

History 390-001: The Digital Past¹ (syllabus version 2.0, 9/7)
1:30 PM to 2:45 PM TR
Horizon Hall 2009

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Office hours: Tues/Thurs. 10:00am-11:00am; 3:00-4:00pm; Fri. 8:am-10:am, NB: office hours will be via Zoom this semester. If you can't make the office hours posted, send me a message and I'll try my hardest to find a mutually convenient time.

Communication policy: E-mail is the best way to get in contact but please allow up to 24 hours for me to respond to your message. If you have a question that isn't a personal one, ie regarding assignment requirements, class lectures, need advice right away or help troubleshooting an assignment, etc. please post them first in the course Slack channel--the chances are high that someone else will have your question and/or be able to help out. The chances are even higher that your classmates will be able to respond more quickly than I will, especially as I can't always answer emails in the evening and am less available on weekends.

ABOUT THE COURSE

This course, which satisfies the University's IT requirement, engages with history using digital methods while also teaching the fundamentals of information technology and digital information including storage, retrieval, and ethics. Students can expect to become informed digital citizens by doing research, navigating archives, and constructing arguments using a digital toolkit. Most importantly, students will be learning by doing. Using a variety of tools, including Omeka, TimelineJS, and GIS, students will learn how to create dynamic, engaging, argument-driven historical essays and projects. The skills you learn in this course, including research, analysis, problem-solving and collaboration will be useful, no matter what field you are going into.

The course meets the following learning outcomes for the Mason Core:

1. Students will understand the principles of information storage, exchange, security, and privacy and be aware of related ethical issues.

¹ This syllabus is indebted to the syllabi of Dr. Mills Kelly, Dr. Abby Mullen, Dr. Lincoln Mullen, Dr. Stephen Robertson, and Dr. Nate Sleeter.

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.

Learning Outcomes: In addition to the above learning outcomes, by the end of this course, I expect that we will have met the following outcomes:

- You will improve your digital literacy. Over the course of the semester not only will we peek under the hood of many digital projects, we will come to understand digital infrastructure and concepts, including information ethics, storage, and organization.
- You will learn historical analysis and make arguments using primary and secondary sources. You will draw on the tools and methods we are learning to make argument-driven, multimedia historical essays.
- You will become a better researcher, evaluator of information, and digital citizen.
- Another learning outcome TBD as a class

My goals for this course: This course is based on the principles of active learning. We will learn by doing, practicing, making, experimenting, and sometimes breaking and/or failing. It is not expected that you will become experts, but it is expected that you will be more comfortable with information and communication technologies by doing lots of hands-on work. This course will also be highly collaborative. Not only will you be doing a final group project and peer review, we'll also be working together on just about everything we do in this course. Learning how to collaborate is a critical skill that you will need no matter what you do next. Behind every brilliant hip-hop album, is a team of mixers, producers, agents, reps, friends, significant others, tour managers, etc.; the same goes for projects, websites, and digital history projects.

We will also learn about history by doing history. While my goal isn't to make you into a professional historian, my goal is to help you gain some expertise--over the course of the semester, we'll talk about what expertise means.

Required Purchases/Reading: One of the things we will be focusing on for this course is open access software and resources. You do not need to buy a textbook for this course; all readings will be posted on Blackboard. You will need to purchase a Reclaim

Hosting account here for use with many of your course assignments. Accounts are approximately \$30 : <https://reclaimhosting.com/>

COURSE POLICIES

Participation: We'll be doing a lot of active learning in this course so attendance and active engagement is one of the cornerstones of your success in this course. There's simply a lot of material you will miss if you don't attend class and participate on the Slack channel. And because the course is so hands-on, students who don't engage, simply don't do as well in the course. If for some reason you won't be able to attend the class and/or are unable to participate, please make arrangements with a classmate to make-up and get info on what you have missed. I want to encourage you to get in contact with me ASAP if you are struggling with any aspect of the course or in general--I'm happy to help you get back on track and I can put you in touch with the appropriate resources as necessary.

