



HART Program
Houston Action Research Team
Engaged Research Opportunity
Spring 2021

Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site, Main House Redesign

This project will support the Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site (VHP) by providing recommendations for redesigning the public history interpretation offered at the Main House. Public history has an important and vital role in communicating stories about the past to people in the present and it is the responsibility of heritage professionals to constantly (re)evaluate how historical knowledge is disseminated in public spaces.

To this end, the staff at VHP seek to re-interpret the Main House to upend past, ‘traditional’ conceptualizations of how and what plantation-era houses typically convey to the public. While other exhibit spaces have undergone periodic updates, interpretation at the Main House, which currently serves as a house museum displaying antiques and furniture, has largely stayed the same since the 1960s. Recommendations are open to innovative and creative ideas but the redesign plan should focus on helping VHP in its ongoing efforts to decenter historical narratives that focus primarily on the white, owner experience and move toward a more inclusive and accessible approach to public history interpretation that acknowledges other periods, voices, and experiences.

During the Spring semester of 2021, this Houston Action Research Team will:

- Recommend interpretative themes that contribute to and support a more regional understanding of historical development in Brazoria County.
- Identify how redesign can effectively target audiences of all ages.
- Analyze and incorporate data collected by VHP site staff regarding the visitor experience to inform recommendations. Examples of such data include visitor comment cards/surveys, public forums, and listening sessions/roundtables with descendant groups and community members.
- Identify how interpretative themes should be communicated through public history best-practices.
- Identify how technology might be integrated into the Main House both for interpretation and accessibility.
- Review and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of redesigning the Main House and using it as an interpretative space.
- Complete a written report and oral presentation of findings and recommendations to VHP.

This engaged research opportunity is available to Rice undergraduate students for Spring of 2021. An interdisciplinary team of four students, each of whom will bring different, but equally important, skills, knowledge, and experiences, will undertake this project. Team members will each work approximately 10 hours per week on this project between January 15th and May 5th

under the guidance of Dr. Molly Morgan (Anthropology) and CCL staff and will receive \$10/hour for their project work. Work time will be flexible, although team members must attend weekly meetings and must coordinate time to work with other team members on the project as needed. Undergraduate students from **all fields of study** with interests and/or skills in at least some of the following areas are encouraged to apply:

Anthropology, history, anti-racism, museum study, art history, professional writing, public presentations, teamwork, community engagement

APPLICATIONS ARE DUE November 22, 2020 at 11:59pm
To inquire or apply contact Dr. Jessica Khalaf, jkhalaf@rice.edu
For more about Rice's HART Program, visit: <http://ccl.rice.edu>