1 Central Questions

*For in-class reading and breakout group discussion
(Soft copies are in Canvas; I’ll have some hard copies in class)*

- Morris, William, “Manifesto of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.” <https://www.spab.org.uk/>
- World Monuments Fund, excerpts from the organization’s website www.wmf.org
- Fitch, James Marston. “Preface to the First Edition,” *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World*. University of Virginia Press, 1990 (original 19xx).
- Roberts, Andrea. “When Does It Become Social Justice? Thoughts on Intersectional Preservation Practice,” Preservation Leadership Forum, National Trust for Historic Preservation, forum.savingplaces.org, July 20, 2017. <https://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/special-contributor/2017/07/20/when-does-it-become-social-justice-thoughts-on-intersectional-preservation-practice>

Class 2 Fundamental Concepts / Values-based theory

Read each of the bulleted pieces; they relate to several different subjects—values, collective, and public good.

VALUES

- Erica Avrami and Randall Mason. “Mapping the Issue of Values.” In Erica Avrami, Susan Macdonald, Randall Mason, David Myers, eds. *Values in Heritage Management: Emerging Approaches and Research Directions*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust/Getty Conservation Institute, 2019.

Optional

- Avrami, Erica, Randall Mason and Marta de la Torre, *Values and Heritage Conservation*, Getty Conservation Institute, 2000. pp.1-12;
- de la Torre, Marta and Randall Mason, “Introduction.” and Randall Mason. “Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices.” in de la Torre, ed. *Assessing Values in Heritage Conservation*. Getty Conservation Institute, 2002.

- Mason, Randall. “Values and Sustaining Heritage” in Routledge Handbook of Sustainable Heritage. Fouseki and Cassar, eds. London: Routledge, 2022.
- Arrhenius, Thordis. “The Modern Cult of Monuments” in The Fragile Monument—On Conservation and Modernity. Artifice, 2012.

Optional

- Riegl, Alois. “Modern Cult of Monuments” in Price, Tally and Vaccaro, eds. Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Getty Conservation Institute, 1996.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

- Nora, Pierre. “Between History and Memory.” Representations 26.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History. Beacon Press, 1995/2015. [excerpts]
- Olick, Jeff. “Collective Memory.” International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.

In class, we’ll read these two charters and discuss them in breakout groups. I’ll have some hard copies; here are the links to virtual copies:

- The Venice Charter (1964): <https://www.icomos.org/charters-and-doctrinal-texts/>
- The Burra Charter (2013, original 1979): <https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf>

Class 3 Histories of Preservation (European and global narratives)

Read and compare these four different historical perspectives on preservation theory

- Ruskin, John. “The Lamp of Memory” in The Seven Lamps of Architecture. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35898/35898-h/35898-h.htm>
- Viollet-le-Duc, Eugène-Emmanuel. “Restoration” from The Foundations of Architecture: Selections from the Dictionnaire Raisoné. G. Braziller, 1990.
- Boito, Camillo. “Restoration in Architecture: First Dialogue” in Future Anterior, 6/1 Summer 2009, pp. 68-83.
- Brandi, Cesare. “Theory of Restoration” in Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage. N. Stanley Price, et al, eds. The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996 (pp. 230-235, 339-342, 377-379) and “Restoration and Conservation.” in Encyclopedia of World Art. Vol. XII. McGraw-Hill, 1966. (optionally, followed by essays by Renato Bonelli and Paul Philippot)

Sample selections from at least one of the following works on preservation/conservation history:

- Choay, Françoise. The Invention of the Historical Monument. Cambridge University Press, 2001. Introduction and Chapters 4 and 5.
- Glendinning, Miles. The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation. Routledge, 2013. Introduction and skim chapters.
- Lowenthal, David. The Past is a Foreign Country. Cambridge University Press, 1985. Introduction (skim Chapters 6&7 if you have time).

