

Course syllabus: Digital History

History 795 / Section 001

Digital History

Tu 1:20 – 3:15 pm,
Humanities Bldg. 5255
Twitter #wischist795

Instructor:

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Contact details

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This course aims at introducing students to the use of digital tools in research, analysis, visualization, and sharing of historical data, documents, and texts. The goal is to provide a, largely open/free, toolbox that may be useful in the students' research activities. Furthermore, we will focus on understanding and analyzing the various shapes digital history takes and the possibilities it provides for new forms of scholarship.

Among the topics that will be discussed there are the nature of digital history, the importance of having a professional online presence, the fruitful gathering of information online, the structuring of digital bibliographies and archival databases, an introduction to spatial, textual and numerical analysis, as well as data visualization, and the publication and sharing of results and primary documents.

The class experience is based on seminar discussion and hands-on practice. Collaborative work will as well be a central component of this course. No prior knowledge in computing is expected. Students who do have such knowledge however are invited to share their insights with the class; peer-learning will, in fact, be an important part of the seminar. Discussion and collaboration will take place both in class and through digital media (e.g. blogging and social media).

At the end of the course students will have gathered knowledge of the challenges and

Course syllabus: Digital History

opportunities of digital history. They should be able make an informed choice of the tools that may be more useful for their research topics and to use them for analysis and outreach. They should as well become able to discover and evaluate autonomously new digital tools and historiographical resources. One of the final aims of the class is the completion of a final digital project related to the students' interests in research, teaching, and/or public history. The establishment (or consolidation) of a professional online presence is another goal of the class.

Important!

Bring your own laptop! Shouldn't you own one you can rent one from DoIT. You will however need full admin control of the computer since we will install some software. Please check this in case you need to rent a computer. All software used in this class is open-source and cross-platform, so any OS will do.

Assignments

The main output of the course will be a final digital project. The details of each project will be discussed and contracted collegially in class. Beside this there will be the following assignments:

- Blogging and commenting (spread over the whole semester)
- Reference management (due Apr 15)
- Tool use (due Apr 29)
- Project statement (due May 13)

You will also be graded for participation. Both in-class and online participation (Twitter and commenting) will be evaluated for this grade. Come to class ready to discuss the week's topics and to participate in our practice based sessions.

Blogging and commenting

During one of the early classes we will set up a course blog. To do this we will install Wordpress on a folder on my website (www.wilkohardenberg.net). This is obviously also a way to show you how the installation process works. This course blog will also act as a “sandbox” where to exercise with the numerous options offered by a self-hosted version of Wordpress, in respect to the free blogging platforms (Wordpress.com, Blogspot, Tumblr, etc.). The course blog will thus be built collegially by the class not only as regards content, but also in its look, features and design.

In this space you will publish at least the following posts (400-800 words) and comments:

Course syllabus: Digital History

- 1 reading response post: discuss one of the readings we will select during class
- 1 tool response post: discuss one of the tools presented in class
- 1 resource response post: discuss one of the online resources presented in class
- 1 presentation post: find something relevant to digital history on your own (resource, tool, or article) and present it
- 2 project blog posts: present your ideas for a final project at different stages of development (since we will discuss new tools and resources towards the end of class you might want to add them as new features to your project)
- 1 project reflection post: present what you learned from doing your digital project
- Commenting: substantively comment at least one post by your colleagues every fortnight.

The order in which you publish these posts is not relevant, but spread them evenly over the semester. You are welcome to post more: it will positively affect your participation grade. You are expected to blog at least once every second week, starting in week 2. Comments are due in the alternate, uneven weeks.

Reference management

Reference management software is an essential part of an historian's toolset in the 21st century. If you are not using one already you will have to start by the end of the class. In theory you could use any of the many available citation tools (e.g. Bibtex, Endnote, Mendeley, Zotero), but this class will focus on how to best use Zotero. This is because it is free and open-source, very flexible regarding the kind of contents, and can easily be used in combination with other citation tools and other software in case of need. For this assignment you will have to build a bibliography using a reference management software. Details will be given in class.

Tool use

Use one of the tools presented in class or that you discovered yourself to perform one specific task (e.g. georeference a map, build a timeline, analyze a text). Details will be given in class.

