

HIST 390-002: The Digital Past

Tuesday-Thursday 3:00-4:15pm

East Building room 122

Professor Daniel Howlett (he/him)

Contact:

Office Hours: 1:30-2:30pm Tuesday-Thursday in the History Department's TA/Adjunct suite on the third floor of Horizon Hall. It can be tricky to find so please send a message if you plan to come so I can keep an eye out for you. If you cannot make these times, please reach out to schedule office hours over Zoom or immediately following class.

Email: dhowlett@gmu.edu or message in the class Slack. Please allow up to 24 hours for me to respond on weekdays or 48 hours on weekends. Send a follow up message if you do not hear from me within that window.

Course Description:

This course will introduce students to the field and methodologies of digital history through the history of the Salem Witch Trials. The course's content will cover the causes of this infamous event to learn how the accusations of witchcraft spread and resulted in the executions of 19 people in seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Students will learn a variety of free and open-source digital tools for network analysis, online exhibits, podcasting, digital storytelling, and more. The digital component will focus on how these tools convey historical information and offer new insights into the past. Students will select one of these methods for a final class project that combines historical research and digital skills. The class will also cover topics like algorithmic bias, bad actors and misinformation on Reddit, and historical research in a digital age.

This course fulfills the Mason Core IT requirement and meets 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.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will learn the history of the Salem Witch Trials to understand the causes and effects of the event, as well as how the specter of Salem still resonates today.

- Students will learn about and experiment with a variety of free digital tools to study the past. Students will learn the benefits and challenges of these tools to think critically implementing them in research projects.
- Students will learn how to do research with digital tools and the range of possibilities that the digital realm offers to explore, study, and present history and historical research.
- Students will learn to think broadly about the ethics, labor, and accessibility of digital spaces within and outside of the classroom.

Required Books:

There are no required textbooks to purchase for this class. All weekly readings will either be open access, available through Mason libraries, or shared on Blackboard.

Grading:

Participation*: 15%

5 DH Assignments: 15%

Options: February 2, 9, 16, 23; March 2, 9, and 30

6 Reading Responses: 15%

Options: January 31; February 7, 14, 21, 28; March 7, 21, 28; April 4, 6, 11

Project Proposal due March 30th: 10%

Project Workplan due March 30th: 5%

Final Project due May 16th: 40%

*Participation will be considered broadly. Not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of large groups of people, such as a 40+ person class. In-class participation is one form of participation, but multiple avenues are available to students to be engaged in the intellectual community of the class. Attendance, small and large group discussion, Slack discussions, class activities, and office hours are all viable ways to show participation. At the end of the semester, your final project response will include a section asking you to describe your participation over the semester to allow you to advocate for yourself.

Attendance:

You are expected to attend each class. While attendance is not directly listed in the grading categories, attendance is a crucial part of participating in class. This course is also built around training students in digital technologies with in-class instruction and demonstration of software that will be a part of your final project and other assignments. If you are absent from class without advanced notice of a reasonable excuse, Professor Howlett is not obligated to repeat course material just for you, and your classmates are not obligated to forego their own work to catch you up.

Professor Howlett will endeavor to be as understanding about absences as possible, however, you registered for this class with the awareness of the dates and times that it meets so please avoid scheduling conflicts.

Slack:

The class Slack is Salem390. A link to join will be shared with students prior to the start of classes. Students are expected to adhere to the communication guidelines posted in #general to keep Slack a respectful and productive space. This will be the place to share many of your homework assignments so it will be important that you are able to access it.

Technology:

This is a digital course, so students will be expected to attend class with an Internet connected device each week, preferably a laptop. Students may use these devices to take notes during lecture portions of the course, however, Professor Howlett reserves the right to ask you to put away devices that are not pre-approved by Disability Services for accommodations if students cease paying attention or distract others.

COVID Addendum:

Students are asked to follow the GMU Safe Return to Campus guidelines and any university-wide changes to those policies over the semester. See www.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus for details. Please stay home if you are sick and test if you experience COVID-19 symptoms during the semester. **Do not attend class if you have a positive test result.** The university does not enforce a mask mandate but you are encouraged to maintain safe practices including masking and social distancing.

Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to follow the GMU Honor Code found here: oai.gmu.edu/full-honor-code-document/. Cheating and plagiarism, including but not limited to submitting work done by another student, copying or stealing ideas without proper citation or attribution, and using AI generated responses to complete assignments are all strictly forbidden and will result in a failing grade for the assignment or class.

Non-Discrimination Policy:

George Mason University enforces a non-discrimination policy to provide “equal opportunity and an educational and work environment free from any discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, military status (including veteran status), sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, pregnancy status or genetic information.” For more information see universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/non-discrimination-policy.

This class will cover some topics that include historical and contemporary forms of discrimination. In order to maintain an inclusive class setting, students are expected to treat these topics respectfully and acknowledge that fellow students in the class may have lived experiences impacted by these forms of discrimination.

Disability Accommodations:

Disability Services at GMU is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please visit www.ds.gmu.edu or call (703) 993-2474 for information about the DS registration process.

Other Services:

Student Support and Advocacy Center: 703-993-3686 <https://ssac.gmu.edu>

Counseling and Psychological Services Offices: 703-993-2380 www.caps.gmu.edu

Crisis Support: 703-993-2380 <https://caps.gmu.edu/crisis-consultation/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255

Mason Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Crisis Line: 703-380-1434

The Steve Fund (for students of color): Text STEVE to 741741

Trans Lifeline (for the trans community): 877-565-8860

The Trevor Project's TrevorLifeline (for LGBTQ+ students): 866-488-7386

Veterans Crisis Line (for Veterans): 800-273-8255, Press 1

Title IX Office: 703-993-8730 titleix@gmu.edu diversity.gmu.edu/equity-access-services/title-ix

GMU Police and Public Safety: 703-993-2810 <https://police.gmu.edu/>

Troubleshooting:

We will be trying out new software over this semester and you are likely to have moments of frustration or difficulty with at least one, if not several, components. Please follow these steps to work through the issue:

1. **Read the documentation**
 - a. **Every software and technology discussed in class has some sort of documentation, or user manual, associated with it. Read the relevant sections to see if it solves your issue.**
2. **Search a forum**
 - a. **There are online forums for technical difficulties, and there should be a specific one for just about all the tools used in class. The chances are that someone else has run into this issue and asked about it somewhere on the Internet.**
 - b. **You will most likely receive an error message related to the problem you run into, and a search for “[Software/tool name][Error Message]” may lead to solutions**

- 3. Post in the #tech-help channel in Slack**
 - a. If you run into an issue, other students will likely encounter it too. You can collaborate with other members of the class to solve it.**
 - b. This is where Professor Howlett will expect to see your effort to resolve a technical difficulty, explain what you have tried, and offer assistance.**

Course Schedule

Week 1

Tuesday, January 24th Intro to Class and Salem

- Before Class:
 - Fill out Google Survey
 - Join Slack
- In Class:
 - Introduction & Syllabus
 - Salem Mythbusting

Thursday, January 26th Intro to Digital History/Humanities (DH)

- Before Class
 - Visit <https://whatisdigitalhumanities.com/> and pick a definition that you find interesting and share it in Slack. Note why that definition appealed to you.
 - Read “Project Introduction” for *Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive and Transcription Project* <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/intro.html>
 - Read “Introduction” for *Salem Witchcraft Papers* <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/swp-intro.html>
- In Class
 - Writing a class definition of DH
 - History on the Web
 - Database Scavenger Hunt
- After Class
 - Get used to the types of primary sources we'll be using by reading Dorothy Good's case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n62.html>

Week 2

Tuesday, January 31st Witchcraft before 1692: What is a witch?

