The Digital Past
HIST 390-003

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Class Time
Monday & Wednesday, 10:30-11:45
Planetary Hall 120

Office Hours
Mon 1-2 PM, Wed 2-3 PM
Horizon Hall 3220

Class Website
https://chartweave.com/hist390spring2024

Course Overview

Welcome to HIST 390 – The Digital Past! In this course, you will learn the fundamentals of information technology within the context of a history course. This course is about how historians do history in today's digital age. Together, we will explore a variety of existing digital history projects and the digital tools used to create them. You will be doing hands-on historical research into a topic of your choice and creating your own digital history projects as you get to know and work with the programs and digital tools historians use to interrogate the past and present their findings to both academic and public audiences. In the first half of the semester, you will learn how to come up with a research question, gather historical sources, analyze them and interpret them. From there, you will learn how to present your research in visual, audial and textual narrative form and how to write and publish effectively online.

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.

Course Requirements
There are no required textbooks for this course. All weekly readings will be either open access online or accessible through the George Mason University library.

However, what you will need to purchase for this course is a domain name through Reclaim Hosting for your blog, on which you will post your assignments, projects and blog posts. Domain hosting through Reclaim Hosting is $45 for one year. Think of this as a replacement for textbook purchases. We will discuss how to go about setting this up in class.

Technology

This is a history course, but it is a *digital* history course and thus is decently tech-heavy. That's why it fulfills Mason's General Education IT Requirement! You are expected to attend class with an Internet-connected device each meeting, preferably a laptop. While some of the things we'll be doing can be done on a smartphone or tablet, many of them cannot. If you only have a phone or tablet to bring to class, that's okay; you'll just have to buddy up with a classmate for some in-class tech demonstrations. However, you will need access to a laptop or desktop computer to complete some assignments outside of class.

You are expected and encouraged to use your device (smartphone, tablet or laptop) during class. However, please stick to class materials during class. Attendance isn't just about being physically present; you also have to be engaged and not distract yourself or your peers. I reserve the right to tell you to put your device away or to discount your attendance if you really aren't paying attention. If something comes up during class and you need to take a phone call or text conversation, please take it outside; as long as you come back to class in a reasonable time frame or talk to me after class, your attendance will still be counted.

Grading

Your grade will be determined as follows:
- Digital History Projects: 60%
  - This includes: Project #1 (Wordpress), Project #2 (Zotero), Project #3 (Tropy), Project #4 (Timeline), Project #5 (Podcast) and Project #6 (Twine).
- Blog Posts: 15%
  - You will write six short blog posts over the course of the semester, published on your blog, about the weekly readings and class discussion.
- Attendance & Participation: 10%
- Final Presentation and Reflection Essay: 15%

Late Assignment Penalty: 10% off possible grade. Late assignments are only accepted up until the Last Call date directly following the assignment.

There will be one (and only one) chance for extra credit in this course. The very last day of class will be Game Day, during which your participation and correct answers on course material during the games will garner you some extra credit. No other extra credit opportunities will be available in this class.

Class Policies

Attendance & Participation

This is an in-person class that meets twice a week. I expect you to come to class. As such, you'll notice that attendance and participation make up 10% of your grade. Attendance will be taken at the end of every class meeting. However, sometimes things happen and life gets in the way. You get two 'freebies'; you can miss up to two class meetings without any documentation, excuse,

explanation or otherwise with no effect on your attendance grade. However, you are still responsible for the material we cover in class.

If you need to miss more than two days of class, then I will need an explanation and documentation. Two class meetings is an entire week of this course. Missing more than a week of the semester is a lot, but sometimes, there are legitimate reasons you might need to miss large parts of the semester. Reach out to me sooner rather than later about whatever is going on and we'll find a solution.

If you are sick, stay home. While we have all returned to campus and daily life, Covid very much still exists, as do many other communicable diseases. So, please, if you are sick, do not come to class. If you have already used your two freebies, you will need to talk to me and provide documentation if you want an excused absence. If you don't feel great but can still come to class, I encourage you to maintain safe practices such as masking and social distancing.

Participation is much harder to grade than attendance. While this course will have a lot of class discussions, not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of large groups. That's okay. Attendance is more than just showing up; it's about being engaged. So, attendance, doing the readings, asking questions in class, small and large group discussions, Slack messaging, class activities and office hours are all ways to participate in this course.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and cheating: don't do it. All of the work you turn in for this course must be completed by you. You are expected to follow the GMU Honor Code in this course. Cheating and plagiarism include but are not limited to submitting work done by someone else, copying or stealing ideas without proper credit and citation and using AI generated text in your assignments. Using ChatGPT or similar generative AI to complete course assignments is strictly forbidden. Whether written by another student, a friend, a scholar or a machine, writing that is not done by you must not be turned in under the guise of it being your writing, which all your assignments should be.

