The Digital Past

History 390.01 (ver. 1.4)

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Introduction

This course prepares you to use and understand a wide variety of current and emerging digital technologies in the service of doing history (and other things). We will also spend time on ethics for historians in the digital age and the importance of the challenges posed by the trade-offs between digital access and the need for data security. You will learn some fundamentals, skills, and something about how we as a society became so enamored of and dependent on these knowledge and information tools. Understanding a new technology requires not just knowing its technical aspects, but also understanding how new technologies transform the societies that embrace them and why technologies succeed and later fade.

Learning Goals

Each week we will focus on a particular IT skill through the examination of a particular historical topic or historical research skill. During the semester you will learn to use the more sophisticated features of digital tools and media, ranging from word processing software to collaborative social media to databases, websites, and maps. You will come to understand basic digital media technologies and concepts and be able to analyze content you find in digital form. Finally, you will learn about computer security and how to protect yourself in an open and connected digital world.

Learning By Doing

This course emphasizes the acquisition of both historical methods and information technology skills through doing rather than just reading. That is, in most weeks you will engage in making or doing something historical using digital tools and networks.

The General Education Information Technology Requirement

This course satisfies the [University's information technology requirement](), which has the following five goals:

- Students will be able to use technology to locate, access, evaluate, and use information, and appropriately cite resources from digital/electronic media.
- Students will understand the core IT concepts in a range of current and emerging technologies and learn to apply appropriate technologies to a range of tasks.

- Students will understand many of the key ethical, legal and social issues related to information technology and how to interpret and comply with ethical principles, laws, regulations, and institutional policies.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate, create, and collaborate effectively using state-of-the-art information technologies in multiple modalities.
- Students will understand the essential issues related to information security, how to take precautions and use techniques and tools to defend against computer crimes.

Unlike some other courses designed to satisfy the IT requirement, this course teaches the fundamentals of information technology within the context of a history course rather than as a set of abstract principles or discrete skills tied to particular software packages. But to make it more transparent which of the Gen Ed skills are being satisfied, the syllabus contains bracketed references to which of the five goals are addressed each week.

Course Requirements
In addition to keeping up with the readings on a weekly basis, I expect you to be an active participant in class discussions, both in the classroom and online. Failure to participate in our discussions will not only have a negative impact on your final grade, but will also make the class less enjoyable for you and for everyone else. Online participation will take place via the class blog and you will be expected to post there every week of the semester. Your blog will contain the results of the weekly exercises, as well as reactions to the reading and links to things you find that might be relevant to the class.

There will be a midterm exam and a final project, each of which allow you to demonstrate your mastery of the historical content and your mastery of the digital skills that are central to the course.

Grading
Your grade for the semester will be based upon the following criteria:
• Blog — 25%
• Class participation — 20%
• Midterm exam — 25%
• Final project — 30%

Course Policies
Attendance: Because each week's topic lays the groundwork for the progressively more sophisticated work that we will be doing as the semester goes along, it is imperative that you come to class, keep up with your assignments, and stay engaged with the rest of the group, both in class and online via the class blog.

ADA: Any student who requires special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me to make necessary accommodations (before February 1, please). Students should present appropriate verification from the Office of Disability

[Services](#), 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Please note: There are often ODS forms that must be filled out and signed by me. It is your responsibility to get those forms to me for signing.

Medical and Other Excuses: Every semester someone is forced to miss either an examination or the due date for an assignment either as the result of an illness or a family emergency. If you find yourself in this situation, fairness to all students in the class requires the proper documentation, without which your excuses will not be accepted. If you need to know more about this process consult me as soon as the emergency is taken care of.

Plagiarism and Cheating: In a word, don't. Plagiarism and cheating are much easier in the digital age, but finding cheaters is even easier, especially when you know computers and the Internet as well as I do. The university expects students to demonstrate a high code of personal honor when it comes to academic work. Please read the [George Mason University Honor Code](#) if you have any questions about what is expected of you in this regard. Penalties for academic dishonesty are severe. In short, you are at extreme risk for failing the course from just a single act of plagiarism or cheating, and your academic career will be put in jeopardy. Also, future employers will ask you about that course you failed for plagiarism or cheating.

