# Digital History | History 696 | Fall 2011

Fred Gibbs (486 Research I).
If you'd like to meet for any reason, please suggest a time convenient for you.

## Course Description

This course explores the theoretical and methodological issues raised at the intersection of the history profession and technology. It aims to provide conceptual fluency on broad topics such as the uses of new media in relation to history and historical narrative, the implications of copyright law on access to historical data and scholarship, the changing role of museums and libraries, and the politics of authority and expertise in knowledge networks. The course also examines in some depth the future of historical research, especially how powerful new research methodologies now allow historians to ask and answer fundamentally different kinds of questions. Overall, the course seeks to challenge the typical conceptions of how one ought to produce and consume history, and, more broadly, to provide guidelines for effectively using technology in the humanities.

### Course Goals

- Understand what new media has to do with the humanities, particularly the history profession
- Converse intelligently with both skeptics and advocates about the history and future of 'digital history'
- Appreciate the theoretical possibilities and practical limitations of new research methodologies

### Course Expectations

- Thorough preparedness and engaged participation in every meeting
- Original contributions on your blog that helps advance the broader discussion
- Perseverance and tolerance for frustration with hypothetical discussions. Much DH is about engaging with new methodological problems raised by rapidly shifting technology and new media
- Do not suffer in silence. I try to situate discussions squarely within course themes and readings, but I expect that you'll ask for clarification if such connections elude you.

## Final Project

The goal of the final project is to show that you have absorbed course material, grasped the key issues, and can speak intelligently about how they are relevant to your research/careers. You'll being evaluated on the extent to which you do that in the project. Start early and get help often.

- ~4,000-word historiographical review on some topic related to the interactions between humanities and technology
- 4 ~1000-word book review articles related to history/new media/digital history/digital humanities
- begin a history project (ideally related to your research interests) that takes a non-traditional form:
  - a suite of blog posts about applying principles of this course to your own work/field
  - a pictorial history of some topic that develops an argument (per Staley)
  - an on-line exhibit using Omeka a set of data visualizations and interpretations

## Grading

If you are tempted to ask 'what do i have to do to get a [some grade] in this class?', then you are in for a frustrating semester. Ultimately, you are graded on your ability (as far as i can perceive it) to absorb, process, connect, and show facility with course material. This happens mostly in your blog posts and in course discussions (and obviously in the final project), but individual contributions to these are not explicitly graded (though i try to comment regularly on the blog). If you have questions about your performance/grade during the semester, please alert me, and I will be very happy to meet with you to discuss how things are going. I understand that everyone comes into the course with different skills and backgrounds. In general, if you make a serious effort, then you will do well grade-wise.

- Active and intelligent participation in class discussions: 30%
- Original and articulate blog posts: 30%
- Presentation of Final Project: 10%

- Final project: 30% (you will be welcome to show me early versions to make sure you are on the right track)

This syllabus only scratches the surface of the topics that inevitably arise during discussion because it can be approached from many different angles. Your particular interests will focus and direct the discussions. In fact, that you retain such control is central to the success of the course. This is a polite way of saying that you share some responsibility in making this class relevant to your life/work. With feedback from you, I'll do my best to make sure that it is.

Required books:

- Gregory and Ell, *Historical GIS* (Cambridge, 2007) ISBN: 978–0521671705
- Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture* (Penguin, 2004) ISBN: 978–143034650
- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (Verso, 2005) ISBN:978–1844671854
- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Harper, 1993) ISBN:978–0060976255
- Alex White, *The Elements of Graphic Design (2nd ed.)* (Allworth, 2011) ISBN: 978–1581157628
- John Willinsky, *The Access Principle* (MIT, 2006) ISBN:978–0262512664

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS

I recommend you read the the assignments in the order presented, but you won't instantly fail if you don't.