"Last Call" Dates: Late Assignments & Resubmissions

Once you've read the class schedule, you'll see two "Last Calls", one on February 28th and one on April 29th. Every assignment in this course has a due date. You can find them on both the class schedule and on the briefs for each assignment. You are expected to complete assignments by their due dates. However, just like attendance, sometimes things happen and life gets in the way. It is always better to submit something late than to not submit something at all.

Turning in an assignment after its due date incurs a 10% penalty to that assignment's grade; however, if you do need to turn something in late, you only have until the Last Call to turn in any assignments prior to that date. The final presentation and reflection can not be turned in late. Assignments turned in after the Last Call date for that assignment will not be accepted outside of extreme circumstances, special exemptions or an officially registered Incomplete.

You can also use the Last Call date to resubmit a digital history project if you received a grade you found less than satisfactory. Learning technology is iterative. It gets easier and makes more

sense the more you do it; you get better at technology the more you use it. I know that for many of you, this will be the first time you've used many of the programs we use in this course. So, if you receive a grade on a digital history project that you are less than satisfied with and you would like to try again, you can choose to resubmit. Respond to my feedback, fix any mistakes, polish up your work and you can resubmit any project by the Last Call date.

To resubmit a digital history project, do not simply edit your old post; create a new blog post for the resubmission so that I can see the changes you made. Just like turning in work late, you only have until the Last Call to resubmit any assignments prior to that date. This is because Projects #1, 2 and 3 are the foundation for #4, 5 and 6; the first three need to be completely finished before you head into the last three. Resubmission only applies to digital history projects, not the blog posts or the final presentation and reflection. Late assignments that are resubmitted will maintain the original 10% late penalty.

TL;DR – Late assignments and digital history project resubmissions must be completed as follows:

Before February 28th's Last Call:
Late submission: Projects #1, 2 and 3; Blog Posts #1 and 2
Resubmission: Projects #1, 2 and 3

Before April 29th's Last Call:
Late submission: Projects #4, 5 and 6; Blog Posts #3, 4, 5 and 6
Resubmission: Projects #4, 5 and 6

Disability Accommodations
Everyone in this course deserves equitable access and equal treatment. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please contact me as soon as possible to make necessary arrangements. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the Office of Disability Services. Please visit https://ds.gmu.edu/ or call (703) 993-2462 for information on the ODS registration process. If ODS forms need to be signed by me, it is your responsibility to bring me those forms.

If there is ever a time in class where I can do something small (such as turning up volume on a video or making font size larger) to make class easier for you, please let me know. Whenever possible, I will provide closed captioning or a transcript for audio and video assignments. If you need to fidget, wear headphones or switch between tasks to stay on target in class, please do so. I will only ask you to stop if it becomes a distraction to myself or others in the class.

Non-Discrimination
This course and 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."

Privacy

We will not be using Blackboard for this course. All of your course materials will be provided on our course website, in class, through Slack or via email. You will also be making your own blog on the web; a lot of your work will be public. This reflects a lot of what digital history is. Public scholarship and open-source programs are at the heart of digital history and that's a good thing! However, privacy is still a concern and an important one. Please be careful about the things you post online. This is good practice, not just for this course, but for life in general. You are not required to put your name or any identifying information on your blog, so long as I know which blog is yours. Please also be respectful of others in your responses. Don't hold back your opinions, but remember that anyone could read them. In addition, I will at no point share your name, face or work anywhere online without your explicit permission.

Class communication will be done in-person and online through Slack or email. However, in compliance with university rules and FERPA, your grades will only ever be shared with you (and only you) in person or via email. If you misplace your grades and need me to send them to you, please ask me for your grade over email with your GMU email account.

Course Enrollment

It is your responsibility to verify that you are properly registered for this course.

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. Undergraduate students wishing to drop a class after the drop date may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal.

Class Schedule

The complete course schedule, including links to reading assignments, can also be found at https://chartweave.com/hist390spring2024/schedule/. As we move through the semester, I reserve the right to edit our schedule and/or course readings, but I will try to keep changes minimal and make sure to give you ample warning. The most accurate and up-to-date class schedule will always be the one on our course website.