Attendance Policy: You can miss up to three classes without it adversely affecting your participation grade. Past three absences that aren't approved or for documentable reasons like illness, 5 percent of your participation grade will be deducted. I understand that unforeseen events may impact attendance, so please get in touch with me if you think you may miss class.

Use of Electronic Devices: Since this is a digital history course that incorporates IT, we'll be doing some in-class work and group exercises. You are highly encouraged (but not required) to bring your laptops. Our classroom will be interactive and collaborative so please don't engage in activities unrelated to the class (email, chat, youtube, social media, Assassin's Creed, Skyrim, Cyberpunk 2077, tik-tok, etc.). Any disruptions or lack of inattention may affect your participation grade.

Important Dates:

Last Day to Drop with 100% tuition refund for Full Semester	September 7
Drop period begins with 50% tuition refund for Full Semester	September 8
Final Drop Deadline with 50% tuition refund for Full Semester	September 14
Last day Third Party Billing Authorizations accepted	September 14
Unrestricted Withdrawal Period for Full Semester: 100% Tuition Liability	September 15 - September 27
Fall Break (Classes do not meet)	October 11

Thanksgiving Recess, university closed	November 24 - November 28
Last day of classes	December 4
Reading Days	December 6 - December 7

Safe Return to Campus

- All students taking courses with a face-to-face component are required to follow the university's public health and safety precautions and procedures outlined on the university Safe Return to Campus webpage (<https://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus>). Similarly, all students in face-to-face and hybrid courses must also complete the Mason COVID Health Check daily, seven days a week. The COVID Health Check system uses a color code system and students will receive either a Green, Yellow, or Red email response. Only students who receive a "green" notification are permitted to attend courses with a face-to-face component. If you suspect that you are sick or have been directed to self-isolate, please quarantine or get testing. Faculty are allowed to ask you to show them that you have received a Green email and are thereby permitted to be in class.
- Students are required to follow Mason's current policy about facemask-wearing. As of August 11, 2021, all community members are required to wear a facemask in all indoor settings, including classrooms. An appropriate facemask must cover your nose and mouth at all times in our classroom. If this policy changes, you will be informed; however, students who prefer to wear masks either temporarily or consistently will always be welcome in the classroom.
- If the campus closes, or if a class meeting needs to be canceled or adjusted due to weather or other concern, students should check Blackboard [or other instruction as appropriate] for updates on how to continue learning and for information about any changes to events or assignments.

Academic Integrity: Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Please familiarize yourself with this [here](#). We will be discussing this in depth when we cover ethics and research.

Disability Accommodations: Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is

located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email:ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474

Diversity and Inclusion: Diversity and Inclusion is one of George Mason's core values and something I take very, very seriously in my classroom. I expect us to be respectful and understanding of each other, particularly when discussing issues of race, class, gender, identity, and sexuality. Let's work together to make sure everyone feels included and have productive and useful conversations about sometimes difficult topics.

Mental Health: It's been a difficult couple of years for all of us and this semester is likely to have more uncertainty. Let's be a resource for one another. I've listed my course policies below, but I understand that things may shift for you and for me (including this syllabus). If you feel you are having issues with anything in the course, get in touch with me ASAP. I'm your best resource--both to help you get back on track as well as provide you with further resources.

If you are experiencing feelings of anxiety, panic, depression, sadness during the semester, Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services Offices (703-993-2380) provides a range of resources to assist and support you. Students can call (703-993-2831) or walk-in during open hours to schedule an appointment to talk with a healthcare provider. If you or someone you know experiences a mental health crisis or emergency, seek help immediately. Call 911 for local emergency services, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255), or text the Crisis Text Line (741-741) anytime. I am also available to speak with you about stresses related to your work in my course.

Privacy: Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly reflections	10%/100 pts
Tool Assignments (5)	15%/150 pts
Blog Posts (3)	15%/150 pts
Participation/Discussion board	15%/150

Essay proposal	10%/100
Interactive Essay	15%/150
Group Project	20%/200

Course grading: This course is graded on a A-F scale.

