Course Syllabus
HIST 390 Section 3
Krug Hall 242
MW 12:00-1:15pm
Abby Mullen

Office: Research 1 Office 473 (in RRCHNM)

In this class, you will to learn to do history using digital tools. The course—which satisfies the Mason Core IT requirement—teaches the fundamentals of information technology by applying them to practical problems in history. You will learn how to do research online, but also how to put those sources in the context of other scholarly work. You will gather data, learn how to question it, analyze it, summarize it, and interpret it. You will create visualizations of datasets, including maps. You will learn how to present visual and textual sources online in web exhibits, and you will learn how to write and publish effectively online. Through learning by doing, you will gain both digital skills and the skills of a historian. This combination will be useful to you throughout your university career and in your future work. Our focus this semester will be on war in the antebellum United States.

In this course you will:
- Learn the varied history of war in the antebellum United States, from the French and Indian War to the Civil War;
- Create historical scholarship using varied tools and sources;
- Publish historical scholarship on the web.

Because it is an IT course, this course will also meet the following learning outcomes:

1. Students will understand the principles of information storage, exchange, security, and privacy and be aware of related ethical issues.
2. Students will become critical consumers of digital information; they will be capable of selecting and evaluating appropriate, relevant, and trustworthy sources of information.
3. Students can use appropriate information and computing technologies to organize and analyze information and use it to guide decision-making.
4. Students will be able to choose and apply appropriate algorithmic methods to solve a problem.

Essential Information

Office Hours
My office hours are Th 10:00am-12:00pm and F 11:00am-12:00pm. I **strongly strongly** recommend you make an appointment [here.](#)

Communication
Most communication outside of class hours will be done on Slack. (If you have not received an invitation to join our class group, please add yourself using your Mason email address.) NB: The goal for this Slack group is mostly for you to help each other. I will be available at certain times, but not at all hours of the day or night. Ask your questions in one of the open channels rather than in a DM to me.

Assignments
All assignments should be linked to in a post on Blackboard. You won't be doing any writing *on* Blackboard, but we want a record of when you completed your assignments. So for every assignment, post a link on Blackboard.

You'll be creating a number of small projects throughout the semester, all related to a topic you choose. Your topic should be a conflict that the U.S. armed forces participated in at some point between 1750 and 1861 (in other words, you may not choose the Civil War). Each of these projects will allow you to demonstrate mastery of a particular digital skill or tool. At the end of the semester, you'll be bringing all of these projects together into a unified portfolio. What that portfolio looks like is up to you, but you should think about it from the beginning--think about how all your small projects relate to each other, as you'll be asked to unify them with some narrative. You may choose any of the conflicts on [this Wikipedia page](#), up till the Civil War. Be judicious in your choice—you're going to be collecting a variety of data about your conflict throughout the semester, so an extremely obscure one might not be the best choice. If you're not sure, ask me before we get too far into the semester.

Grading breakdown
Blog posts (15%): You will be asked to write a number of blog posts. I will grade an indeterminate number of these--not all of them. However, you will not know in advance which I'm going to grade and which I'm not, so don't slack off!
Small projects (45%): There are nine small projects throughout the semester. Each of these will be worth 5%.
Midterm (15%): Mid-way through the semester you'll be taking an exam. It will be your only exam of the semester.
Final portfolio (15%): Your portfolio of all your work for the semester, brought together in a polished package.
Participation (10%): You are expected to attend each class meeting and participate actively. Bring a laptop and power cord, so that you can follow along with instructions in class and work

on assignments. Bring a copy of readings to class on any day for which they are assigned. Participation means activity both within class and on our class Slack group.

General policies

See the George Mason University catalog for general policies, as well as the university statement on diversity. You are expected to know and follow George Mason's policies on academic integrity and the honor code. Please ask me if you have any questions about how these policies apply to this course. Please note the dates for dropping and adding this course from the academic calendar. You especially need to be aware that harassment of other students or the professor, for any reason and in any manner, will not be tolerated. Also, don't cheat. Do your own work.

Getting help and accommodations

There are many ways that you can get help for a variety of needs at Mason. If you have any question about what kinds of help are available, please contact me.
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or http://ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Credits

This course's structure is mostly based on syllabi from other HIST 390 instructors, most especially Lincoln Mullen and Mills Kelly. Assignments and ideas also came from Ben Schmidt, Ryan Cordell, and Cameron Blevins.