How Not to Plagiarize: If you are copying and pasting text that someone else wrote, you might be plagiarizing. Pasted or manually retyped text is not plagiarized only when **all** of the following three conditions are true: 1) the pasted text is surrounded by quotation marks or set off as a block quote, and 2) the pasted text is attributed in your text to its author and its source (e.g., "As Jane Smith writes on her blog . . . "), and 3) the pasted text is cited in a footnote, endnote, and/or a bibliography (e.g., "Smith, Jane. Smith Stuff. Blog. Available http://smithstuff.wordpress.com. Accessed August 1, 2012.") Conventions for copying and pasting computer code are less strict, but even when you copy and paste code, if you can identify the actual individual who wrote the code, you should give the coder's name and the source of the code in a code comment. If you find and use images, audio, or video on the web, you should also cite the creator (if known) and the source (at the very least) of that media file, usually in a caption as well as in a footnote, endnote, or bibliography. Note that reproducing someone else's text, image, audio, or video file in full on your own public website may constitute copyright infringement, even with proper attribution. And, of course, copyright infringement is against the law.

Communication: In general, the best way to get hold of me is by email; I will usually respond within one business day. Please be aware that I often don't check email in the evening or on weekends. You may also IM me using AIM or through an aggregator like Adium at tkelly7029. If I'm online and my status is available, that means it's fine to send me a message. You can also tweet me any time at @EdwiredMills. I will usually contact you by email (gmu email account only), and I too will try not to expect a response sooner than one business day.

Enrollment Status: You are responsible for verifying your enrollment status in this course. Any change in that status is your responsibility and must be made by the dates listed in the Schedule of Classes. After the last day to drop a course (February 22), withdrawal from the course must be approved by the Dean and will be approved only for nonacademic reasons. Attempting to add a class after the last day to add (January 29) is all but impossible. Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

Cell phone ringers: Why do I even have to say this? Please turn off your phone or set it to vibrate before you come to class. And if you take a call in class (it's happened), I will penalize you severely in that all important class participation grade. However, I hope you'll be tweeting or blogging about class during class (more on this in class) and if your phone is your primary access point to the Internet, then by all means use it. Just don't sit there texting your friends. That falls into the category of disrespectful.

Laptops/Tablets: I am not one of that growing legion of professors who bans laptops or tablets from class (see my blog post on this: http://edwired.org/?p=587). In fact, I encourage you to bring your laptop or tablet to class. But if you are clearly checked out (Anyone? Anyone? Bueller?) to Facebook, YouTube, AIM, League of Legends, or wherever, expect me to call on you. A central theme of this course is being connected, so connect!

Food, Drink, Tobacco: No eating in class. It's disruptive and results in ants, roaches, and other beasties infesting the classrooms. Drinks are fine, so long as you don't slurp loudly. No tobacco products of any kind.

Important dates
Last day to add classes: January 29
Last day to drop without penalty: January 29
Final drop deadline: February 22
Mid term exam: March 4
Spring break: March 11-17
Last day of classes: May 6
Final projects due: May 8 NLT 12:00 pm. Projects submitted after noon that day are late.

Course Outline

January 23 – Class intro
Getting your technologies set up (blog, Zotero, etc.). The hashtag for this class will be #h390gmu. If you aren't on Twitter already, go to twitter.com and get yourself set up. It's not difficult. Tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions of people have figured it out.