## 1. Introduction to the Course and Digital History

- In honor of Roberto Busa (d. Aug 2011): *TIME Magazine* (1956): "Religion: Sacred Electronics"
- Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, What Is Digital humanities...?
- Susan Hockney, History of Humanities Computing
- Cathy Davidson, Humanities 2.0: Promise, Perils, Predictions
- Discussion: What *is* digital humanities? Digital history? What's new?
- Lab: Setting up, customizing, and maintaining your blog

## 2. History and Narrative

- Hayden White, The value of narrativity in the representation of reality [@JSTOR via GMU Libary]
- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*
- Discussion: What are the principal criticisms of narrative? How might new media improve historical scholarship?
- Lab: Collecting, Organizing, and Researching with Zotero

## 3. History and Principles of New Media

- Espen Aarseth, *Nonlinerarity and literary theory*
- Alan Liu, When Was Linearity? The Meaning of Graphics in the Digital Age
- David J. Staley, Sequential Art and Historical Narrative: A Visual History of Germany
- Marshall McLuhan, *The medium is the message [excerpt from Understanding Media]*
- Discussion: How is new media relevant to historical research and writing?
- Lab: Intro HTML and CSS

## 4. Designing History

- Alex White, *Elements of Graphic Design (2nd ed.)*
- Lab and Discussion: Building an online exhibit for The National Library of Medicine

## 5. Distant Readings

- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (skip last section on evolutionary theory if so inclined)
- Timothy Burke, a response to *Graphs, Maps, Trees*
- Discussion: Pros and cons of distant reading for historical inquiry

## 6. Text mining and processing large data sets

- Michael Wesch, The Machine is Us/ing Us (4.5 min. video)
- Marc Parry, The Humanities Go Google
- Douglas Oard, A Whirlwind Tour of Automated Language Processing...

- Literary Lab, Quantitative Formalism: an Experiment
- Lab: experimenting with text-mining tools and projects

## 7. Metadata, Mark-up, and Text Encoding

- msporny, Introduction to the Semantic Web (6 min. video)
- Allen Renear, Text Encoding
- Buzzetti and McGann, Critical Editing in a Digital Horizon
- Problems with searching and metadata
- Discussion: Why do machines need to read, anyway?

## 8. APIs

- Julie Meloni, "Working with APIs", parts 1, 2, and 3.
- Demo: Creating Visualizations with APIs
- Discussion: Why should historians care about programming?]
- Lab: How to use Google Fusion Tables in your own research

## 9. Mapping and GIS

- Richard White, What is spatial history?
- Ian N. Gregory and Paul S. Ell, *Historical GIS. Technologies, Methodologies and Scholarship.*
- Lab: Playing with online mapping tools and projects

## 10. Copyright

- Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture*
- Fair Use Example: crash course | blue puppies | court case (read the DISCUSSION section)
- Brian Lamb, Dr. Mashup
- Overview of Licenses: GNU GPL, Creative Commons
- Discussion: What's at stake for historians?

## 11. Access

- John Willinsky, *The Access Principle*
- Steve Kolovich, very short update in Inside Higher-Ed
- Discussion: How does copyright and access matter to historians?

## 12. New Scholarly Spaces: Blogs, Tweets, Wikis, and Digital Identities

- Dawn Gilpin, Working the Twittersphere
- Martyn Jessop, Digital Visualization as a Scholarly Activity [skim]
- Chuck Tyron, Blogging, Scholarship, and the Networked Public Sphere
- Roy Rosenzweig, Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past
- Discussion: How is new media transforming hierarchies and relationships in Academia?

## 13. Thanksgiving

## 14. Scholarly Critiques, Peer Review, and Publishing

- William Thomas III, Writing a Digital History Journal Article from Scratch
- Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Planned Obsolescence
- Robert B. Townsend, How is New Media Reshaping the Work of Historians?
- Lab: Create a wiki that outlines a digital review rubric

## 15. Presentations & Conclusions

Presentations are limited to 5 minutes! There is no specific form or style requirements, but you should have visual aids to make the ridiculously short time limit more useful. Your main goal is to highlight the intellectual merit and originality of your final project.

SEND SUPPORTING MATERIALS (powerpoints, links, bribes) BEFORE CLASS so we don't have to waste time swapping out computers.

Discussion: What did you learn in this course? What do you wish you had learned more about? How does one be a digital historian? Why won't you be one?