Final project and project statement

The final project can take many shapes (and please remember that digital does not mean exclusively online): a database, a website, an online collection, a social media campaign, etc. Your project choice will greatly depend on your own research interests. The various opportunities will be discussed in detail during one of the early meetings and examples of project developed at other institutions will be shown. The project statement should detail aims and scope of your project, as well as discuss how it is positioned in the wider debate about digital history.

Course syllabus: Digital History

Producing a high-quality digital project might appear as a challenging task. It does not need to be. Since not everybody has the same skills or prior knowledge (you might have more a penchant for design, rather than programming, or be more confident with GIS than with social media), for the final project you can decide to present either an individual work or a group work. In case you should choose to work as a team, you should still produce an individual project statement, in which you detail the components of the project of which you were responsible.

Grading

Letter grades will be converted from a 100-point scale. The following conversion chart applies:

- 93-100 = A;
- 88-92 = AB;
- 83-87 = B;
- 78-82 = BC;
- 70-77 = C;
- 60-69 = D;
- 59-below = F.

Grades per coursework will be broken down following this rubric:

– Participation	30 pts
– Blogging and commenting	30 pts
– Reference management	5 pts
– Tool use	5 pts
– Final project and statement	30 pts

Readings

Digital history is, aptly, a discipline that lives mostly on the internet and that is in constant evolution. Blog posts and open-access journal articles appear regularly. Readings will thus be selected collegially in class on a rolling basis to reflect this constantly evolving environment. You are as well encouraged to make suggestions for further readings, such as blogposts and articles relevant to your specific final project, on Twitter, via our class hashtag #wischist795. I also suggest you to follow some established hashtags in the field: #digitalhumanities, #dhist, and #digitalhistory (there are more). Twitter in fact is one of the best sources to remain updated on what is going on in the field.

Course syllabus: Digital History

Some good texts that are useful as an introduction to the general domain of digital history are:

- Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. (Also available online at chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/)
- T. Mills Kelly. *Teaching History in the Digital Age*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013. (Also available online at hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.12146032.0001.001)
- Roy Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired. The Future of the Past in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. (Available online through EBL)
- Jack Doherty and Kristen Nawrotzki, *Writing History in the Digital Age*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012. (Also available online at <http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu>).

I strongly encourage you to read them over the semester. They will help you to better inform your writing and our discussions. Beside this a number of tutorials for various tools will be mentioned in class: you are strongly encouraged to make use of them. We will also discuss them in class or attempt to clarify any point that may be obscure.

Course policies

Attendance: Attending classes is the student's responsibility and attendance will not be taken. However, this is both a discussion seminar and a hands-on workshop and your active involvement is essential for the course to reach its pedagogical goals. As a reminder: just showing up to class is necessary, but not sufficient, to gain grades for participation.

According to campus wide rules on religious observance I invite you, nonetheless, to notify me within the first two weeks of class of the specific dates for which you request relief for religious observance, since these may affect your ability to respect the assignments' deadlines.

Reading assignments: The seminar aims both at teaching you tools useful for your research and to invite you to reflect about the limits, challenges, and opportunities of digital history. Reading the material that will be suggested during class is thus expected, as is coming to class ready to participate actively in discussion: reading will affect your participation grade.

Academic integrity: In any written assignment it is necessary to acknowledge your sources and references. Quotes are handled rather differently in online publications than in print, and quoting online sources poses a number of new challenges. Nonetheless you should always credit in full anyone you cite. The Chicago Manual of Style (www.chicagomanualofstyle.org) gives useful hints about how to manage most issues that may come up while citing online sources. You should NEVER attribute to yourself, or give the impression that you are attributing to yourself, the

Course syllabus: Digital History

words and phrasing of others. Plagiarism is an unacceptable ethical infraction and can lead to serious consequences. For more information on how to avoid plagiarism please refer to the UW-Madison Writing Center webpages: <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html>

Communication: E-mails will be answered only on weekdays 10am-3pm. If you have any questions that require a longer answer please drop by during office hours or arrange a meeting. You are encouraged instead to use the course hashtag #wischist795 or the commenting feature on the course blog for questions of interest to the whole class. In e-mails please always use a subject line and clarify which course you have a question about.

