

Digital History – 2012 Syllabus

History in the Digital Age

- Wednesday: 5:30-8:00, Spring 2012
- Instructor: Trevor Owens, contact: trevor (dot) johnowens (at) gmail (dot) com
- Office hours by appointment

Course Description

This course will explore the current and potential impact of digital media on the theory and practice of history. We will focus on how digital tools and resources are enabling new methods for analysis in traditional print scholarship and the possibilities for new forms of scholarship. For the former, we will explore tools for text analysis and visualization as well as work on interpreting new media forms as primary sources. For the latter, we will explore a range of production of new media history resources, including both practical work on project management and design. As part of this process we will read a range of works on designing, interpreting and understanding digital media. Beyond course readings we will also critically engage a range of digital tools and resources.

Course Goals

After the course students will be able to:

1. Discover, evaluate, and implement digital tools and resources to support emerging and traditional forms of historical scholarship, public projects, and teaching.
2. Develop proposals for digital history resources with detailed plans for project management, design, outreach, and evaluation.
3. Thoughtfully and purposefully engage in dialog about history on the public web with a range of stakeholders in digital history: historians, archivists, museum professionals, educators, and amateurs, etc.

Overview of Assignments

Blogging (30% of grade)

- Reading response post: **1 post, sign up on day one**
- Tool/ resource response post: **1 post, sign up on day one**
- Show and Tell, find something on your own related to a given week and blog about it: **1 post**
- Project blog posts: **2 proposal posts (1 print and 1 digital), 1 reflection**
- Commenting: **12 substantive comments on posts on the course blog. At least one comment a week.**

In Class Participation (30% of grade)

- Tool/resource demonstration: **10-15 min demonstration of tool you blogged about**
- Lead discussion on a reading: **What is the argument of the reading you blogged about? Come prepared with 3 questions to keep discussion going.**
- Class attendance:

Project (40% of grade)

- Proposal for print project Blog Post: **400-800 words** (one of your project blog posts)
- Proposal for digital project Blog Post: **400-800 words** (one of your project blog posts)
- Preliminary project pitches: **3-5 min**
- Final paper (**2,500-5,000 words**) OR final digital resource (**digital resource and 300-700 word project statement**)
- Final project poster presentation: **Small Poster (For example)**
- Project Reflection Post: **200-500 words** (one of your project blog posts) reflect on what you learned, what worked what didn't, include your poster, include a link to your final product online.

Assignment Details

The course blog: Engaging in online public discourse about digital history

We are not simply going to learn about digital history in this course, we are also going to do digital history. That means we need to engage with the public web. To this end, part of our course communication is going to happen in a public course blog.

On the first day of class I will show you how to use the blog. **You are expected to post a minimum of six times, once about the reading you lead discussion on, once about the digital tools or resource you demonstrate, once about a relevant paper or resource you found on your own, once about each of your project proposals and a reflection on your project.** We will sign up for who writes about what on the first day of class.

These are blog posts, and as such they should not be written like term papers. Part of the goal of this assignment is to become familiar with the genre and format of discourse on thoughtful blogs. You need to get in, say something interesting, and get out. Ideally telling us what the thing is, why it is, what is particularly interesting here, and ending with an invitation to discussion. You should think of your posts as mixing the features of a well composed academic book review and the well conceived blog post (Read the preceding links, they offer critical information for completing these assignments). Posts for a given week must be on the web the Sunday before class (yes, if you want you can post it at 11:59 PM on Sunday).

Do not assume your reader has detailed knowledge of the thing you are writing about. One of the goals of the blog is to invite interested third parties into a conversation with our course. If we are doing this right you can expect comments and dialog with historians, humanists, librarians, archivists, curators, and bloggers who are not participating in the course as students but who are participating in the public conversation we initiate through the blog.