January 28-30 — The Digital Landscape
Course introduction to demystify information technology and help you understand the basics. As part of getting set up in new media for the course, we will look behind the scenes at how these websites and digital services are created, including basic IT concepts such as the client, server, hardware, software, the network and its protocols, the web and its standards, and newer technology such as mobile. We will continue to refer to these concepts and particular technologies week to week in the course. By the end of the course you should be able to analyze content you find online and technologies and figure out how these things are put together using a set of principles we develop.
Read: Cohen & Rosenzweig, Digital History, Introduction, "Promises and Perils of Digital History"; Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," The Atlantic (July 1945), and Stewart Brand, "Founding Father" (March 2001)
Video: RSS in Plain English by CommonCraft
Exercise: Sign up for a blog at onmason.com, learn how to use its WordPress writing environment, which is a common one for many blog services, and fill out your profile with a short biography. Before class on Monday the 28th, publish your first blog post 1) identifying the most important or interesting part for you of any one of next Monday's assigned material, 2) explaining why that part is important or interesting, and 3) listing three potential historical topics you might be interested in researching throughout the semester (e.g., "historical hoaxes"). Sign up for Google Reader to receive all posts from the class, in the process learning about connective technologies on the web, such as RSS.

February 4-6 — The Underpinnings of the Web
Read: Cohen & Rosenzweig, Digital History, ch. 2, "Getting Started: The Basic Technologies Behind the Web," and Ted Nelson, "Complex information processing [if you access the Nelson article from off campus, you will be asked to log into Mason's library system with your Mason ID]"
Video: History of the Internet
Exercise: Create a blog post (on anything; can be test text) using the HTML tab that includes the following: subheads for sections, a numbered list, an unnumbered list, bold and italicized words, at least one link, and at least one image. See the W3Schools.com HTML tutorial if you need help.

February 11-13 — Digitization, Searching, and Finding
In this week's blog post, choose one of the topics you posted last week and frame it as a question that can be answered by research (e.g., "Did the War of the Worlds hoax really create mass panic in America?").
Read: Cohen & Rosenzweig, ch. 3, "Becoming Digital"
Explore: ProQuest Historical Newspapers database, available through the Mason library website under the databases tab (search for "ProQuest Historical Newspapers"); Archive Finder, also available through the Mason library website under the databases tab, and Flickr Commons.

Exercise: Find one item from each of the above sources related (at least tangentially) to your research question: a newspaper article or advertisement, an archival collection, and an image. Write a blog post describing (or including, or linking to) what you found and its significance for your research.
[IT requirement 1]

February 18-20 — The Reliability of Digital Sources, and the Analog Sources They Come From
Read: Errol Morris, series on a Crimean War photograph: "Which Came First?" Parts 1, 2, 3; also: Morris on Photoshop, history, and "Photography as a Weapon"
Video: Jon Udell, Heavy Metal Umlaut
Read: "Evaluating Websites"
Exercise: Go to the website Whois.com and look up the domain registration information for a historical website that you like. Report the results in the blog.
Exercise: Judge a Wikipedia article on a historical topic by looking at its sources, discussion, and history.
Exercise: Read into this student blog and evaluate how Jane Browning assessed the reliability of the sources she was working with for her senior project.
[IT requirement 1, 3]

February 27 — Ethical, Legal, and Social Issues in a Digital Age

(Note: No class 2/25)

Read: Cohen & Rosenzweig, ch. 7, "Owning the Past?"
Read: Mason's Copyright Office PowerPoint presentation, "The Basics"
Video: The Amen Break
Video: Copyright Criminals
Video: A Fair(y) Use Tale
Exercise: Determine the ethics and legality of one of the following sites:
1) Teachers Pay Teachers
2) Internet History Sourcebooks Project
3) History in Photographs of the California Gold Rush
OR Find a website related to your own research topic and determine its ethics and legality.
[IT requirement 3]

March 4 – Midterm Exam

March 6 -- Securing Information
Read: Mat Honan, "How Apple and Amazon Security Flaws Led to My Epic Hacking" and "How I got my Digital Life Back"
Read: Basic Computer Security
Read: Passwords Under Assault

Discussion: The practical problems of computer security and how one weak link compromises the network and all the computers connected to it. We will discuss what informed users can do to protect against this.
Exercise: Evaluate your own computer security practices.
[IT requirement 5]

March 11-17 – Spring Break!