Submitting Work: The project statement, in pdf, should be uploaded on the dedicated Learn@UW dropbox. The filename should be formatted in the following way: [YourSurname]_ProjectStatement.pdf (e.g. Hardenberg_ProjectStatement.pdf)

The student's name, assignment title, project name and submission date should appear clearly on top of the paper. Formatting should be 12pt font, double spacing, 1 inch margins. Pages should be numbered. Text should be thoroughly proofread. **Formatting, grammar, and syntax will be graded.**

Modifications to Syllabus: The syllabus may be subject to changes. In fact, the schedule given below may change radically, according to the students' prior knowledge or specific interests. I am also willing to introduce you to other tools and resources upon demand.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – 21 Jan 2014 – *Introduction of course and presentation of the syllabus*

Besides going over the syllabus we will start thinking about possible projects that fit your research interests.

Week 2 – 28 Jan 2014 – *What is digital history?*

Suggested readings:

- **Introduction** to Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*
- **Introduction** to Kelly, *Teaching History in the Digital Age*
- "The Promise of Digital History." *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (September 2008). <http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/issues/952/interchange/index.html>.
- Turkel, William J. "Going Digital." *William J Turkel*, March 15, 2011. <http://williamjturkel.net/2011/03/15/going-digital/>.

Come with three ideas for possible projects, informed by the discussion in Week 1, the readings

Course syllabus: Digital History

of Week 2, and a connection to your research interests.

Week 3 – 4 Feb 2014 – *Establishing a professional online presence*

We will discuss the importance of having a professional online presence and see how best to accomplish this goal. We will start using Wordpress and look at how to use micro-blogging tools and social media to accomplish this goal. A very basic introduction to HTML will be given.

Week 4 – 11 Feb 2014 – *Managing bibliographies and archival collections*

This week I will briefly introduce Zotero and its functionalities, as well as some useful plugins. It will just be an introductory class: if you need more information I invite you read the tutorials (<http://www.zotero.org/support/start>), attend one of the many workshops offered by the libraries, or ask me.

Week 5 – 18 Feb 2014 – *Finding and using online sources*

We will explore the best strategies, methods and venues to find sources online. Another topic will be how to best use these sources. We will also discuss the limits, challenges, and opportunities posed by the increasing digitization of primary sources, as well as copyright issues.

Week 6 – 25 Feb 2014 – *Writing, collaborating, publishing*

We will look at the basic features of the Omeka CMS, writing options beyond Word and Libreoffice and of online collaboration tools (Google Docs, Editorially).

Week 7 – 4 Mar 2014 – *Spatial analysis*

We will explore ways to use Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for historical research, both using desktop tools (mainly the free and open source QGIS suite) and online tools (Google Maps, Worldmap, Neatline).

Week 8 – 11 Mar 2014 – *No class!*

Take this time to think about your final project and tinker with the tools we discussed. You could for example set an appointment with the DesignLab and consult with them about the design aspects of your project (if relevant).

Spring break

Course syllabus: Digital History

Week 9 – 25 Mar 2014 – *Textual and numerical analysis*

We will look at ways to extract bits of information from text and how to analyze them. We will also discuss options to use numerical and statistical data.

Week 10 – 1 Apr 2014 – *Spatial analysis (continued)*

See week 7. We will mostly play around with the tools presented earlier.

Week 11 – 8 Apr 2014 – *Analyzing and visualizing information*

This class will be dedicated to explore ways to present information in different ways (e.g. timelines, graphs, video, etc.).

Week 12 – 15 Apr 2014 – *Q&A*

I'll be available over the whole block for questions, further explanations, and discussion of tools that haven't been discussed. Show me what is not working or why your project is stuck and we will try to fix it together. **The reference management assignment is due in class.**

Week 13 – 22 Apr 2014 – *Students' choice*

You will present a tool, resource, or trick that you independently discovered over the semester.

Week 14 – 29 Apr 2014 – *Projects discussion*

Your final projects will be discussed in class. You will need to briefly (3-5 minutes) present your project in front of the class and to constructively comment on your colleagues' projects.

Tool use assignment is due in class.

Week 15 – 6 May 2014 – *The "Programming Historian"*

While we will limit most our activities to the use of existing tools, the idea that basic programming skills should be integral to any historian's toolset is intriguing. In this week we will discuss the premises of the Programming Historian 2 online tutorial and look through its structure.

13 May 2014 Final project and project statement deadline