First decision: Your identity and the blog

This is public so one of our first considerations is going to be personal identity. While this is a practical matter it is also, very directly, part of the subject matter of the course. I would encourage you to blog with your real name, it is a good idea for you to start building a web presence for yourself. It has even been suggested that in the emerging field of digital humanities you can either “be online or be irrelevant.” With that said, some people have good reasons not to use their real names on the web. With that in mind, if you are uncomfortable with sharing your name publicly, you should feel free to use a pseudonym. If there is a reason that you do not want to share your work on the web please send me an email or meet with me after class. I feel that this public dialog is an important course goal, but I will of course understand and accommodate anyone that needs a different arrangement. If at the end of the course you would like to continue blogging I will be happy to show you how we can pull all your posts out and into a new blog of your own. We will talk about this identity decision on the first class day.

Keep the conversation going

Posting is not the end of the assignment. After posting you need to foster the discussion you are initiating. When people comment you need to give substantive responses. Try to engage everyone who comments in some fashion and try to use the comments to sustain a conversation you began at the end of your post.

Commenting is also an assignment

Beyond posting you are expected to contribute substantive comments to a minimum of six of your peers posts. Your comments should extend and contribute to the conversation. Good comments are an important format unto themselves. Read profhacker’s guidelines for comments for a sense of the kind of comment ecosystem we are trying to produce here and then read how to write a great blog comment for some suggestions on the format for comments. Comment early so that others have a chance to read them (your comments need to be up before midnight on Monday).

The course blog is the required reading we write ourselves

Beyond posting and commenting **everyone needs to read everything on the blog** before class each week. This is the part of the course readings that we write ourselves and in all honesty this is the most important springboard for our in-class discussions.

Major Project

Everyone is going to write **two 400-800 word proposals** for projects, a proposal for a print project and a digital project. You only need to actually do one of them. In the case of the print project the final result should be a 2,500-7,000 word Chicago style journal article ([For an example see this article](#) we will read later in the semester.) In the case of the digital project it should be the digital resource you devise and a short 500-1000 word project statement which articulates the goals of the project, connects it to other projects we discussed in class, and briefly offers personal reflections on what you learned from the project.

You can [see the projects students worked on last year here](#). This includes proposals and final resources and is a great resource for planning your own project.

Print Project, study something digital:

Write something about the digital. This could include using software we discuss to engage with a set of primary sources or exploring born digital material associated with a field you are already familiar. For example, if you are interested in the Civil War you could plan and execute a research project on how a particular Civil War memorial is presented and discussed on Flickr, or compare how it is reviewed on Yelp, or analyze how it is represented in some set of video games, or explore how a particular Civil War site uses Twitter, or use something like [Mike Davies' online corpus of time magazine](#) to explore trends in discussions of the Civil War or a particular historical figure. Whatever you do you need to ground the study in both historiography for whatever topic you work on and incorporate material from our readings on digital history. In short, all of the readings offer potential models for this project. If you decide to work on a print project I strongly

encourage you to set up weekly appointments with a writing consultant in the writing center. Simply put, good writing is re-writing. If you work with them starting at the proposal stage, through your first full draft, and on through your final paper you will end up with something you can really be proud of.

Digital Project, build something scholarly:

Take one of your interests and develop a digital resource around it. This should explicitly NOT be putting an essay on a webpage. Whatever you propose there should be clear reasons that this should be digital, it should probably draw on something we worked on in class. I would suggest staying away from difficult technical projects. While I would be thrilled if you taught yourself the ins-and-outs of PHP and wrote your own content management system to build a blog it would be a much better idea for you to simplify the technical decisions in your project and just use something like wordpress.com or omeka.net which does not require you to devote your time to primarily technical issues. To restate this, the goal of this project is not to demonstrate technical competence. Please simplify technology decisions and focus your time on using something that already exists in a novel way. Proposals should include major features from the Brown (2006) book, a) description of audience, comparison to existing projects, detailed description of the thing to be created, plan for outreach and publicity, plan for how you will evaluate the project. Examples could include starting and curating a Flickr pool focused on collecting and interrupting representations of the American west, in consultation with the DC historical society you might build an Omeka exhibit to complement one of their physical exhibits, you might create an annotated Google my map or a set of quests for a mobile app like Gowalla that gives an interpretive tour of the history of the design of the national mall.

