HIST 6685: Special Topics, Digital History

Thursdays, 5:30-8:00
TLC 1111

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Course Description
This course will introduce you to the theory and practice of digital history. Historians and public historians increasingly use digital methods for research, analysis, and presentation, thus the importance for a foundational class for emerging practitioners. Though not exhaustive, the course will introduce you to tools and methods for collection and preservation of digital records; for public history interpretation on the web; for textual and spatial analysis; and for thinking critically about issues of design, usability, and accessibility.

In addition, my personal hope for the class is that it will increase your ability to be comfortable with sometimes uncomfortable modes of working and doing, and that it will build your love of tinkering (key to the certainty that you can teach yourself the tools you need)!

Required Texts

Dougherty, Jack, and Kristin Nawrotzki, eds. Writing History in the Digital Age (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013). Also available at: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=dh;c=dh;idno=12230987.0001.001;rgn=full%20text;view=toc;xc=1;g=dculture.

Other readings are all online and freely available; these will linked to the syllabus the weeks in which they’re assigned.
Also required:
Please purchase your own domain from the hosting service Reclaim (the $25/year student account is just fine!)

Learning Outcomes
- Demonstrate practical knowledge of a subfield of public history (main assessment: final project)
- Demonstrate a command of the history and theory of digital history (main assessment: blog posts and discussion responses)
- Design and build a final site that showcases best practices in digital history (main assessment: final project)
- Design and build a professional portfolio that lays claim to a digital identity (main assessment: portfolio)

Assessment
Discussion/participation (25%)
The course will be conducted as a seminar in which everyone contributes to the conversation—you are thus expected to attend class weekly and be prepared to discuss readings. If you are sick or need to miss class for any reason, you should alert me in advance by e-mail or by phone. If an absence is deemed justifiable, you will be given an opportunity to make up the work by having a separate reading discussion with me during office hours. If you miss more than two classes without excuse, your final grade will be reduced by 5 points.

Blog assignments (25%)
You will have a weekly prompt that you’ll answer via your own blog. Blog posts must be at least 3 paragraphs in length and demonstrate engagement with the week’s readings and themes. Blog posts are due by noon on Thursday; all posts will be pulled into the course website via an RSS feed. Please read others’ posts before coming to class and be prepared to speak to the thoughts and perspectives of your colleagues in class.

Portfolio (25%)
You will use your Reclaim (or other) site to build a professional portfolio that showcases your history/public history work to date. The goals for this assignment are twofold: that you begin to build a coherent digital identity and that you create something that you can use for the job market. The portfolios should demonstrate the best practices in usability and accessibility you’ve learned in the course, and should include a curriculum vitae and clear examples of your public historical or historical work. You will present your portfolio on the last day of class, December 1.
Project (25%)
You will design and build a digital history site/project based on original research and using tools learned in the course. Ideally, the project will become a part of your thesis work. The site should illustrate your command of best practices and principles in historical research and digital history work learned through the course, and should take into consideration issues of usability and accessibility (I’ll give a more specific rubric for expectations). You will present a draft of your project on November 17th, which will receive feedback from your colleagues. You will present the final project on the last day of the course, December 1.

Grading scale
90%-100%   A
80-89       B
70-79       C
60-69       D
0-59        F

Grades are based on student performance and capability. Simply turning in every assignment does not guarantee that a student will receive a “good grade.” To receive a higher grade, a student must demonstrate proficiency in the material. For different students, gaining that proficiency requires different levels of work, because not all students walk into the class with the same aptitude for history. I will give you a rubric for each assignment so that you have clear expectations for how grades are determined. Also, you must turn in every assignment to pass this course.

Course policies
University policies and academic support
Please carefully review the following Common Language for all university course syllabi at this link: UWG’s Common Language for Course Syllabi
It contains important material pertaining to university policies and responsibilities. Because these statements are updated as federal, state, university, and accreditation standards change, you should review the information each semester.

Academic honesty
Plagiarism--copying or failing to cite the work of others--is a serious academic offense. Any form of academic dishonesty (including but not limited to cheating and plagiarism) will result in a failing course grade as well as potential disciplinary action. Definitions of academic dishonesty and plagiarism are defined in student handbook, so please familiarize yourself with them in the handbook: http://www.westga.edu/handbook/

Disability Act/Accessibility for the course
Students with ADA-defined disabilities needing academic accommodation should; (1) register with and provide documentation to the UWG Office of Accessibility Services; (2) bring a letter to me indicating the need for accommodation and what type. **This should be done during the first week of class.** You can contact to the Office of Accessibility Services at 678-839-6428

**Student Conduct**

Students are obligated to abide by the guidelines detailed in the university catalog. Respect and courtesy are required of all students while in the classroom. The following is also mandatory:

1. No arriving late or leaving early for class meetings (unless you have checked with me in advance). Arriving late or leaving early will count as against your participation grade. Arriving late is defined as arriving after I have begun the course plan for the day. Leaving early is defined as leaving once class has started and is in process. If you habitually arrive late or leave early, you will be asked to leave. Any disruptive behavior will result in your expulsion from the room. If disruptive behavior persists, you will receive a minimum of one grade-letter deduction from your overall grade (depending on the severity of your behavior), as well as possible action.

2. Cell phones, headphones, iPods, and all other electronic devices other than those you use to take notes or perform course activities must be turned off during lectures and individual/group activities. Continued use of these devices during inappropriate times will result in you being tossed from the class. **Use of laptops is permissible**, but if you are caught using laptops for non-class purposes, you will not be allowed to use a laptop for the remainder of the semester. Also, you may **not** record any portion of the class. If you have any documentation needs, please let me know.