March 18-20 — Tools and Services
Readings and Exercise: Familiarize yourself with some of the tools we will be using in the second half of the class by trying them out and reading their help documentation.
Google Docs (Spreadsheets, Presentations, Charts) Tutorials
Google Chart Wizard
Google Maps – My Maps: If you are logged into your Google account, go to maps.google.com and click on "My Place" and then "Create Map". You can export your map as KML by clicking "KML" or by adding "&output=kml" to the end of the URL for the map you create (see the URL by clicking on the chain/link icon).
Google Earth (download Google Earth, then try opening your KML file from Google Maps in it). KML Tutorial
Zotero: If you haven't done so already, set up a Zotero account. Once you have your account set up, I will share with you my folder for this course.

March 25-27 — Maps, Spatial Analysis & History
Read: Will Thomas and Edward Ayers, "The Difference Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities," http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/AHR/
Explore: Hypercities, PhilaPlace, Euclid Corridor History Project
Exercise: Create a historical map involving geolocated data, images, or video using Google Maps. Some links to get you started:
Guide to Google Maps "My Maps"
New York Public Library historical maps
Digital Harlem, 1915-1930
LookBackMaps
Overlaying a historical map on Google Earth
Maps from the Library of Congress
History Pin
[IT requirements 1, 2, & 4]

April 1-3 — Databases and Statistics
Read at least two Feltron reports
Exercise: Learn how to use Google Charts well and create at least one chart using historical data.
Daytum personal data recorder and visualizer
Rumsey map search

[Rumsey Historical Maps on Google Maps](#)
[Google Maps introduction at TeachingHistory.org](#)
[Atlas of Historical County Boundaries](#)
[Example Google search for KML/KMZ files](#)

April 8-10 — The Visual Communication of Information
Read: Edward Tufte, "[PowerPoint is Evil](#)" and Peter Norvig, "[The Gettysburg PowerPoint Presentation](#)"
Explore: [Many Eyes](#)
Exercise: Using the slideware program of your choice, create a three-slide presentation on a moment in history. You are limited to three slides because a good presentation should be concise even as it is visually rich.
[IT requirements 2 & 4]

April 15-17 — Data Mining and Text Mining
Read: Cohen, "[From Babel to Knowledge: Data Mining Large Digital Collections](#)"
Explore: [Time Magazine Corpus](#)
Explore: [Google Ngram Viewer](#)
Other tools: [Wordle](#), [BYU Corpora](#), [Bookworm](#)
Exercise: Create a chart using one of the services mentioned, and explain how it illustrates a historical event or era. Be sure to include any caveats about using the chart.
[IT requirement 1 & 2]

April 22-24 — The Stability of Information Technology and Digital Records
Read: Roy Rosenzweig, "[Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era](#)"
Explore: "Born digital" archives: [April 16 Archive](#), [Hurricane Digital Memory Bank](#), [September 11 Digital Archive](#), [George Mason Basketball Digital Memory Bank](#)
Read: [Digital Preservation Guide from the Library of Congress](#)
[IT requirement 1, 2, & 3]

April 29, May 1 — The Art of Programming
Video: [Intro to Scratch](#)
Read: [Scratch Getting Started Guide](#)
Download and explore: [Scratch](#)
Exercise: Solve the [Blockly maze](#)

May 6 — Final wrap-up and review
Final projects should be submitted via email to me no later than noon on May 8. Projects submitted after that day/time will be late and graded down.

Syllabus lineage: This syllabus is a modified version of the one created by [Amanda French](#) and hers is based heavily on one originally developed by [Dan Cohen](#). The course iis also being taught this semester by Sharon Leon.Examining these other syllabi can give

you a sense for how this course is developing across multiple instructors.