- Before Class
 - Read Chapter 7 “Germany- “The Mother of the Witches” by Johannes Dillinger pages 94-112 and Chapter 11 “Witch Hunts in Britain” by James Sharpe pages 145-159 in *The Routledge History of Witchcraft*
 - **Reading Response**
- In Class
 - Witch Hunt game
 - Pre-Salem Witch Hunts

Thursday, February 2nd Online Exhibits

- Before Class
 - Create an Omeka.net account
 - <https://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/copyright/index.php.html>
 - Read <http://programminghistorian.org/en/lessons/up-and-running-with-omeka>
- In Class

- Online Exhibits
- Basics of Omeka
- After Class
 - **DH Assignment:** Post a 1 paragraph critique of this exhibit in Slack:
<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-misogyny-of-witchcraft/index>

Week 3

Tuesday, February 7th Puritan Massachusetts before 1692

- Before Class
 - Read Chapter 3 “Almost Inconceivable Foes: Anglo-American Women and Indian War” from *The Virtuous and Violent Women of Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts*
 - **Reading Response**
- In Class
 - Puritan Massachusetts 101
 - The Name of War
 - Essex County Court Records

Thursday, February 9th Data and Datasets

- Before Class:
 - Read *Exploring Big Historical Data: The Historian’s Macroscope* by Shawn Graham, Ian Milligan, and Scott Weingart, Chapter 1 “The Joys of Big Data for Historians” pg 1-35, posted on BlackBoard
 - Look at the data visualizations on Richard Latner’s site
<http://www2.tulane.edu/~salem/index.html>
- In Class:
 - Data and the Humanities
 - Making a dataset with Will Inventories
- After Class:
 - **DH Assignment:** Finish your datasets and share in Slack. Write 1 paragraph about how this data may be useful and what considerations you needed to make when making tidy data. What surprised you while making the dataset?

Week 4

Tuesday, February 14th Salem Village Factionalization

- Before Class
 - Read *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum Chapter 2 “In Quest of Community, 1639-1687” pgs 37-59 and Chapter 5 “Two Families: The Porters and the Putnam” pgs 112-132
 - **Reading Response**
- During Class
 - Salem Village Church Politics 1672-1692
 - The Putnam and Porter families

Thursday, February 16th Networks

- Before Class
 - Read “Demystifying Networks, Parts I&2” by Scott B. Weingart, *Journal of Digital Humanities* <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-1/demystifying-networks-by-scott-weingart/>
 - Read *The Network Turn: Changing Perspectives in the Humanities* by Ruth Ahnert, Sebastian E. Ahnert, Catherine Nicole Coleman, and Scott B. Weingart Chapter 3 “Culture is Data” pgs 43-56.
- During Class
 - Edges, Nodes, and Spaghetti Monsters
 - Church Records Edge List
- After Class
 - **DH Assignment:** Finish making the Edge List. Post in Slack a paragraph about what you learned from making the Edge List, what was challenging about it, and any other thoughts you have about networks from this assignment.

Week 5 Witchcraft in Salem

Tuesday, February 21st The First Accusations

- Before Class
 - Read Chapter 4 “An Incomplete Transformation: A Tawny Puritan” in *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* by Elaine Breslaw
 - Read Tituba’s case file <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n125.html>
 - **Reading Response**
- During Class
 - The first accusations and examinations
 - The Goodwin Children

Thursday, February 23rd Text Analysis

- Before Class
 - Read “Using Voyant: Text Analysis meets Historical Research” by dhlurker <https://dhlurker.wordpress.com/2015/08/09/using-voyant-text-analysis-meets-historical-research/>
 - Read “Topic Modeling Martha Ballard’s Diary” by Cameron Blevins <http://www.cameronblevins.org/posts/topic-modeling-martha-ballards-diary/>
- During Class
 - Texts Analysis and Visualizations
 - Voyant-Tools
- After Class

- **DH Assignment:** Keep playing with Voyant and different case files (or several at once). Share one of the visualizations you make in Slack and tell us why its interesting. What does it tell us that reading the text itself does not?