**Communication for the course**

I will periodically contact students in the course for schedule updates and changes, or to pass along items of general interest. Please check our UWG email often, as this is the outlet I’ll use to get in touch.

In addition, please use my UWG email for correspondence ([jbrock@westga.edu](mailto:jbrock@westga.edu)). This way is a much quicker route to get a response from me!

**Important note:** I reserve the right to modify this syllabus at any time during the course of the term, particularly regarding the course schedule. If such a modification is substantial, I will reissue a revised syllabus.
Course Calendar

W1: August 11
The Power of Tinkering: Setting an Ethic for this Course

W2: August 18
Wait, it wasn’t Al Gore?: The Inventors of the Computer and Internet
Readings
  ● Walter Isaacson, *The Innovators* (full book)

W3: August 25
An Introduction to Terms: Digital History, Digital Public History, and Digital Humanities
Readings:
  ● Sherman Dorn, “Is Digital History More than an Argument About Past?” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12230987.0001.001/1:4/-writing-history-in-the-digital-age?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1#4.2](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12230987.0001.001/1:4/-writing-history-in-the-digital-age?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1#4.2)
• William G. Thomas III, “What We Think We Will Build and What We Build in Digital Humanities,” History and The Making of Modern America, 15 October 2011, http://railroads.unl.edu/blog/?p=616

Hands-on
• Using Jeffrey McClurken’s Guidelines for Digital History Reviews in the Journal of American History, we will examine the following sites:
  ○ Mapping Occupation
  ○ Performing Archive: Curtis + “the vanishing race”
  ○ “Everything on Paper Will Be Used Against Me”: Quantifying Kissinger
  ○ Plateau People’s Project
  ○ Emigrant City
  ○ Mapping the Spread of U.S. Slavery
  ○ Remembering Lincoln
  ○ Educating Harlem

W4: September 1
Baptism by Fire: Coding
Readings:

Hands-on:
• Sign up for a free CodeAcademy Account and complete the HTML & CSS course (7 hours): https://www.codecademy.com/learn/web

W5: September 8
Searching for and Preserving Data for DH Projects
Readings:


Explore before class:


Hands-on:

- TinEye reverse image search
- Installation and tutorial of Zotero

W6: September 15

Telling Stories With Digital Collections

Readings:

- Stephen Tanaka, “Pasts in a Digital Age,” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12230987.0001.001/1:4/--writing-history-in-the-digital-age?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=142

**Explore in-depth before class (both of these were created at UGA’s DIGI lab):**
- CSI: Dixie: [https://csidixie.org/](https://csidixie.org/) (explore in whatever manner you choose, but I recommend starting with Genesis)
- Invasion of America: http://invasionofamerica.ehistory.org/

**Hands-on**
- Overview of [content management systems](#)
- Overview of server operation
- Installation and tutorial of [Omeka](#)
- Choosing [Omeka plugins](#)

**W7: September 22**
Visualizing Data

**Readings:**
- Fred Gibbs and Trevor Owens, “The Hermeneutics of Data and Historical Writing,” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12230987.0001.001/1:7/--writing-history-in-the-digital-age?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1#7.3](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12230987.0001.001/1:7/--writing-history-in-the-digital-age?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1#7.3)

**Hands-on**
- Using [Plotly](#)

**W8: September 29**
Sensory Engagement: Sound and Other Sources

Readings:

- Listen to one episode from a history podcast of your choice: http://mentalfloss.com/article/64415/pod-city-19-history-podcasts-delight-your-brain

Watch:

- Audacity tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uqCNjbQn54

Hands-on

- Intro to Audacity (on your own)
- Intro to Soundcite

**W9: October 6**

Fall break! No class meeting!

**W10: October 13**

Maps and Spatial Analysis, Pt.1: Narrative Maps

Readings

- Chapters 1-3 (42 pp.) from Mark Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996 (CourseDen)

**Hands-on**
• StorymapJS

**W11: October 20**  
Maps and Spatial Analysis, Pt. 2: Data Maps with Dr. Andy Walter

**Readings:**
• Chapters 10-12 (41 pp) from Mark Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996 (CourseDen)

**Hands-on**
• Carto
• QGIS

**W12: October 27**  
XML and TEI with Dr. Laura Miller

**Readings**
• *An Introduction to the Semantic Web* (video)

• Read through “Intro” and “XML1” sections of the Semantic Markup course U. of London: http://port.sas.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=54

Hands-on
• Into to Bookworm
• Semantic Markup for Historians

W13: November 3
Bringing the people to your project, bringing your project to the people!

Readings:
• All of Part 6 from Writing History in the Digital Age, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12230987.0001.001/1:9/--writing-history-in-the-digital-age?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1

Hands-on:
Back to mapping!
• Mapwarper + CartoDB
• OpenStreetMaps

W14: November 10
Design, Usability, and Accessibility

Readings
• “Downgrading your Website,” CooperHewitt Labs: http://labs.cooperhewitt.org/2014/downgrading-your-website-or-why-we-are-moving-to-wordpress/
• “How People with Disabilities Use the Web: Overview,” Web Accessibility Initiative, [https://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/people-use-web/](https://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/people-use-web/)

**Hands-on**

• Making your Wordpress site [accessible](http://wip.cch.kcl.ac.uk/2013/11/11/lean-ux-in-dh-projects/)

**W15: November 17**
Presentation of project drafts and feedback from colleagues

**November 24**
Thanksgiving Break!

**W16: December 1 (Last Day)**
Portfolio and final project presentations