

THE DIGITAL PAST

HIST 390, SPRING 2024

Dr. Gretchen Beasley

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Slack: dh390-spring2024.slack.com

Class Times: T/TH 1:30-2:45 pm

Office Hours: By appointment only.

Please use: [Dr. Beasley's Calendar](#)
(<https://calendly.com/gbeasley1/dropin>) to book appointment times.

WELCOME TO THE DIGITAL PAST! In this class, you will learn to do history using digital tools. The course—which satisfies the university's IT requirement—teaches the fundamentals of information technology by applying them to practical problems in history. You will be introduced to the fields of Digital History (DH) and the Digital Humanities (also DH). You will learn about popular digital tools, platforms, and methodologies, and how to use these to aid in the interpretation of historical data and creation of a historical narrative in the digital space. Additionally, you will learn the concepts, ethics, and values that influence DH practice.

While this course will not have an overarching historical theme, we will discuss an array of historical topics/problems each week that correspond with provided datasets to master each tool. Our discussions and assignments throughout the semester are designed to prepare you to understand the theory and practice of DH, as well as use History to critically evaluate the digital tools you come into contact with. Through learning by doing, you will gain both digital skills and the skills of a historian; skills which will be useful to you throughout your university career and in your future work.

UPON COMPLETING THIS COURSE, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Explore the foundational frameworks, approaches, ethics, and debates in DH
- Focus on building digital literacy and digital skills; or understanding why, when, and how to use various digital tools and platforms
- Employ the Agile approach to project management through our weekly assignments and through development of your final project (a DH project built in the content management system Omeka)
- Develop a familiarity with a range of DH projects, as well as the ability to evaluate tools and methods involved in creating these projects
- Examine your "Digital Self" through the creation of a professional personal website, course blogs, and class discussions
- Become thoughtful, critical and reflective users of DHs tools, technologies and spaces by understanding that all technologies are complex, socially situated and political tools through which humans make meaning
- Learn how to discover and analyze primary and secondary sources online by reading metadata efficiently and understanding how search engines work
- Work collaboratively with other people towards a common goal. This type of collaboration will have life-long implications as you build professional skills

THE FINE PRINT: COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

WHAT EACH WEEK WILL BE LIKE:

All assignments must be completed in the schedule listed; this includes completing assignments and posting to our discussion board on Slack, your website, or via a course website.

HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS CLASS:

First and foremost, please ask me for help for any reason, whether you are stuck, or whether you want to learn more about what we're doing in class. Second, be persistent. Be willing to experiment, and be willing to make mistakes. Some of your best blog posts might be about what you learned by making a mistake. Third, remember that your goal is not to learn tools, but concepts. Look for the skills and ideas underlying the specific technologies we will work with. Fourth, keep up by doing the weekly work – including the reading and any other preliminary assignments. If you miss part of the course work, you'll have a hard time keeping up.

OFFICE HOURS/DROP-INS:

All office hours (or drop-ins) this semester will be virtual, though if you want to meet in-person we can make arrangements. Feel free to use this time to talk about coursework, converse with me about history and DH, or simply to get to know one another more than class time allows.

CREDIT HOURS AND EXPECTATIONS:

This is a 3-credit course, which means that in addition to the daily discussions, you are expected to do at least 6-8 hours of course-related work each week during the semester. This coursework includes readings; skill-based assignments and writing assignments; and research and writing for your final project.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND COURSE CONDUCT:

I am committed to a class dynamic that supports diversity in race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexuality, class, disability, age, and religion. All communication in this course must be done with respect and civility toward others who have different ideas, perspectives, and traditions than your own. This also applies to newer forms of digital disrespect: Zoom bombing, trolling, cyberbullying, or other inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated. If anything is said or done in our virtual classroom spaces that makes you uncomfortable, by me or a fellow student, please schedule a time to talk with me as soon as possible and we will find a solution.

In addition, there are some guidelines that I expect to be applied to our digital spaces at all times.

1. **Be empathetic.** We're all adjusting to new situations and workflows, and I want us to stay sensitive to that as we move through the semester. If you need something, please ask for it and I will do my best to help or find someone who can.
2. **Be flexible.** A cardinal rule of DH classes is that the tech rarely works as expected. Please stay flexible as we work through any technical issues and figure out which workflows make sense for our group. Also, as we move through the course, I challenge you to approach the messiness and technical failures as moments to reflect on

how to adjust and adapt. These can also be moments to identify the boundaries or limitations of technology and imagine creative solutions.

3. **Practice good calendar management.** This will be key to keeping on track this semester. Establish a calendar early on to keep track of due dates. Make sure to incorporate the rule of thumb that for a 3-credit class, you can expect 6 to 8 hours/week for “homework”.
4. **Communicate!** This is crucial. Falling behind or need some extra help? Schedule a meeting with me. Have a tech issue or don’t fully understand a concept? Pose your questions in our discussion spaces. Have ideas for how to improve our workflow? Let me know!

A WORD ON PLAGIARISM:

Although digital writing provides new opportunities for remixing and hyperlinking, plagiarism is not acceptable in any form. Any text or idea that is not in your own words needs to be cited without exception (with hyperlinks if applicable). This includes direct quotes or paraphrased text. You are also responsible for assessing the copyright restrictions of any materials you use in your projects. If in doubt about copyright or possible plagiarism, please ask for clarification.

