HIST 390: The Digital Past[1]

Tuesday-Thursday 9:00-10:15am EST
Spring 2024
Horizon Hall Room 2017
Professor Laura Brannan Fretwell (she/her)

Contact:

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:15am-11:15am in Horizon Hall 3220*. If you cannot make these times, please reach out to schedule a separate time to meet over Zoom. (*Note Horizon Hall 3220 is the History Department's TA/Adjunct suite on the third floor of Horizon Hall. It can be tricky to find-you have to go through the kitchen- so please send me a direct message in Slack if you arrive and can't find me.)
Email: lbranna@gmu.edu or direct 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:

In this course, which satisfies the University's Information Technology and Computing (IT) requirement, students will learn how to use digital tools to study the past. This section will focus on urban histories of the modern-era in the United States and Western Europe with an emphasis on city planning and postwar issues of migration and citizenship. Students will learn the fundamentals of information technology and apply them to practical historical problems. Using a variety of digital tools for analysis and visualization, including Omeka, Tropy and various mapping technologies, students will learn how to engage with primary sources and put them into conversation with secondary sources to make historical arguments presented on the web. The course will foster collaboration skills through hosting international speakers (via Zoom in a hybrid format) and facilitate exchange between students through a series of small group digital history projects, helping students gain valuable skills of teamwork, historical thinking, and digital literacy.

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.

[1] This syllabus is indebted to the syllabi of Dr. Mills Kelly, Dr. Abby Mullen, Dr. Amanda Madden, Dr. Jessica Mack, and Dr. Greta Swain.

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.

In addition to the above outcomes, this course will meet the following learning outcomes:

1. Students will work together collaboratively and learn the function, process, and types of challenges/benefits to working on collaborative digital history projects.
2. Students will also understand how to properly use digital tools and search in digital databases for historical research. They will form a foundation of how to critique systems of data and metadata.
3. Students 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.
4. Students will be introduced to the field of digital history and digital humanities. Students will also be introduced to the methods and challenges of the digital public historian.

We will have one section that consists of five joint sessions with students from the University of Luxembourg from the course Introduction to Spatial Studies and Digital Methods for the Humanities, which fulfills the European Culture and Society requirement. Eliane Schmid, MA, is the instructor of record and is a PhD student at the University of Luxembourg's Centre for Contemporary and Digital History. Eliane's PhD project, centering on the development of public parks and playgrounds during the Postwar period (1945-1973), combines history of public urban green spaces (PUGS) and GIS (Geographic Information Systems). We will have other international guest speakers join us, such as Dr. Tugce Karatas and Dr. Antia Lucchesi from the University of Luxembourg.

Course Policies:

General Policies

- The instructor reserves the right to modify the course schedule or assignments as the course progresses, and this syllabus may be updated online as necessary, and in response to the classes' needs. The online version of this syllabus is the only authoritative version:

https://laurabrannanfretwell.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/DH-390-04-GMU-2024.pdf.

- See the George Mason University catalog for general GMU course policies.

Communication

This course will primarily use a platform called Slack for class communication. While I welcome all questions on class projects and assignments, it is my hope that Slack will be a useful tool for students to communicate with and solicit advice from each other as well. For questions about assignments, the course schedule or resources, use the #general channel. To discuss technical problems and offer help and suggestions to each other, use the #tech-help channel. I expect most discussions to take place in these public channels. Questions about grades or problems of a personal nature should be addressed in a private email, or discussed with me during office hours.

It is also very important to note that I DON'T USE BLACKBOARD. Why is that, you might ask? I have two reasons. The first is that BB imposes a style of pedagogy on professors that makes sense to BB's software developers but not to me. Second, when you graduate from Mason, you will never, ever use BB again unless you become a teacher or someone who uses one of BB's point of sale systems. By contrast, you might just find yourself using Slack (or BitBucket, Trello, or any of the other similar platforms out there). The one thing Slack can't do that BB can is provide an online gradebook. If you want to know what your grade is at any point in the course, you can ask me and I'll tell you within 24 hours.

Technology

This is a class about using digital technology, and thus requires the use of a computer and other online tools. All assignments in this course will be submitted electronically. During class, please use your devices for course work and class communication only. Do not use your devices for texting, checking email, browsing social media or handling personal affairs. One of the goals of this course is to learn how to be respectful producers and consumers of digital content, and the way we utilize technology in the classroom is part of that.