For an in-class exercise I’ll pass excerpts from this document – “the Secretary’s Standards.” Here is a link to the full document, for reference:

- [The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings \(2017\)](#)

Class 4 Histories of Preservation (U.S.)

Sample selections from both of the following essay collections on U.S. preservation history:

- Bluestone, Daniel. Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory. W.W. Norton, 2011. Introduction and two other chapters of your choosing.
- Mason, Randall and Max Page, eds. Giving Preservation a History: Second Edition. Routledge, 2019. New Preface, Introduction and one other chapter of your choosing

Class 5 Recent and Alternative Theories

- Smith, Laurajane. Uses of Heritage. Routledge, 2006. [excerpts?]

Read at least two of these pieces and compare the theories behind them:

- Desilvey, Caitlin. Curated Decay. University of Minnesota Press, 2018. [excerpt]
- Donofrio, Gregory. "Preservation by Adaptation: Is It Sustainable?" Change Over Time, 2/2, Fall 2012, pp. 106-131.
- Akagawa, Natsuko. "Rethinking the global heritage discourse – overcoming 'East' and 'West'?" International Journal of Heritage Studies, 22/1, 2016, pp.14–25.
- Mason, Randall. "**Engaged Preservation.**" JAE
- Avrami, Erica. Second-Order Preservation: Social Justice and Climate Action through Heritage Policy. University of Minnesota Press, 2024. [excerpt]

Read at least one chapter that most interests you in this volume (available online):

- Erica Avrami, Susan Macdonald, Randall Mason, David Myers, eds. Values in Heritage Management: Emerging Approaches and Research Directions. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust/Getty Conservation Institute, 2019. – in particular, the essays by Li Kuanghan on China, Hossam Mahdy on Arabic-Islamic traditions, Joe Watkins on indigenous perspectives, and Tara Sharma and Ayesha Pamela Rogers on south Asia

Class 6 Theory in Practice: Policies and Ethics

Public good & commons

- Throsby, David. Economics and Culture. Chapters 1, 3, 5.
- Hardin, Garrett. "Tragedy of the Commons" in Science, v.162, 13 December 1968.
 - Matto Mildemberger, The Tragedy of the Tragedy of the Commons, Scientific American, April 23, 2019, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/the-tragedy-of-the-tragedy-of-the-commons/>
- Ostrom, Elinor. Governing the Commons (2015) [excerpts]

Policies

In Canvas: you'll find two lists of websites to survey: one for major policy documents from the US and UNESCO; one for the professional ethics discussion.

From Reserves:

Scan one of these collections representing the breadth of topics addressed by the field in practical and policy terms: (If you want to choose a book not on this list, please let me know the title in advance of class.)

- Fairclough, Graham, ed. *The Heritage Reader*. Routledge, 2007.
- Stipe, Robert, ed. *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the 21st Century*. University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Feras Hammami, Daniel Jewesbury and Chiara Valli, eds. *Heritage, Gentrification and Resistance in the Neoliberal City*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2022.
- Kalliopi Fouseki, May Cassar, Guillaume Dreyfuss, Kelvin Ang Kah Eng, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Sustainable Heritage*. London: Routledge, 2022.
- Erica Avrami, ed. *Preservation, Sustainability and Equity* (2021), and *Preservation and Social Inclusion* (2020), and *Preservation and the New Data Landscape* (2019). New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City.

Class 7 New research directions; theory in allied fields; planning HSPV 6610

After the in-class exam (which will take up the first half of class), we'll have a discussion to map out future directions and topics for the Spring semester. The reading assignment for this second half of class is simple: find an article in a recent academic or professional journal (for instance, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *Change Over Time*, *Future Anterior*, *Built Heritage*) that interests you and relates to preservation theories; print and read the article, and annotate it by hand. We'll discuss them in class.