Week 0: Welcome to class! (January 17th)

Wednesday: Class introduction

Homework, due January 22nd:
- Brainstorm your historical research topic and complete welcome survey (sent to your email)
- Join the class Slack (invitation sent to your email) and post your meme about our class to the #week-0 channel using the resources here: The 6 Best Tools for Making Memes, Mashable
- Watch: The Internet: Packets, Routing and Reliability (7 minute video)

Week 1: Web Basics (January 22 & 24)

<u>Monday:</u> How the Internet works & Setting up your Website
- Begin working on Project #1: WordPress. <u>Read the assignment brief here</u>. Due January 29th.

Due January 24th:
- Read: <u>"How Search Works,"</u> Google.
- Prefer to watch? Watch: <u>"How biased are our algorithms?",</u> Safiya Umoja Noble, TEDxUIUC (16 minutes video)
  Discussion of racism, sexism and misogynoir

  Prefer to read? Read: Chapter 2, "Searching for Black Girls" in *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* by Safiya Umoja Noble
  Discussion of racism, sexism and misogynoir

<u>Wednesday:</u> How Search Works

Due January 29th:
- Read: <u>"The History of Fake News in America,"</u> Karen Yuan and Matt Peterson, *The Atlantic* AND <u>"Three challenges for the web, according to its inventor,"</u> Tim Berners-Lee, *Web Foundation*

Week 2: Secondary Sources (January 29 & 31)

Due January 29th: Project #1 – Website

<u>Monday:</u> Finding credible sources online & Zotero
- Write: Blog Post #1: Wikipedia. <u>Read the prompt here.</u> Due February 5th.
- Begin working on Project #2: Zotero. <u>Read the assignment brief here.</u> Due February 12th.

<u>Wednesday:</u> Using the Library with Dr. George Oberle

Due February 5th:
- Read: <u>"What is Metadata and how do I use it?",</u> Tropy.
- Prefer to watch? Watch: <u>"The Power of Metadata,"</u> Deepak Jagdish and Daniel Smilkov, TEDxCambridge (10 minute video)

  Prefer to read? Read: <u>"What is Metadata (with examples),"</u> Piotr Kononow, *Dataedo*

Week 3: Primary Sources (February 5 & 7)

Due February 5th: Blog Post #1

<u>Monday:</u> Primary Sources & Tropy
- Begin working on Project #3: Tropy. <u>Read the assignment brief here.</u> Due February 19th.

Due February 7th:
- Read: "The Moon Landing" by National Geographic Kids

<u>Wednesday:</u> Primary Sources in the Digital Age

Due February 12th:
- Read: Mickey, Disney and the Public Domain: a 95-year Love Triangle by Jennifer Jenkins, Duke Center for the Study of the Public Domain, **AND** "Who owns the rights to the archival materials I use?", Tropy.

Week 4: Ownership (February 12 & 14)

Due February 12th: Project #2 – Zotero

<u>Monday:</u> Who Owns What on the Internet

Due February 14th:
- Prefer to watch? Watch: "Artificial Intelligence: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" (27 minute video)
  crude language and humor, discussion of racism and sexism

  Prefer to read? Read: "What is ChatGPT?" by Amanda Hetler, TechTarget **AND** "These fake images reveal how AI amplifies our worst stereotypes" by Nitasha Tiku, Kevin Schaul and Szu Yu Chen
  discussion of racism and sexism

<u>Wednesday:</u> ChatGPT and AI

Due February 19th:
- Prefer to watch? Watch: "What We Learned from 5 Million Books," Erez Lieberman Aiden and Jean-Baptiste Michel, TEDTalk (14 minute video)

  Prefer to read? Read: "Google Books," Wikipedia

Week 5: Digitization (February 19 & 21)

Due February 19th: Project #3 – Tropy

<u>Monday:</u> How Analog Becomes Digital
- Write: Blog Post #2: N-Grams. Due February 26th.

Due February 19th:
- Read: "What is Distant Reading?" by Katherine Schulz, New York Times

<u>Wednesday:</u> Datasets & Text Analysis

Due February 26th:

- Read: ["In the cold mansions of the silent tomb": Data, Disability, and New England Gravestones, Part 1"](#) by Dan Howlett

Week 6: Visualizations (February 26 & 28)

Due February 26th: Blog Post #2

<u>Monday:</u> Presenting Data in Visual Form

Due February 28th:
- Explore: ["Timeline: The American Revolution,"](#) Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
- Project Prep: Come up with 10 events having to do with your historical research topic that can be used to tell a story about your topic.