Late Work

Due to the condensed nature of this class, we will be moving through materials and assignments at a rapid pace. It is therefore imperative that you keep on top of the readings and turn in assignments on time. In that vein, no unexcused late work will be

accepted. If extenuating circumstances arise, please let me know via email. Any alternate arrangements must be agreed upon by the instructor and student before an assignment is due.

Medical and Other Excuses: Every semester someone is forced to miss a due date for an assignment as the result of an illness or due to a personal or family emergency. This is especially true now due to Covid-19. If you are sick and are falling behind, just let me know and we'll work out a catch-up schedule. If you miss a required due date for an assignment, I'll eventually need some documentation – note from a doctor, etc. First, though, get well. Then worry about the documentation.

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 especially if you are feeling minor medical symptoms such as a cold.

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.

George Mason University has an Honor Code, oai.gmu.edu/full-honor-code-document/, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Office for Academic Integrity.

Unless otherwise specified you should work on your own assignments. When you rely on someone else's work, you should give full credit in the proper form.
Plagiarism consists of presenting the writing, research, or analysis of others as one's own, and is not acceptable in any form. Any text, information, analysis, ideas, or opinions from someone else that are presented in your own work—whether paraphrased or copied verbatim—must be properly attributed to its author and source and cited in a footnote, endnote, or bibliography. Direct quotes must be inside quotation marks or offset as a block quote. Paraphrased text must have been substantially altered

in word choice, order, and sentence structure. When in doubt, please ask for guidance and clarification. Any instance of plagiarism will result in, at minimum, the student receiving a grade of 0 on the assignment, and the student will not be given the opportunity to redo the assignment.

Our in-class conduct and discussion will also be guided by the principles of academic integrity. In order to learn, we must be open to the views of people different from ourselves. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility toward others who have different ideas, perspectives, and traditions than your own. Please refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind. See the George Mason University statement on diversity: https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/purpose-and-mission/mason-diversity-statement/.

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/

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 and set up your own domain name account, which is a total $30: https://reclaimhosting.com/.

Assignments and Assessments:

Participation: This includes 1) attendance and active participation in class discussions and exercises, 2) posting in Slack #reading channel 3 times over the course of the semester, and 3) completion of digital tasks before, during, and after class. I understand not everyone is comfortable speaking up during class, so if you feel that way, let me know and we can devise a plan of participating in other informal ways such as attending office hours or posting more in the #reading channel. 5% of the participation grade is posting 3 times in slack (a minimum of 5 sentences) before 3 class periods about the readings. You can describe what you learned from the assigned texts and/or use the texts to answer the question posed for each day in the syllabus. You must post that day by 8am. The digital tasks are designed to help you either set up, try out, and practice a new technology that builds towards developing a particular digital skill, and will only be graded based on completion. Attendance is mandatory at every class session, unless you have a family or medical emergency. Please contact me in advance via email if you must be absent. Because the class is so hands-on and practical, you are expected to catch up on the content learned during the class session you missed and expected to catch up on the digital tasks required before the class on your own time. (20%)

WordPress: You will be expected to establish a domain via ReclaimHosting and execute a few technical tasks such as install a WordPress website and post a number of short blog posts. You must post these updates in the beginning of the semester in the #WordPress Slack channel. Blog posts should be written with the same attention to detail (spelling, syntax, punctuation) that you would use in a paper, but can be more casual in tone and approach (10% Total).

Digital History Assignments: You will publish two digital history assignments as blog posts, one due February 27 and the second due April 11. I will circulate technical details about those assignments closer to the due dates, but the written portion should be at

least 500 words each that describe your process for creating products using those tools, published in WordPress. (20% Total)

Omeka S group project with University of Luxembourg students: This is included in class time built around working together in a hybrid format zooming in with students, but will also require tasks both before and after class. This is all based on completion but includes uploading a total of 4 items, 1 item set, adding spatial information to an item, and writing one blog post about your experience and what you learned about Omeka S by April 2nd by midnight (2-3 paragraphs). (15% total)

Final Project Research Project: More details will be provided later in the semester, but you will research and conduct a written project about a specific historical place or event using Omeka S. (35% Total - 5% proposal due April 18, 30% final product due May 2 at 11:59 EST).