Books:

1. Brown, Dan. 2006. *Communicating Design: Developing Web Site Documentation for Design and Planning*. New Riders Press.
2. Gee, James Paul. 2003. *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

3. Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. 2008. *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
4. Moretti, Franco. 2007. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. Verso.

Week By Week

First week (Jan 18):

- Review syllabus
- Watch CommonCraft RSS in plain english video in class
- Practicum: Using the Course Blog
- Homework: Based on our discussion of the syllabus think of 5 quick ideas for projects you might work on. In each case connect a period or area interest with one of the subjects/approaches that we are going to cover.

Defining Digital History (Jan 25):

Readings

- 1. Cohen & Rosenzweig, *Digital History*, Introduction, Ch. 1 (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)
- 2. Witmore & Hope, Shakespeare by the Numbers: On the Linguistic Texture of the Late Plays (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)
- 3. Kirschenbaum, What is the Digital Humanities and What is it Doing in English Departments? **ADD NAME**
- 4. Kenning, Bringing Historical Order to Youtube. **ADD NAME** React to the site, the review, and the discussion in the comments on that post.

Practicum:

- A. Practicum: PhilaPlace : Demo the site, how it works, what it accomplishes.(post and demo from **ADD NAME**)
- B. Practicum: Wordle: Show us how it works, try using it to illustrate some kind of interesting historical comparison, for example it can work well with speeches. **ADD NAME**

The Collaborative Web (Feb 1):

Readings:

- 5. Rosenzweig, Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)
- 6. The Machine is Using Us Video: Look around the web and put together your commentary on the video.
- 7. Crowdsourcing the Civil War: Insights Interview with Nicole Saylor (**ADD NAME**)

Practicums:

- C. Practicum: Wikipedia: how it works. Analyze three related wikipedia pages and talk pages what their history is. Teach the class how to do this. (post and demo from **ADD NAME**)
- D. Practicum: Tell us how Flickr works, walk us through how the platform works, how search works, how commenting works, try to find some examples that have a historical bent. (Ex, this course photo pool) include discussion of the Flickr Commons (post and demo from **ADD NAME**)
- E. Practicum: What's On the Menu? (post and demo **ADD NAME**)
- F. Practicum: PB Wiki: Show us how to set up a wiki: Show us how these are being used in the digital humanities (ex, digital tools wiki) (post and demo from **ADD NAME**)

Text Analysis and Visualization (Feb, 8):

Readings:

- 8. Staley, Sequential Art and Historical Narrative: A Visual History of Germany (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)
- 9. Jessop, Digital Visualization as a Scholarly Activity (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)

Practicums:

- G. Practicum: Voyer : Show us a bit of how it works, show us an example of how you might use it for historical research (post and demo by **ADD NAME**)
- H. Practicum: HistoryWired : Show us a bit of how it works. Does this change how you think about their collections?. (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)
- I. Practicum: Viewshare : Show us a bit of how it works, show us how it might work with an example collection. Consider referencing Learning About Collections With Viewshare (post and discussion demo from **ADD NAME**)
- J. Practicum: Many Eyes : Show us some of the basics and show us how it might work for a historical project.

Reminder:

- **HOMEWORK: Print project proposal due next week! 400-800 words posted to the blog.**

Designs have arguments (Feb 15):

- Watching Helvetica in class (80:00)

Readings

- 10. Brown, Communicating Design (post and discussion of Introduction and Personas chapter by **ADD NAME**)
- 11. Brown, Communicating Design (post and discussion of concept models and site maps) **ADD NAME**.