A = 90 or above

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = 0-59

Rubrics will be provided with explanations of grading for each assignment in advance of the assignment.

Late policy: For the weekly reflections and participation assignments, I give two, no-questions asked passes at your discretion. For the blog posts, tool assignments, and essay proposal, I give one, no-questions asked extension at your own discretion. Use these wisely. I deduct 5% for every day late unless you have an authorized excuse and/or have consulted with me first.

COURSE SCHEDULE

* unless otherwise specified, all assignments are due on the Sunday of the week they are listed at midnight.

Week One (8/23-28) Introduction to Class

Week Two (8/30-9/4) Introduction to Digital History

Tuesday, 8/31

CERN, A Short History of the Web

<https://home.cern/science/computing/birth-web/short-history-web>

Romein, et al, "State of the Field: Digital History,"

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1468-229X.12969>

Thursday, 9/2

Roy Rosenzweig and Dan Cohen, Digital History: A Guide to Exploring and Preserving the Past

<https://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/introduction/>

<https://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/exploring/>

Task for the week: Set up a reclaim hosting account

Abby Mullen, Setting up your website

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWkEuyoZuw>

Week Three (9/6-9/12) Research and Evaluation

Tuesday, 9/7: Doing effective research

Google, "How Search Works" <https://www.google.com/search/howsearchworks/>

"How to Research History Online" (Podcast)

<https://doinghistorypodcast.com/how-to-research-history-online/>

(Optional) "Felines React to Men with Beards"

<http://www.doctordeluca.com/Library/Giggles/FelineRxnBeards.htm>

Thursday, 9/9: Disinformation

"Facebook's most viewed article in early 2021 raised doubt about Covid vaccine."

<https://www.npr.org/2021/08/21/1030038616/facebooks-most-viewed-article-in-early-2021-raised-doubt-about-covid-vaccine>

Burkhardt, Joanna M. "History of Fake News." *Library Technology Reports* 53, no. 8 (2017): 5-9.

Task for the Week: Start thinking about first blog, see examples here:

<https://dancohen.org/blog/>

<https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2021/keeping-it-real-historians-in-the-deepfake-era>

<https://briancroxall.net/2021/06/04/talking-myself-through-word-embeddings-part-1/>

Week Four (9/13-9/19) Ethics and Privacy

Tuesday 9/14 Ethics:

Mittelstadt, Brent Daniel, Patrick Allo, Mariarosaria Taddeo, Sandra Wachter, and Luciano Floridi. "The Ethics of Algorithms: Mapping the Debate." *Big Data & Society* 3, no. 2 (2016) (Perusall)

Hannes Grasseger & Michael Krogerus, "The Data that Turned the World Upside Down: How Cambridge Analytica used your facebook data...."

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/mg9vvn/how-our-likes-helped-trump-win>

Thursday, 9/16 Privacy

Ian Bogost, "Welcome to the Age of Privacy Nihilism,"

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/08/the-age-of-privacy-nihilism-is-here/568198/>

Mat Honan, "How Apple and Amazon Security Flaws Led to My Epic Hacking,"

<https://www.wired.com/2012/08/apple-amazon-mat-honan-hacking/>

(Optional) The LinkedIn Incident (Podcast)

<https://darknetdiaries.com/episode/86/>

Week Five (9/20-9/26) Metadata and Open Source

Tuesday, 9/21

Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past," *Journal of American History* 93, 1 (June 2006): 117-46. (Perusall)

"What is Open Source Software?"