Important Dates
January 23 – Last day to add classes
January 30 – Last day to drop classes without penalty
February 22 – First Digital History Assignment due by midnight (post link in Slack)
April 11 – Second Digital History Assignment due by midnight (post link in Slack)
April 18 - Final Project Proposal due by midnight (post link in Slack)
April 25 - Last day of class.
May 2 – Final project due May 2 at 11:59PM EST. Projects submitted after this deadline without a documented medical (or similarly severe) excuse will suffer a substantial grade penalty. No exceptions.

Section 1: Introduction to Digital History and Historical Research on the Web

Week 1: Introduction to Digital History

Tuesday January 16 - Class Canceled due to University Delay from Inclement Weather

Thursday January 18 - Class Introduction; What is Digital History?

Task before class: Fill out class GoogleForm Survey - https://forms.gle/X3HDXJBmTHkqENzn9
Task before class: Set up Slack account at thedigitalpast2024.slack.com and introduce yourself in #general channel. Here is a link of how to join a workspace - https://slack.com/help/articles/212675257-Join-a-Slack-workspace.

Read: Jason Heppler's blog post "Defining Digital Humanities" https://jasonheppler.org/2013/01/08/defining-digital-humanities/

Visit: https://whatisdigitalhumanities.com/ and select a definition that you find interesting and be ready to share in class why that definition appealed to you.

Week 2: How the Internet Works and its Ethics

Tuesday January 23 - How does the internet work? How is it structured?

Read: CERN, A Short History of the Web https://home.cern/science/computing/birth-web/short-history-web

Watch: "Hypertext Pioneers"

Task before class: Go to https://www.reclaimhosting.com/, buy your domain ($30 student plan). Watch this video from Professor Abigail Mullen on how to set up your site on Reclaim Hosting and WordPress site- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWkEuyoZuwk. Post the link to your wordpress website in the #WordPress Slack channel.

In-class: Walk through backend of WordPress and how to create a blog post.

Thursday January 25 - Search Engines: How do they work and what are its ethics?

Watch: Cathy O'Neill, The Truth About Algorithms, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heQzqX35c9A

Read: Safiya Umoja Noble, Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism, Introduction (pp. 1-14), https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.mutex.gmu.edu/lib/gmu/reader.action?docID=4834260&ppg=20

Task before class: Choose a theme for your WordPress site. Publish a draft blog post introducing yourself and post it in the #WordPress Slack channel before class.

In-class exercise: Google searches

Week 3: Historical Research: Between the Analog and the Digital

Tuesday January 30 - Analog History: What is a primary source and secondary source?

Read: Ian Milligan, The Transformation of Historical Research in the Digital Age, https://www.cambridge.org/core/elements/transformation-of-historical-research-in-the-digital-age/30DFBEAA3B753370946B7A98045CFEF4

Watch: Watch: Using the Library Catalog, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldyWYA-qH_I
Task before class: Set up a Zotero Account
In-Class exercise: Saving Zotero articles

Thursday February 1 - How do we find sources online? What are the implications to using search engines?

Read: Roy Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era” American Historical Review, https://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/links/pdf/introduction/0.6b.pdf
Watch: Using the Library’s Journal Databases, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzsU_SVGKv4
Task before class: Try searching for a journal in the Library’s database that sounds interesting to you, and try saving it via Zotero.

Week 4: Using Technology to Manage Digital Sources and Historical Data

Tuesday February 6 - How does digital technology help historical research?

Read: Tropy Documentation. What is Tropy? https://docs.tropy.org/, Tropy Basics https://docs.tropy.org/before-you-begin/before-you-begin
Watch: Getting Started in Tropy, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqTkI49JUDA
Task before class: Download Tropy, https://tropy.org/.
In-Class exercise: Walk through Tropy, Introduction to Metadata

Task before class: Search and then submit a screenshot of two primary sources you found online, upload them to Tropy, and fill out at least four fields of metadata for each source.

Thursday February 8 - What are some of the ethical issues involved in using and managing data? What about historical data?
Read: 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
Watch: TBD

Week 5: AI and ChatGPT

Tuesday February 13: AI and its Ethics
Read: TBD

Thursday February 15: ChatGPT: What are the pros and cons to Artificial Intelligence technologies such as ChatGPT?
Read: From Punch Cards to ChatGPT, https://towardsdatascience.com/from-punch-cards-to-chatgpt-42c2a09ac01a
Task before class: Create a ChatGPT account, https://chat.openai.com/auth/login
In-class Guest Lecture: Eliane Schmid ChatGPT