ASSIGNMENTS

[1] Very short "op-ed" paper

You'll write a short paper on an issue important to you, important to the public, and related to preservation theory. The paper should be modelled on the "op-ed" columns that are published as part of the opinion sections of major newspapers ([here's a short guide](#) to op-ed writing and [another good resource](#)). These short essays (around 500-750 words) should report on a contemporary preservation controversy and raise a question, or make a critique, or otherwise present an argument. You can also use the papers to reflect on a particular reading that moved you to see something different. The papers should not simply summarize what others say; it should focus on your opinion and your argument (while of course drawing on others' arguments as you see fit). The paper is due before Class 2 (September 4), uploaded to Canvas; and will account for 25% of total grade.

[2] Reading questions

In advance of class sessions 2 through 6 you must submit at least two critical, thoughtful questions raised by the readings for that week. Please keep the questions brief (2-3 sentences is usually sufficient). Your questions should be submitted to the course's graduate assistant, Kaiyue Yang, by email (yangky@design.upenn.edu) by 8:00pm each Wednesday evening before a scheduled class meeting. Together, these will account for 25% of total grade (5% for each of five weeks).

[3] Exam

An in-class, written exam will be used to build lasting knowledge of some of key concepts and debates discussed in the readings and class sessions in the half-semester course. This will be taken in class, writing by hand, in the first part of our Week 7 class (October 16). The exam will account for 25% of the final grade. We will organize two review sessions for the exam between Weeks 6 and 7.

[4] Participation and engagement in class

You are expected to attend all class sessions, participate in exercises and discussions to the greatest extent possible, and generally be intellectually present and engaged. 25% of total grade.

ADMINISTRATION, GROUND RULES, AND RESOURCES

Grading

Individual assignments will be graded on a point system (“12 out of 15”). Final letter grades for the course will be figured on the basis of these assignments and expectations, in light of the course outcomes. The grading rubric follows below. General guidelines for course letter grades are as follows: A+ Exceptional; A Outstanding; A- Excellent; B+ Very good; B Good; B- Competent; C+ Fair; C Acceptable; C- Marginal; F Failure.

Overall grading rubric:

Assignment 1	25%
Assignment 2	25%
Assignment 3	25%
Assignment 4	25%
Total	100%

General Guidance on Written Assignments

Good writing is important—and quality will factor in the grading of every written assignment. Grades will reflect the content and persuasiveness of your writing, your willingness to advance new ideas, your grasp of the course’s issues, as well as conformity with scholarly conventions and the mechanics of good writing (spelling, grammar, paragraph structure, and so on).

Conventions of academic and professional writing are essential to successful professional work. You will use standard forms of footnoting and clear bibliographic referencing to record the sources on which your work relies. The Chicago Manual of Style (available online through PennLibraries) should be your guide.

All written assignments must employ the following formatting:

- 10-12 point type
- 1.5 line spacing
- At least 1” side margins and 1” top/bottom margins
- Page numbers
- Footnotes or endnotes, following the Chicago Manual of Style
- Submit assignments electronically, as a Word file or pdf via Canvas.

If you feel (or are told) that you need to improve your writing skills beyond class work and assignments, there are many resources on which to draw. For one, you can make an appointment to talk to your instructor. Assistance in becoming a better writer is abundantly available on campus at Penn’s Writing Center and the Weingarten Learning Resources Center. We encourage you to explore these websites (they have multiple programs) and make an appointment with the counselors.

Additionally, there are two reference works you are expected to know and use: Strunk and White's The Elements of Style (there are many editions) and the Chicago Manual of Style. The former is a classic work on the craft of writing and is very useful in self-critique. The latter explains the proper formatting of footnotes, bibliographies, and other elements of scholarly writing; it is available in print and online.

Academic Integrity & Classroom Culture

Academic integrity is the foundation of the University's culture of learning and research. Everyone, at all times, is expected to abide by the principles set out in the University's Code of Academic Integrity. Students with questions or concerns about plagiarism or any other issues regarding academic integrity or the classroom environment are welcome to approach the professor in confidence. You can also refer to the Weitzman Student Handbook for academic and other policies that must be followed.