Class Schedule and Assignments

Week 0 (January 23): Introduction
- BEFORE CLASS:
    - Join the class Slack group
    - Read Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, "[Introduction: Promises and Perils of Digital History](#)" and "[Getting Started](#)," in *Digital History*, online edition (Center for History and New Media, 2005)
    - Browse
        - [Valley of the Shadow](#)
        - Cameron Blevins, "[Geography of the Post](#)"
        - [Histories of the National Mall](#)
        - [The Proceedings of the Old Bailey](#)
        - [Papers of the War Department](#)
- Read for next week (Due January 28):
    - Megan O'Neil, "[Confronting the Myth of the 'Digital Native',](#)" Chronicle of Higher Education, April 21, 2014
    - Google, "[How Search Works](#)" (click through all the pages)
    - "[How the World Came to Be Run by Computer Code](#)"

Week 1 (January 28, 30): French and Indian War / Professional Presence + How the Internet Works
Assignments for the Week:
- Read "[Colonial Society](#)" in *The American Yawp* (Due January 30)
- Register for a domain at [Reclaim Hosting](#) and install WordPress. Pick a theme and write a blog post about your goals for this semester in this class (be thoughtful about this!). Post the URL of your post to Blackboard. (Due February 4)
- Read for next week (Due February 4):
    - Caleb McDaniel, "[The Dangers of a Fake Harriet Tubman Quote](#)"
    - Scott Weingart, "[Down the Rabbit Hole](#)"

Week 2 (February 4, 6): American Revolution / Using the Internet to find credible sources (IT Learning Outcome #2)
Assignments for the Week:
- Read (Due February 6):
    - "[The American Revolution](#)" in *The American Yawp* (Due February 6)
    - The diary of Albigence Waldo from the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (you'll have to use your skills of finding sources on the Internet to locate it!)

- ○ Caleb McDaniel, "How to Read for History"
- Select a conflict that you'll be focusing your energy on this semester. Write a blog post about why you picked that conflict. (Due February 6)
- Install Zotero and sign up for an account. Add **one of each** of these types of sources about your conflict to our shared class Zotero group: book, journal article, webpage. Make sure the metadata is complete! On your blog, write a post summarizing the argument of each of these sources; include a bibliography generated from Zotero. (Due February 11)
- Read for next week:
  - ○ Lara Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 121, Issue 2, 1 April 2016, pp. 377–402.

Week 3 (February 11, 13): Early Naval Wars / Using and citing primary sources
Assignments for the Week:
- Read (Due February 13):
  - ○ Michael Kitzen, "Money Bags or Cannon Balls: The Origins of the Tripolitan War, 1795-1801," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 4 (1996): 601–24, https://doi.org/10.2307/3124419.
  - ○ Jonathan R. Dull, "A New Navy Fights France and the Barbary States, 1783–1805," in *American Naval History, 1607-1865*, Overcoming the Colonial Legacy (University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 33–48.
- Write a blog post reflecting on your experience of copying from Monday's class. How does what we did change your understanding of how communications worked during 19th century wars? How does it connect to the way information travels today? (Due February 13)
- Find five primary sources (online, or if you're very ambitious, in an archive!) about your conflict. Add them to Tropy, making sure you fill out the metadata properly. Then write a descriptive blog post about your items, including a screenshot of each of your items in Tropy. (Due February 18)
- Read for next week:
  - ○ Public Domain information from Cornell University

Week 4 (February 18, 20): War of 1812 / Copyright/fair use (Omeka)
- Read "The War of 1812" in *The American Yawp* (Due February 20)
- Install Omeka. Add the five sources you found last week to an Omeka project, and give your Omeka project a name. Make sure you include rights information about each of your items! Link to your Omeka project in Blackboard. (Due February 25)
- Read/watch for next week (Due February 25):
  - ○ Preservation and Access: Digitization Services at the National Archives
  - ○ Stanford University Libraries' Digitization Labs
  - ○ Ryan Cordell, "'Q i-jtb the Raven': Taking Dirty OCR Seriously," *Book History* 20 (2017), 188-225.

Week 5 (February 25, 27): Seminole Wars / How analog things become digital
- Read (Due February 27):
  - John K. Mahon, "The First Seminole War, November 21, 1817-May 24, 1818," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (1998): 62–67.
  - Laurel Clark Shire, "Seminole Resistance," in *The Threshold of Manifest Destiny*, Gender and National Expansion in Florida (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 102–34.
- Find a collection of documents online that relate to your conflict. You may have to curate your own collection, or you may be able to find them all together. Write a blog post about what your collection is and what its value is for your conflict. What is there? What is missing? Has the material been made machine-readable, through OCR or transcription? Make sure you include a link to your online collection.
- Readings for next week (Due March 4):
  - Browse these timelines and write a blog post comparing them. What are the ways in which time is marked? What are the primary events or data the timelines are trying to show? How does the timeline use other information to bolster its effectiveness?
    - Slave Voyages Timeline
    - Histography
    - Digital Harlem

Week 6 (March 4, 6): Mexican War / Timelines
- Read (Due March 6):
  - "Texas, Mexico, and America," from *The American Yawp* (Due March 6)
  - Jonathan R. Dull, "Trade Protection and War with Mexico, 1815–1861," in *American Naval History, 1607-1865*, Overcoming the Colonial Legacy (University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 65–82.
- Using the sources you've accumulated as source material, create a timeline of your conflict using TimelineJS. Make sure you watch the introductory video and read the documentation! I'll be extra impressed if you include media from your Omeka project. Put your timeline on your website, and post a link to Blackboard. (Due March 18)

Week 7 (March 11, 13): SPRING BREAK!