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. As a Mason student, you should follow these fundamental principles at all times, as noted by the Honor Code: (1) All work submitted should be your own, without the use inappropriate assistance or resources, as defined by the assignment or faculty member; (2) When you use the work, the words, the images, or the ideas of others—including fellow students, online sites or tools, or your own prior creations—you must give full credit through accurate citations; (3) In creating your work, you should not take materials you are not authorized to use, or falsely represent ideas or processes regarding your work. If you are uncertain about the ground rules or ethical expectations regarding the integrity of your work on a particular assignment or exam, you should ask your instructor for clarification. Support for you to complete your work is available; no grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct.

If you aren’t familiar with it, please also consult the “Understanding Plagiarism” tutorial created by GMU

Libraries: <https://library.gmu.edu/tutorials/plagiarism>

STATEMENT REGARDING USE OF GENERATIVE AI TOOLS:

Use of Generative-AI tools should be used following the fundamental principles of the Honor Code. This includes being honest about the use of these tools for submitted work and including citations when using the work of others, whether individual people or Generative-AI tools.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

1. Computer and internet access. This is an online technology course, and we will use and reflect about the use of technology. You will need to have regular, reliable access to a computer and a stable broadband Internet connection with a consistent 1.5 Mbps [megabits per second] download speed or higher. You can check your speed settings using the Google (or another) speed test. If you don’t have regular computer access or a stable Internet connection, please let me know so that I can accommodate your needs.

Platforms: We'll use a variety of platforms: In addition to Blackboard (for grades), we'll use Zoom, Mural/Neatro for collaboration, and small group meetings/discussion boards in Slack. I will distribute further instructions in class.

While you participate in class, make sure that your use of technology during class is not a distraction to yourself or others. Avoid using technology as a barrier to actively engage during class.

2. As part of our course, you will set up a website. If you don't already own your own web domain, you will need to create one for our course.

Reclaim Hosting: is a hosting service developed originally at the University of Mary Washington especially for students and faculty: <https://reclaimhosting.com/>

THE FINE PRINT: MASON POLICIES & DATES

Accommodations: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or <http://ods.gmu.edu>

Communication: The best way of reaching me quickly is via Slack. If you email, I will respond to you promptly within 24 hours (weekends excluded).

All office hours (or drop-ins) this semester will be virtual, by appointment via Zoom *though if you want to meet in-person we can make arrangements*. Feel free to use this time to talk about coursework, converse with me about history and DH, or simply to get to know one another more than class time allows.

Diversity Statement: "George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty, and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services, and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds, and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

The reflection of Mason's commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach.

Acknowledging that the attainment of diversity and inclusion are dynamic and continuous processes and that the larger societal setting has an evolving socio-cultural understanding of diversity and inclusion, Mason seeks to continuously improve its environment. To this end, the University promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment regarding diversity. The aim is to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group and organization, and to make improvements as needed."

Medical issues: Please consult Student Health Services or another physician if you need medical attention: <https://shs.gmu.edu/>

Please let me know if there are any medical issues that I need to know about.

Counseling and Psychological Services: <https://caps.gmu.edu/>

Enrollment Status: You are responsible for verifying your enrollment status in this (and every) 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, 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 is not possible. Undergraduate students wishing to drop a class after the drop date may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

Honor Code and Academic Integrity: Please consult the resources from the Office of Academic Integrity, including the GMU Honor Code, here: <https://oai.gmu.edu/>

If you aren't familiar with it, please also consult the "Understanding Plagiarism" tutorial created by GMU Libraries: <https://library.gmu.edu/tutorials/plagiarism>

IMPORTANT DATES

[Spring 2024 Academic Calendar](#) | [Office of the University Registrar](#) | [George Mason University](#)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE*

*Schedule Subject to change

(It's very easy to get whatever grade you want in the class by just keeping up with the basic work, but the grade awarded depends on you. There is no huge midterm or final that is a large percent of your grade, so make sure you budget your time to fulfill the weekly assignments.)

I reserve the right to shuffle, remove, or swap out readings and assignments at any point throughout the semester. This is meant to anticipate the anxieties and unknowns that might come with well, living through life. I will never increase your workload but will do my best to respond to events as they unfold. You will be informed of any changes ASAP, and I will make changes directly here and send out a message via email and Slack.

Week 1 (January 16/18): Getting Started

Week 2: What is the Internet? (January 23/25)

Week 3: Let's Create Your Digital Identity (January 30/February 1)

Week 4: What is Digital History? | Evaluating DH (February 6-8)

Week 5: Making Sense of Evidence | Sources (February 13/15)

Week 6: HTML & CSS (February 20/22)

Week 7: AI | Ethical, Legal, and Security Issues in DH | Project Proposal Peer Review (February 27/29)

- February 29: Final Project Proposal Due

Week 8: Spring Break (March 5/7)

Week 9: Audio, Oral Histories, and Transcription (March 12/14)

- March 12: Museum Exhibition Review Due
- March 14: Midterm Self Reflection

Week 10: Building the Pieces – An Archive (Understanding Metadata and Omeka) (March 19/21)

Week 11: Building the Pieces – An Exhibit, Understanding Omeka and Simple Pages (March 26/28)

Week 12: Building the Pieces – A Timeline (April 2/4)

- April 4: Final Project Outline Due

Week 13: Building the Pieces – Data Analysis (April 9/11)

Week 14: Building the Pieces – Publishing Spatial Data and Historical Maps (April 16/18)

Week 15: Final Wireframe for Project/Workshopping (April 23/25)

- April 23: Working Session
- April 25: Digital Gallery Walk

Week 16: That a Wrap! Final Project Due (May 7)

- Final Self Reflection (due with your Final Project) Due by 4:15 pm on May 7 (our final exam day)