Week 6

Tuesday, February 28 Gospel Women to Rev. George Burroughs

- Before Class
 - Read Chapter 1 “Women’s Sinful Natures and Men’s Natural Sins” in *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* by Elizabeth Reis
 - Read Martha Corey’s case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n38.html>
 - Read Nehemiah Abbott Jr.’s case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n5.html>
 - **Reading Response**
- During Class
 - The Half-Way Covenant
 - March and April Accusations

Thursday, March 2nd Storytelling and Games

- Before Class
 - Read Chapter 2 “The First Wave of Digital Story Telling” pgs 18-28 and Chapter 3 “The Next Wave of Digital Storytelling Platforms” pgs 29-44 in *The New Digital Storytelling: Creating Narratives with New Media* by Bryan Alexander
 - Read the discussions in the comments (or watch the panel) for *Players Gonna Play, Play, Play, Play: History in Games, Games in History* from the r/AskHistorians 2021 Conference
https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/qbls5e/players_gonna_play_play_play_play_history_in/
 - Download Twine: <https://twinery.org/>
- During Class
 - Video Games and Storytelling
 - Twine
- After Class
 - **DH Assignment:** Where have you seen history (related to any topic) in a video game? Fact check it and share in Slack. Explain the benefits and negatives of that history’s representation in a game.

Week 7

Tuesday, March 7th The Maine Frontier

- Before Class
 - Listen to Unobsured Podcast episode Season 1 Episode 4 “The Refugees”
<https://www.grimandmild.com/unobsured> (The YouTube version include closed captioning- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfHlkpl3AoM>)

- Read Chapter 7 “Statecraft and Witchcraft, 1692” pgs 134-155 in *The New England Knight: Sir William Phips, 1651-1695* by Emerson W. Baker and John G. Reid
- **Reading Response**
- During Class
 - Rev. George Burroughs
 - The Maine Frontier

Thursday, March 9th Podcasting

- Before Class
 - Read “How to Listen to a Podcast for Class” by Abby Mullen
<http://abbymullen.org/how-to-listen-to-a-podcast-for-class/>
 - Read “Going Narrative” by Karen Given <https://transom.org/2021/going-narrative/>
 - Download Audacity: <https://www.audacityteam.org/>
- During Class
 - Podcast Deconstruction
 - Audacity
- After Class
 - Listen to Ben Franklin’s World episode 53 with Emerson Baker.
<https://benfranklinsworld.com/episode-053-emerson-w-baker-a-storm-of-witchcraft/>
 - **DH Assignment:** Record a 2-3 minute mini podcast response/critique to the episode in Audacity and post it in Slack. Does the podcast make you want to read the book? What does the podcast offer that the book doesn’t?

Week 8

Tuesday, March 21st Legal History

- Before Class
 - Read: Chapter 6 “The Tongue is a Witch” in *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* by Jane Kamensky
 - Read Bridget Bishop’s case file <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n13.html>
 - **Reading Response**
- During Class
 - Bridget Bishop
 - The Court of Oyer and Terminer

Thursday, March 23rd Tropy and Project Management

- Before Class
 - Download Tropy: <https://tropy.org/>
 - Read “Before You Begin” section of Tropy’s documentation
<https://docs.tropy.org/>
 - Read <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/projectsupport.html>

- Read <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/projectstaff.html>
- During Class
 - Project Management
 - Tropy Basics
- After Class
 - **Project Workplan**

Week 9

Tuesday, March 28th Disability & Witchcraft

- Before Class
 - Read: Chapter 3 “The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul” in *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* by Elizabeth Reis
 - Read Rebecca Nurse case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n94.html>
 - Read Sarah Wildes case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n136.html>
 - **Reading Response**
- During Class
 - July 1692
 - Rebecca Nurse

Thursday, March 30th Digital Accessibility

- Before Class
 - Read: Chapter 3 “The discriminatory impact of digital inaccessibility” pgs 50-74 in *Ensuring Digital Accessibility Through Process and Policy* by Jonathan Lazar, Daniel Goldstein, and Anne Taylor
 - Read: https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/Accessibility/Cognitive_accessibility
- During Class
 - Accessibility guidelines
 - Alt text, Captions, Screen Readers, and more!
 - Accessibility Maze
- After Class
 - **DH Assignment:** Take a look at this checklist and think about what websites you’ve visited and how barriers come up <https://www.a11yproject.com/checklist/>. Post a paragraph of your thoughts in Slack.