Classroom culture

The School's commitment to diversity, inclusion, justice and belonging, is worth repeating and contemplating here. I will work hard to abide by this; I always welcome conversations and suggestions about improving the experience of the course for you.

"The University of Pennsylvania Stuart Weitzman School of Design is committed to creating an educational setting in which all students, faculty members, and staff members are valued. We strive to create an inclusive culture that celebrates difference and is strengthened by contributions from people of all races, religions, countries of origin, genders, ages, sexual orientations, physical abilities, learning differences, and socioeconomic backgrounds. We aspire to support and retain a student body, faculty and staff who are representative of the multiple communities and publics with which we collaborate and work. A diverse community here enhances our ability to prepare the next generation of artists, architects, landscape architects, planners, and preservationists to become leaders and innovators in a multicultural society."

Use of digital devices and wireless internet access during class time must be confined to course-related activities (essentially, note-taking). Uses unrelated to the course can be distracting to others in the classroom. This will be monitored and managed throughout the semester; if it becomes an ongoing issue, it could result in loss of in-class internet access, or dismissal from a class session.

About the use of AI tools

Artificial intelligence technologies present challenges to traditional concepts of academic integrity. As AI tools are more widely available and adopted, it seems wise to address their use specifically. AI use inhibits many of the kinds of learning and habits of mind we want to cultivate in this course and encourage in your professional development. In addition, the high environmental costs, ethical quandaries regarding intellectual property, and confusion of authorship that have come with wide adoption of AI give us pause. AI tools can be helpful in brainstorming, data-scraping, organizational, or other preliminary research tasks. It is never adequate for completing assignments. Bear in mind the material generated by these programs is often inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Relying on it will limit your own independent thinking and creativity. We'll discuss the uses of AI occasionally as a class (and even apply it selectively in class activities). This said, I regard critical, highly selective use of AI tools as a legitimate means of supporting the research and organization of our work. I strongly discourage use of AI (whether LLMs or image-based) to write or otherwise produce creative work (final versions in particular).

Assignments for this course are to be conceived, designed, and written by you personally. All sources should be cited following the typical rules of academic honesty, fair use, and transparency. This includes using conventional means of using citations to indicate sources used in your work (see [Chicago Manual of Style](#) for specifics). Everyone must abide by traditional standards of transparency and accountability in academic and professional ethics. Report what you use; give credit where it is due; everything under your name is your responsibility. If you feel compelled to use AI, you must disclose and document its use as part of your work deliverables (for instance, in a separate “methodological note”). If you use AI tools without disclosing it, this could be considered a violation of Penn’s Code of Academic Integrity.

Academic and Support Resources

I want to ensure that everyone has the resources they want or need in order to participate fully in this course. Students who are differently abled are welcome let me know if you need special accommodations in the curriculum, activities, instruction or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. I will keep all conversations confidential. You can refer to the [Weingarten Center](#) for assistance.

The University provides a number of resources to support improvement of your writing, studying and learning skills. I encourage you to take advantage of them. The following University-wide points of contact may be helpful:

The [Marks Family Writing Center](#) provides individual help with writing. The [Weingarten Learning Resources Center](#) provides support and guidance on a range of academic work issues, including time management and organizational skills. [Communication within the Curriculum](#) offers guidance on speaking and making effective presentations. [Weigle Information Commons in Van Pelt Library](#) is a clearing house to these and other sources of support. And [Career Services](#) offers assistance on a number of issues related to academic work – as well as post-academic job searching and career advice.

As always, the School of Design’s Student Services office, and [the University’s Wellness resources](#), are ready to help with any issues that arise in or outside the classroom. Please don’t hesitate to take advantage of these folks’ ability and eagerness to support you.

In this and every other course in the School, you are welcome to make an individual appointment to talk to your instructor. Please email me directly, at any time, to arrange an appointment or have a conversation.