Due February 28: Last Call for Projects 1, 2 and 3

<u>Wednesday:</u> Time & Timelines

- Begin working on Project #4: Timeline. Due March 13th.

Due March 11th:
- Watch: ["The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes,"](#) Slate. (2 minute video)

Spring Break (March 4 & 6)
No class this week!

Week 7: Visualizations (March 11 & 13)

<u>Monday:</u> Maps as historical sources
- Write: Blog Post #3: Maps. Due March 18th.

Due March 13th:
- Read: ["Putting Harlem on the Map,"](#) by Stephen Robertson, Writing History in the Digital Age

Due March 13th: Project #4 – Timeline

<u>Wednesday:</u> In-Depth Project Look: The Spread of US Slavery & Mapping Early American Elections

Due March 18:
- Read: ["How to Listen to a Podcast for Class"](#) by Abby Mullen AND "Going Narrative" by Karen Given
- Listen: TBD Podcast episode from R2Studios.

- Project Prep: Choose an episode or "snapshot" that would make a good subject for a podcast about your historical research topic.

Week 8: Digital Public History – Podcasts (March 18 & 20)

Due March 18th: Blog Post #3

Monday: Deconstructing a Podcast
- Begin working on Project #5: Podcast. Due April 1st.

Due March 20th:
- Prefer to watch? Watch: "POURing Over Your Website: An Introduction to Digital Accessibility," Ashleigh Lodge, TEDxWinnipeg (14 minute video)

  Prefer to read? Read: "Chapter 3: The discriminatory impact of digital inaccessibility" in *Ensuring Digital Accessibility Through Process and Policy* by Jonathan Lazar, Daniel Goldstein and Anne Taylor

Wednesday: Accessibility in the digital age
- Write Blog Post #4: Alt Text. Due March 27th.

Week 9: Digital Public History – Omeka (March 25 & 27)

Monday: Digital Public History & Omeka

Due March 27th:
- Read/Watch: TBD.

Due March 27th: Blog Post #4

Wednesday: In-Depth Project Look – Mason Legacies
Due April 1st:
- Prefer to watch? Watch: "Why Assassin's Creed Unity can't rebuild Notre Dame cathedral?", Polygon (11 minute video)

  Prefer to read? Read: "Assassin's Creed Unity can't help rebuild Notre-Dame, and that's OK" by Simone de Rochefort, Polygon
- Project Prep: Identify or create a "protagonist" character who could serve as the main character of a video game about your historical research topic. This person can be a real historical figure or a fictional character you create.

Week 10: Digital Storytelling (April 1 & 3)

Due April 1st: Project #5 – Podcast

Monday: Video Games & Twine
- Begin working on Project #6: Twine. Due April 15th.

<u>Wednesday:</u> In-Depth Project Look – A Sailor's Life for Me
- Write: Blog Post #5: Games. Due April 10th.

Due April 8th:
- Read: <u>"How One of the Internet's Biggest History Forums Deals With Holocaust Deniers"</u> by Johannes Breit, Slate

Week 11: Digital Lives (April 8 & 10)

<u>Monday:</u> Historians Online – Social Media

Due April 10th:
- Prefer to watch? Watch: <u>"Why Digital Preservation is Important to You,"</u> Library of Congress (8 minute video)

  Prefer to read? Read: <u>"Digital Preservation Guide,"</u> Duke University Libraries

Due April 10th: Blog Post #5

<u>Wednesday:</u> Stability and Longevity in the Digital Age

Due April 15th:
- Prefer to watch? Watch: <u>"Internet Privacy Prank,"</u> Buzzfeed (3 minute video) **AND** <u>"What is Your Password?",</u> Jimmy Kimmel (3 minute video)

  Prefer to read? Read: <u>"How Apple and Amazon Security Flaws Led to My Epic Hacking"</u> by Mat Honan, Wired

Week 12: Security & Originality (April 15 & 17)

Due April 15th: Project #6 – Twine

Monday: Digital Security
- Write: Blog Post #6: Security. Due April 22nd.

Due April 17th:
- Read/Watch: TBD.

Wednesday: Originality, Remixing & Reusing

Due April 22/24:
- Be prepared to give your final presentation during your time slot next week.

Week 13: Final Presentations (April 22 & 24)

Due April 22: Blog Post #6

Monday & Wednesday: Student Presentations

Week 14: Game Day (April 29)

Due April 29th: Last Call for Projects 4, 5 and 6

Monday: Last Day of Class – Extra credit Game Day

Final Reflection

Due May 6th: Final Reflection