<https://opensource.com/resources/what-open-source>

(Optional) "How Linux has Changed the Business Landscape,"
<https://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-linux-has-changed-the-business-landscape-its-more-than-you-think/>

(Optional) Hiten Shaw, "How Github Democratized Coding,"
<https://nira.com/github-history/>

Thursday, 9/23, Metadata

"Documentation and Metadata for Quantitative History,"
<https://port.sas.ac.uk/mod/book/tool/print/index.php?id=1253>

Metadata Exercise due

Week Six (9/27-10/3) Creating a Project

Tuesday, 9/28

Paul Ford, "What is Code?"
<https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2015-paul-ford-what-is-code/>

Miriam Posner, "How did they Make That?"
<https://miriamposner.com/blog/how-did-they-make-that/#gallery>

Thursday, 9/30

Sharon Leon and Sheila Brennan, Building Histories of the National Mall: A Guide to Creating Public History Project:
<http://mallhistory.org/Guide/index.html>

Blog Post #1 Due

Week Seven (10/4-10/10) Timelines

Tuesday, 10/7

Daniel Rosenberg, "The Trouble With Timelines,"
<https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/13/rosenberg1.php>

<https://histography.io/>

TimelineJS exercise due

Week Eight (10/11-10/17) Visualizations

Thursday, 10/14

Matt Daniels, "The Largest Vocabulary in Hip Hop"

<https://pudding.cool/projects/vocabulary/>

John Theibault, "Visualizations and Historical Arguments,"

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12230987.0001.001/1:8/--writing-history-in-the-digital-age?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1#8.1>

"Interactive Visualizations," The Historian's Macroscope

<http://www.themacroscope.org/1.0/interactive-visualizations/>

Essay Proposal due

Week Nine (10/18-10/24) Text Analysis

Tuesday, 10/19

Lara Putnam, "The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows they Cast," The American Historical Review, Volume 121, Issue 2 (Perusall)

Stefan Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell, "Text Analysis and Visualization: Making Meaning Count," in A New Companion to the Digital Humanities (Perusall)

Thursday, 10/21

Cameron Blevins, "Topic Modeling Martha Ballard's Diary,"

<http://www.cameronblevins.org/posts/topic-modeling-martha-ballards-diary/>

S. C. Healy, "Using Voyant: Text Analysis Meets Historical Research,"

<https://dhlurker.wordpress.com/2015/08/09/using-voyant-text-analysis-meets-historical-research/>

Voyant Exercise due

Week Ten (10/25-11/7) Maps

Tuesday, 10/26

Richard White, "What is Spatial History,"

<http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29>

Sarah Bond, "Mapping Racism and Assessing the Success of the Digital Humanities,"

<https://sarahemilybond.com/2017/10/20/mapping-racism-and-assessing-the-success-of-the-digital-humanities/>

Thursday, 10/28

DECIMA

<https://decima-map.net/>

Digital Harlem

<http://digitalharlem.org/>

Cameron Blevins, "On Paper Trails,"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHDxCLcrrqY>

StoryMap exercise due

Midterm evaluation due

Week Eleven (11/8-11/14) Quantification

Tuesday, 11/9

Marc Parry, "Quantitative History Makes a Comeback,"

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/quantitative-history-makes-a-comeback/>

Thursday, 11/11

Laite, Julia. "The Emmet's Inch: Small History in a Digital age." *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 4 (2020): 963-989.

<https://www.slavevoyages.org/>

Blog Post #2 due

Week Twelve (11/15-11/21) Databases

Tuesday, 11/16

Miriam Posner, "Humanities Data: A Necessary Contradiction,"

<https://miriamposner.com/blog/humanities-data-a-necessary-contradiction/>

Thursday, 11/18

Frederick W. Gibbs, "New Forms of History: Critiquing Data and Its Representations," *The American Historian*

<https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2016/february/new-forms-of-history-critiquing-data-and-its-representations/>

Due: Database ExerciseWeek Thirteen (11/22-11/28) Argumentation**Tuesday, 11/23**

Stephen Robertson and Lincoln Mullen "Digital History and Argument" (White Paper) <https://rrchnm.org/argument-white-paper/>

Blog Post #3 dueWeek Fourteen (11/29-12/5) Sustainability and Digital Citizenship

"Lessons on Digital Citizenship from Charlie Brown"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvDGGceA-0A>

Miriam Posner, "What's Next: The Radical, Unrealized Potential of Digital Humanities,"

<https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled/section/a22aca14-0eb0-4cc6-a622-6fee9428a357>

Group Project due**Final essay due**