

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University
Proposal 13-25

Proposal to rename the Minor in
“Historical Studies” to “Public History”

Basic Program Information

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Program/Degree type: minor

Program Title: Minor in Public History

Planned Implementation Date: Fall 2025

Program location/modality: In-person, on campus

Target student population: current undergraduates across the university

General description and characteristics of the program

The public dissemination of history is a valuable skill for students working in history, archaeology, or other public facing humanities and social science disciplines. Public history is the use of historical skills and methods outside of the traditional academic realm of history, and public historians use their training to meet the needs of their community, wherever that may be. Public history as a discipline has been around for decades: *The Public Historian*, the flagship Journal of the National Council on Public History, has been publishing since 1978; The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), to which any museum or site with public engagement belongs, has existed since 1940. Some universities have separate history and public history departments (e.g., NC State offers an MA in both, but only a PhD in Public History).

Numerous courses across our university help students take what they are learning on campus and transmit that knowledge to the broader public, one of the core tenets of the new Essential Education philosophy. While Michigan Tech does not have the resources to offer a full public history degree as a standalone option, sufficient courses exist allowing a student to earn a minor in public history while completing other majors including anthropology (SANT), policy and community development (SPCD), general social sciences (SSS), and various humanities majors (especially Communication, Culture and Media [CCM], Science and Technical Communication [STC], or English [SEN] or). A public history minor would in fact complement another major if a student has a strong interest in history and archaeology, but does not have enough space in their main degree to do a dual major in history. Many of the courses in the proposed public history minor have an applied, hands-on component, as

benefits the field.

The University of Montana, a leader in public history recognized that public historians work in interpretation at museums and historical societies and sites, in preservation at historic properties and in the CRM (cultural resource management) field in general [incidentally this sector is where most graduates from our Industrial Heritage and Archaeology [IHA] graduate degrees find jobs], and in public policy and planning for all levels of government. Public historians are also at the forefront of the dissemination of historical documents through the digital humanities and creative fields such as writing, film and television, and even theater and historical recreation. A minor in Public History can open the door to many of these professions for Tech graduates.

Rationale

We are changing the name of the historical studies minor to public history in order to recognize a strong theme of applied methodology that has been growing in our history program and across the Dept. of Social Sciences in the last 5 years. This minor could serve our new History concentration in the Social Sciences BS degree, as well as other majors such as Anthropology (SANT) and Policy and Community Development (SPCD) in the department.

This minor will allow more effective ways for students to integrate history and historical interpretation in their course of study and also turn the normally inward-looking discipline of history to one that embraces outreach to our and other communities, asking how the past can benefit the present and future.

We envision students who have taken one or two history courses out of interest, whether Social Sciences majors or from any other unit on campus, will then discover that with a targeted methods course and a final project-based course (the internship or UPERSS in the Required Courses section) will recognize the utility for the public communication of history, whether through texts, images, or artifacts.

Related programs: within MTU and at other institutions

Several universities within Michigan offer degrees and certificates in public history (PH). These include:

- Northern Michigan University (NMU): Until about 2022, NMU offered a Minor in PH, but it has been shelved.¹ We would thus become the only university offering a PH concentration in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

¹ See <https://nmu.edu/bulletin/public-history-minor-4> and <https://nmu.edu/bulletin/public-history-12>, but the link on the Dept. of History page (<https://nmu.edu/bulletin/history-31>) leads to a search page (<https://nmu.edu/bulletin/programs>) where the PH minor is no longer listed. A call to the NMU History Dept. on 28 Oct. 2024 confirmed it has been discontinued.

- Wayne State: undergraduate minor (<https://bulletins.wayne.edu/undergraduate/college-liberal-arts-sciences/history/public-history-minor/>) and a stand-alone MA (<https://clas.wayne.edu/history/grad/ma-public-history>) and a joint program in PH and library and information science (<https://sis.wayne.edu/mlis-maph>).
- Western Michigan University: <https://wmich.edu/academics/undergraduate/public-history>, undergrad major and minor (<https://wmich.edu/history/undergradpublichistory>) and MA (<https://wmich.edu/grad/program-masters-history-public/>).
- Central Michigan University: BA (<https://www.cmich.edu/program/public-history>).
- Grand Valley State University: no formal major or minor (though they do have one course: HST 420 *Public History* and an undergraduate 'badge' [9cr; <https://www.gvsu.edu/acad/public-history-undergraduate-badge.htm>]).
- Michigan State University: no formal majors or minors.
- University of Michigan: no formal majors or minors.

Projected Enrollment

There are currently six students enrolled in this minor. We expect enrollment will increase to at least twelve in this program as it offers a more applied focus for this minor.

Specialized Accreditation Requirements

None

Professional Licensure Requirements

None