Week 10

Tuesday, April 4th Religion During the Trials

- Before Class
 - Read: “The Devil’s Book at Salem” by Christopher Trigg in *Early American Literature* Vol. 49 Issue 1
 - Read George Burroughs case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n22.html>
 - **Reading Response**

- During Class
 - Late summer trials and executions
 - The Return of Several Ministers
 - The King and Queen of Hell

Thursday, April 6th The Andover Phase

- Before Class
 - Read Martha Carrier case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n24.html>
 - Read Richard Carrier case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n25.html>
 - Read William Barker Sr. case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n9.html>
 - Read Mary Toothaker case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n128.html>
 - Read Mary Lacey Jr.'s case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n87.html>
 - **Reading Response**
- During Class
 - Andover accusations
 - Confessions
 - September 1692

Week 11

Tuesday, April 11th Spectral Evidence Ends and Final Trials

- Before Class
 - Read *Cases of Conscience* by Rev. Increase Mather excerpt
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N00531.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>
 - Read Elizabeth Procter's case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n106.html>
 - Read Ann Foster's case file: <https://salem.lib.virginia.edu/n59.html>
 - **Reading Response**
- During Class
 - October 1692 to May 1693
 - Elizabeth Procter

Thursday, April 13th Contemporary Writings on Salem

- Before Class
 - Read *The Wonders of the Invisible World* by Rev. Cotton Mather and *More Wonders of the Invisible World* by Robert Calef excerpts
https://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=modern_english/uvaGenText/tei/BurnNarr.xml
- During Class
 - Rev. John Hale
 - Fact Checking Exercise
- After Class
 - Share an update on your final project in Slack

Week 12

Tuesday, April 18th Reparations and Apologies

- Before Class
 - Read Chapter 7 “An Inextinguishable Flame” in *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience* by Emerson W. Baker pgs 194-228
- During Class
 - Apologies, Reparations, and Exonerations
 - Life after the Trials

Thursday, April 20th Algorithms, Bias, and Digital Ethics

- Before Class
 - Read: Chapter 2 “Searching for Black Girls” in *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* by Safiya Umoja Noble, pgs 64-109.
- During Class
 - Ethical Issues in DH
 - Race and Digital Space

Week 13

Tuesday, April 25th Salem’s Memory

- Before Class
 - Read: Chapter 9 “Witch City?” in *A Storm of Witchcraft: The Salem Trials and the American Experience* by Emerson W. Baker pgs 256-286
 - Read: “With UVA’s Help, Salem Finally Discovers Where Its Witches’ Were Executed” by Caroline Newman, January 19, 2016 in *UVA Today*
<https://news.virginia.edu/content/uvas-help-salem-finally-discovers-where-its-witches-were-executed>
- During Class

Thursday, April 27th Reddit and Social Media

- Before Class
 - Read: r/AskHistorians Subreddit rules
<https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/wiki/rules/>
 - Read: “How One of the Internet’s Biggest History Forums Deals with Holocaust Deniers” by Johannes Breit, July 20, 2018 in *Slate*
<https://slate.com/technology/2018/07/the-askhistorians-subreddit-banned-holocaust-deniers-and-facebook-should-too.html>
 - Read: “Monday Methods: American Indian Genocide Denial and how to combat it” by u/Snapshot52
https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/6kywre/monday_methods_americaniand/genocide/denial/
- During Class
 - History in the Cesspool
 - Social Media History Projects

Week 14

Tuesday, May 2nd What's next for Clio?

- Before Class
 - Read: "Scarcity of Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era" by Roy Rosenzweig
 - Share a project update in Slack
- During Class
 - Fourth Wave DH
 - Your Historical Footprint
 - In Development at CHNM

Thursday, May 4th Salem after 1692

- Before Class
 - Take the virtual tour of the Peabody Essex Museum exhibit *The Salem Witch Trials 1692* <https://www.pem.org/virtual-tours>
- During Class
 - Witch hunting after 1692
 - Salem in pop culture
 - The Monsters are due on Maple Street