Designing Digital Projects (Feb 22):

Readings:

- 12. Brown, Communicating Design (post and discussion of Design Briefs and Competitive Reviews, usability test plans and usability testing) **ADD NAME**
- 13. NEH Start-up guidelines, Section IV, Part 4. Just focus on the narrative section and talk through how this NYPL proposal illustrates those sections. **ADD NAME**

Practicum

- K. Practicum: Omeka.net: Show us how to set up a site, add items, chose themes.(post and demo lead by **ADD NAME**)
- L. Practicum:WordPress.com: Show us how to set up a site, chose themes, add pages, arrange navigation. **ADD NAME**
- **HOMEWORK: Digital project proposal due next week! 400-800 words posted to the blog**

Proposal Week (Feb 29):

- Short proposal pitches: Plan to spend three minutes giving us the elevator pitch for the project you plan to finish. This almost the MTV Cops version of your proposal

Digitization, Digital Collections, Digital Preservation (Mar 7):

- 14. NINCH Guide, Chs. V-VIII, XIV (**ADD NAME**) Whatever you do, don't get too bogged down in the details here.
- 15. Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era" **ADD NAME**

Practicum:

- M. Born Digital Archive September 11 Digital Archive : Give an overview, show a few items, tell us what is novel here. **ADD NAME**
- N. Internet Archive Wayback Machine: Give an overview of what it is, how it works, how content is collected. **ADD NAME**

Visit to American University Special Collections for Second Half of Class (6:45)

Spring Break (March 14)

- Get some work done on that project!

So what's new about new media? Databases! (Mar 21)

Readings

- 16. Manovich, Database as a Genre of New Media **ADD NAME**

- 17. Leary, Googling the Victorians **ADD NAME**
- 18. Michel, et. al. Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)
- 19. Davies, The Corpus of Historical American English and Google Books / Culturomics (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)

Practicums:

- O. Google Custom Search Engine : Tell us how to make our own search engine, show some examples. (post and demo from **ADD NAME**)
- P. Time Magazine Corpus of American English :Think about how this interface enables different kinds of questions. Show us some examples. (post and demo from **ADD NAME**)
- Q. Google n-gram :Think about how this interface enables different kinds of questions. Show us some examples. (post and demo from **ADD NAME**)

What's Old about New Media?: Mechanisms and Materiality (Mar 28):

Readings:

- 20. Kirshenbalm, *Mechanisms* (post and discussion of chapters 1 and 2 lead by **ADD NAME**)
- 21. Kirshenbalm, *Mechanisms* (post and discussion of chapters 3 and 4 lead by **ADD NAME**)

Practicum:

- R. Demo Mystery House: You can find it in a emulator that you can play it online. Talk us through some turns of the game. What would Kirshenbalm, and the other authors he discusses, have to say about our experience of the game here?

Project Drafts Due: For people writing papers this means a full draft of the paper, not a rough draft, a full well thought out draft of your paper. For people

working on digital projects you should have at least a functional proof of concept, a roadmap for how and when you will finish the work on the project, and a revision of your proposal that moves from language about what it will do to what it is doing.

April 4th: NO CLASS

Maps, Graphs and Distant Reading (April 11):

Readings:

- 22. Morritti, *Graphs Maps and Trees* **ADD NAME**
- 23. Burke, response to *Graphs, Maps, Trees* **ADD NAME**

Practicums:

- S. Hypercities : Give us a sense of the big picture goals of the project and get into a example or two. **ADD NAME**
- T. Euclid Corridor History Project Demo the site, how it works, what it accomplishes. **ADD NAME**
- U. Google My Maps : Show us how to build our own Google custom map, show a few ways educators are using this tool. (post and discussion lead by **ADD NAME**)

Reading Video Games: Interactivity and

Action (April 18):

Readings:

- 24. Gee, *What Videogames Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* **ADD NAME**)
- 25. Owens, Modding the History of Science **ADD NAME**)

Practicums:

- V. Playing and reading Argument Wars : Play the game, review it, what does it tell us about the game as a genre for history? (post and demo by Peter)
- W. Playing and reading 1066 : Play the game, review it, what does it tell us about the game as a genre for history?(post and demo by Brittany)

- X. Playing and reading Jamestown Adventure : Play the game, review it, what does it tell us about the game as a genre for history?(post and demo by Bonnie)
- Y. Playing and reading Cotton Millionaire: Play the game, review it, what does it tell us about the game as a genre for history? (post and demo by John)

Project Presentations: Conference (April 25):

- Come prepared to briefly explain the results of your project.