instructor: Julie Riesenweber
course title: Vernacular Architecture
institution: University of Kentucky
date offered: Spring 2007

posted date: June 2008
stable URL: www.vafweb.org/resources/syllabi/riesenweber3.pdf

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Course Description and Approach

Vernacular architecture is at once a type of architecture and an approach to the study of architecture. It is also a multidisciplinary field of study that emerged in the mid-twentieth century in response to limitations many perceived in historical disciplines. Historic preservation has close ties to vernacular architecture’s emergence as a distinct field of study and approach to understanding the past through surviving buildings and landscapes, since the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act mandated historic buildings survey nationwide. Preservationists should know something about vernacular architecture because the majority of buildings with which they concern themselves are vernacular types; many would argue that knowledge of vernacular architecture is more important to preservation than familiarity with monumental or high style architecture. From the vernacular architecture scholar’s point of view, even many architect-designed or high style buildings have “vernacular” aspects, and a vernacular approach to their interpretation reveals new things about them, as well as about the people who made and used them.

This course will touch upon vernacular architecture in each of its senses. We will begin by considering vernacular architecture as a field of study, discussing both the history of the movement and intellectual contributions to it. We will next reflect upon a number of essays that take a vernacular approach to interpreting buildings and landscapes (as well as their makers and inhabitants), and which concern some of the important issues in the field. We will end by examining, both through literature and in the field, several types of vernacular architecture. Because most students have already read a great deal about American vernacular architecture of the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, most of our readings in the third section of the course will concern late 19th and 20th-century vernaculars.

Evaluation

Each student’s grade for the course will be determined by three factors in combination:

**Class participation** 35%

I will conduct this class as a true graduate seminar, in which your engagement counts for a great deal. Part of this engagement takes place through commitment: I expect each student to attend class weekly, arrive on time and complete the weekly assigned readings. Another part of engagement occurs through participation: each student must not only do the readings and attend weekly classes, but must also become involved in class discussions each time class meets. Further, each student will be responsible for leading group discussion for one class meeting. The two field trips, scheduled during regular class meeting times, are regular class sessions. Anyone who misses more than one class without good reason will lose 10 points from his or her final grade.
Notebook 20% percent
Each of you should bring to the class one or more images of a building you think is (or might be) vernacular. I will post these images in the seminar room area of Bowman Hall. Each of you should keep a notebook for the duration of the class, making weekly entries in it that apply class readings to the buildings depicted in the images. You may write about the same image each week, about a different image/building each week or any combination in between. You may also choose to group images and write about several simultaneously. Notebook entries may be any length you wish, so long as you produce at least one page per week of thoughts, questions, or hypotheses about at least one of these images/buildings. I will review notebooks at the middle of the semester and grade them at end. I will be looking first to see whether or not weekly entries are present, but more importantly at how each student’s analytical, interpretive, and other critical skills have developed over the course of the semester.

3 Short essays 15% each for a total of 45%
Each student will write three short (5 to 7 page) essays throughout the course of the semester. The first, due Monday 2/26 in class, will be a review of Henry Glassie’s *Vernacular Architecture*. The second, due Monday 4/2 in class, will answer a question I pose. (Each student will not necessarily receive the same question). The third, due by 4:30 p.m. Tuesday May 1, will be on a topic of your choice, so long as it has something to do with the interpretation of an example of vernacular architecture or landscape.
Class meetings, topics and readings

1/15  Martin Luther King's Birthday: Academic Holiday: No Class

1/22  Introduction to class and topic

1/29  Vernacular architecture as a field of study


2/5  Material culture and a vernacular approach


Carter and Cromley, 2005: 20-81 (chapters 3 and 4).


2/12  Issues and interpretations: typology and nomenclature


Hubka type/nomenclature survey; to be handed out

2/19  Issues and interpretations: acculturation, diffusion and building cycles


2/26  Issues and interpretations: race, class and gender

Essay #1, review of Glassie’s *Vernacular Architecture*, due


Herman, 2005: 119-230 (chapters 4, 5 and 6).


### 3/5 Domesticity and Victorian vernacular

**Notebooks due for mid-term review**


### 3/12 Spring Break: No class

### 3/19 The ‘progressive’ movement and the early twentieth century


### 3/26 Field trip

### 3/28-3/31 Annual Meeting of the Vernacular Architecture Forum
4/2 Suburbanization and post-war housing

Essay #2 due


4/9 Roadside and commercial landscapes


4/16 Field trip
4/25 Appalachian Regional Vernacular


4/30 Finals Week

Essay #3 due
Notebooks due

5/7 Grades due for Spring 2007