Week 6: Digital Public History: Open Source

Tuesday February 20: What is digital public history? How can digital tools be used to engage more public audiences with history?
Read: Roy Rosenzweig "Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past," *The Journal of American History* (2006) https://www.jstor.org/stable/4486062?seq=4.
"Crowdsourcing Digital Public History" https://www.oah.org/tah/extras/crowdsourcing-digital-public-history/

Section 2: Omeka S and Spatial History with University of Luxembourg students
(hybrid format - we still meet in person but Zoom in with Luxembourg students)

Thursday February 22: Intro to University of Luxembourg students; Making Data out of Historical information and Omeka S
Task after class: Log into the Omeka S class website
*First Digital History Assignment due by midnight

Week 7: Metadata and Omeka S

Tuesday February 27: What is metadata?
Watch: What is metadata and why does it matter?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZWg0ClQkYQ
Task before class: review 2 Omeka S websites and be ready to share them in class

Thursday February 29: Guest Speaker Tugce Karatas: Making Data out of Sources

Read: Preserving your data
https://programminghistorian.org/en/lessons/preserving-your-research-data
Task after class: Add an item in Omeka S with 4 properties of metadata

GMU Spring Break March 4-10: Enjoy time off!

Week 8: Introduction to Spatial History and Mapping

Tuesday March 12: What is Spatial History?
Read: Richard White, "What is Spatial History,"
http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29
Task before class: Bring a photo of a place that you have a fun memory of. We will upload it together in class.
In-class exercise: reviewing place-based websites

Thursday March 14
No reading
In-class discussion about spatial history
Task after class: Add spatial information to item you brought

Week 9: Spatial History and Gender

Tuesday March 19
No reading
Task due before class: Adding spatial information to item in Omeka S.
In-class: discussion of pinned photos in Omeka S.

Thursday March 21: How do different notions of gender and sexuality shape people's experiences of space? What are different ways to digitally represent space?
Read: Women and urban public space: Research, design and policy issues (K.A. Franck and L. Paxson, PDF attachment in Slack)
In-class: Discussion different perceptions of spaces over time; gendered experiences of space

Week 10: Wrap Up Omeka S

Tuesday March 26:
Read: The Social Construction of Space and Gender (Martina Löw)
Task due before class: Find an image of a public space and add it to Omeka S and pin it.

In-class time to discuss Second Digital History assignment

Thursday March 28
No reading
In-class: Analyzing spatial items and item sets in Omeka S
Task after class: Write a blog post (2-3 paragraphs) about your experience collaborating with University of Luxembourg students and what you learned by using Omeka S (due April 2nd at 8am)

Section 3: Wrap Up Digital Public History and Visualizations

Week 11: Wrap up Spatial History and Introduce Narrative Digital History

Tuesday April 2: StoryMaps Workshop
Omeka S blog post due by midnight.
Task before class: Sign into StoryMaps GMU account, https://mygmu.maps.arcgis.com
In-class time to discuss final project

Thursday April 4: Podcasts: What are the pros and cons to the method of podcasting for digital history?
Listen: *The Green Tunnel* and/or *Intertwined* (Episode 3) and/or Spatial Delight
In-class: Explore GarageBand, SoundCloud, and/or Audacity

Week 12: Wrap Up Narrative Digital History

Tuesday April 9: What do certain narrative and place-based public digital histories reveal about the history of places?
Task before class: Download the Penn and Slavery app on your mobile device, and explore a few of the settings.

Thursday April 11: No Class - Second Digital History Assignment due by midnight (post link in Slack)
*Start to think about your final project and draft your proposal (due by April 18)

Week 13: Computational History and Visualizations

Tuesday April 16: How can you think about history in numbers? What are different ways to visualize historical arguments?

Read: TBD
Watch: David McCandless, The Beauty of Data Visualization, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Zg-C8AAIGg

Thursday April 18: Network Analysis/Visualizations

Read: TBD
*Final Project Proposal Due
Last Week for Slack Reading Posts!

Week 14 Catch up week - Work on Final Project

Tuesday April 23: Check in about Final Project
No reading
In-class: sharing final project updates, technical help for project

Thursday April 25: Last Day of Class Wrap Up

Watch: TBD
Task before class: Write a one paragraph blog in WordPress about what digital history means to you. Also include one main thing you learned this semester. Post the link in the #general Slack.

Tuesday April 30 - Reading Day

Thursday May 2nd at 11:59 EST - Final Project Due