Week 8 (March 18, 20): The Army in the West / Databases
- Read (Due March 18):
  - Sean Fraga, "Native Americans, Military Science, and Ambivalence on the Pacific Railroad Surveys, 1853–1855," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 75, no. 3 (2014): 317–49.
- Database Assignment TBD
- Read for next week:

○ Andrew Wiseman, "When Maps Lie"

Week 9 (March 25, 27): Assessment / Mapping with historical maps
- **Assessment on March 27--bring a blue book!**
- Sign up for an account at MapWarper. Find a map in the David Rumsey Map Collection that relates to your conflict. Georeference it in Map Warper. Write a blog post about your map, as well as how georeferencing it changed your perspective on what it shows. (Due April 1)
  - Resources for georeferencing: https://lincolnmullen.com/projects/spatial-workshop/georectification.html
- Read for next week:
  - Lincoln Mullen, "Working with Spatial Data"

Week 10 (April 1, 3): Establishment of military academies + slavery / Making maps
- Read William P. Leeman, "A West Point for the Navy?," in *The Long Road to Annapolis*: *The Founding of the Naval Academy and the Emerging American Republic* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 69–100 (Due April 1)
- EITHER:
  - Use QGIS to make a data map about your conflict from the data you've accumulated throughout the semester, OR
  - Create a StoryMap that tells a spatial narrative from your conflict. Make sure each of your points includes text about why that space and time are important.
  - IN EITHER CASE, write a blog post reflecting on what your map tells us about the spatial aspects of the history of your conflict. Include a link to or an image of your map. (Due April 8)
- Read for next week:
  - Michael Witmore, "Text: A Massively Addressable Object," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2012*

Week 11 (April 8, 10): Imperial Ambitions / Text analysis
- Read Eugene S. Van Sickle, "Reluctant Imperialists: The U.S. Navy and Liberia, 1819—1845," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 1 (2011): 107–34 (available on JSTOR).
- Search for at least three terms related to your conflict in the Google NGrams viewer and Bookworm. Write about what you *think* the results might mean.
- Read for next week:
  - Frederick W. Gibbs, "New Forms of History: Critiquing Data and Its Representations," The American Historian, February 2016
  - Maeve Kane, "All One People and Under One King", presentation at William and Mary Quarterly Digital Research in Early America Forum at University of California Irvine, October 11-12, 2018.

- John Theibault, "Visualizations and Historical Arguments," in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, edited by Kristen Nawrotzki and Jack Dougherty (University of Michigan Press, 2013).
- "Types of Visualizations," in *The Historian's Macroscope*

Week 12 (April 15, 17): Lead-up to the Civil War / Visualizations
- Read "The Sectional Crisis" in *The American Yawp* (Due April 17)
- Upload your data set to plot.ly. Investigate different types of visualizations your data works with. Write a blog post reflecting on your investigation. Which work best? Which don't work at all? What do you think your visualizations are saying about your data? (Due April 22)
- Read for next week:

  - Jennifer Howard, "Born Digital, Projects Need Attention to Survive," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 6, 2014.
  - Dan Goodin, "Why passwords have never been weaker," Ars Technica, August 20, 2012.
  - Mat Honan, "How Apple and Amazon Security Flaws Led to My Epic Hacking," Wired, August 6, 2012.
  - Mat Honan, "How I Resurrected My Digital Life After an Epic Hacking," Wired, August 17, 2012.
  - Listen to "Voyage into Pizzagate," *Reply All* (warning: strong language and content about sexual abuse)

Week 13 (April 22, 24): Civil War / Sustainability and ethics
- Read "The Civil War" in *The American Yawp* (Due April 24)
- Possibly reading for next week--will vote in class on April 22 for topics

Week 14 (April 29, May 1): Flex-time to catch up or explore new topics (via class vote)
- Write a blog post reflecting on your semester. Did you achieve your goals? Why do you think digital history matters now? Why does antebellum war history matter now? (Due May 6)

Week 15 (May 6): Why does digital history matter to us now? Why does antebellum war history matter now?