HIST 970
Seminar in Digital History
William G. Thomas, III
University of Nebraska
Syllabus
Fall 2017

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Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the methods and practice of history in a digital age. The goal is to introduce you to the variety of ways historians are producing their scholarship for the digital medium. Digital historians are interested in how the digital medium affects the sources we interrogate, the methods we use to investigate the past, and the ways we disseminate our scholarship. The ascendancy of the Internet, in particular, has reshaped historical practice, and we will consider how digital media affect the discipline, as well as how historical knowledge is constructed, maintained, processed, understood, and communicated. Digital historians often present their scholarship only in digital forms, where it is able to be transmuted, multiplied, revised, and reconstituted.

In this course we will get our hands messy in the spirit of experimentation and experiential learning. To understand the opportunities and the challenges for historians in the digital medium you have to engage it directly. Digital history teaching often proceeds from authentic learning pedagogy in which you immerse yourself in the material records, whether analog or digital, solve real-world problems necessary to produce a tool, model, project, or representation, and reflect on what you learned in the process. You are not expected to have any programming skills already, and you will not become a programmer in this class. All you need is a willingness to explore how digital technologies work. Peer learning will be encouraged throughout the semester--our ethic will be to learn from each other and share what we learn.

This research seminar will examine leading digital history works of scholarship, explore theories of narrative in the digital medium, and develop models of digital scholarship. You will be expected to conduct research around a selected

topic in history, focus your work on the creation of a digital project, and participate in class discussion on methods and theories of digital media. Projects may take many forms, including but not limited to: web site hypertext, xml/xsl markup of texts, geographic information systems data sets, database development, web programming, animation and simulation, and visualization technologies. The emphasis in this course, however, will be to develop an acute awareness of the consequences, opportunities, and challenges inherent in communicating historical scholarship in the digital medium. We will explore the possibilities for scholarly communication in the digital medium and the theoretical implications at every stage of our work.

This course is designed to give you a broad introduction to methods and practice of Digital History, including but not limited to the conversion of texts and other material into digital form, the encoding and structuring of historical sources into digital formats, and the presentation of historical narrative in the digital medium. The goal of this course is not to make you an expert in any given technique but rather to give you the experience necessary to continue to hone your skills and to evaluate and produce digital scholarship.

Grading:

Class Participation	30 %
Assignments and Blog	20 %
Mini projects	20 %
Final Project	30 %

Grading Scale:

A+ 97-100	C+ 77-79
A 94-96	C 74-76
A- 90-93	C- 70-73
B+ 87-89	D+ 67-69
B 84-86	D 64-66
B- 80-83	D- 60-63

F below 60

Blog and Assignments:

You should contribute a weekly blog post on the readings (8) and comment on a peer's post at least twice during the semester. These blog posts will be published on your WordPress installation in Create UNL. Cumulatively you should have at least 10 posts (at least 4,000 words). Posts are meant for you to try out ideas, react to the readings and materials, and demonstrate critical engagement with the major methods and works in the field. These regular, brief writings are an essential aspect of the practice of scholarly engagement. Posts should be 500-750 words, and responses should be under 500 words. Weekly posts are due by Wednesday at 5 p.m.

For the 4 written assignments to hand in:

- Use 12 point Times New Roman font, double-spaced.
- All written papers should be handed in Friday by 5 p.m..
- Late papers will be marked down a half letter grade for each day late. Papers will not be accepted more than a week after the due date.

Research Projects:

Mini project 1 Modeling

Mini project 2 Visualizing

Final Project: Each student will complete a final individual digital history project. The basis for the project should be sources related to an existing piece of research--a seminar paper, a chapter for a dissertation, an M.A. thesis. The research project for this course will be to develop an argument in digital form that is an extension of, or elaboration of this research agenda. Because the course will emphasize the production of an argument in digital form, students will be encouraged to begin with a project for which they have already done some initial primary research. Working with the professor, students will identify sources for digitization early on, and proceed to digitize and render these sources and the argument/narrative they will make. Students will concentrate on how design principles and the affordances of the medium affect their interpretive work and its relationship to the historiography. Students will also make a final presentation of their work to the class.

Projects will be evaluated based on the quality of the project's design and navigability, the originality of its historical argument, and the depth and sophistication of its historiographical engagement.

Class Participation: Students will be assessed on their participation in the discussion of readings and in their collaborative postings on the seminar's discussion lists. The discussions are encouraged to range from technical fixes to ideas about the nature of the medium and narrative.

<div align="center">*Digital Space and Technologies Package:*</div>

We will use Create UNL (https://createunl.com/) for project development. Each student will have a subdomain of Create UNL that they select, and we have documentation available here (https://bettylorang.github.io/create-unl/)for getting started. Or students can use this interactive tutorial: http://libpub.unl.edu/guide_on_the_side/tutorial/domain-of-ones-own

Students should not regard the domain or hosting as permanent spaces for their projects. Projects can live at a student's subdomain while they are students at UNL and for as long as UNL maintains the service (whichever comes first). When students graduate, or if UNL terminates the service, students will receive instructions on how to migrate their work to their own domain and web hosting. Students should not use their Create UNL space as the only location of project files. Students are encouraged to choose to migrate their materials even while they are still students, and to purchase their own domain and web hosting as needed, in order to begin establishing a stable, professional online presence.

Neither Create UNL/Reclaim Hosting nor CDRH (nor the Libraries) will be responsible for maintaining projects or for hosting them after the course ends or students leave or graduate. Students should not expect that if they share project URLs from Create UNL that the URLs will remain active in perpetuity.

<div align="center">*Course Schedule:*</div>

(Note: all weekly readings will be discussed in class on Tuesday, all written assignments will be due on Friday; readings, assignments and due dates are subject to change as necessary in the semester with at least one week advance notice)

8/22   Week 1:   Introduction: What is Digital History?

Readings:
Dan Cohen, "History and the Second Decade of the Web"
Rethinking History Vol.8, No.2, June 2004, pp. 293-301.
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/resources/essays/essay.php?id=34>

Vernon Orville Burton, "American Digital History," *Social Science
Computer Review*, Vol. 23 No. 2, Summer 2005 206-
220. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/resources/essays/essay.php?id=30>

Douglas Seefeldt and William G. Thomas III, "What is Digital
History? A Look at Some Exemplar Projects," *Perspectives on
History* (May 2009)
https://www.historians.org/publications-and-
directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2009/intersections-history-
and-new-media/what-is-digital-history

Assignment due Friday: Write a brief description of your proposed
research project (1 page) with a list of identified primary sources
and their location and availability (1 page).

8/29   Week 2:   Debates in Digital History

Readings:
Cohen, et al., "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History,"
Journal of American History (September 2009). <in Jstor>

Edward L. Ayers, "Pasts and Futures of Digital History"
http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/PastsFutures.html

Chiel Van Den Akker, "History as Dialogue: On Online Narrativity."
BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review, Vol. 128 No. 4 (2013):
103-117.

Andreas Fickers, "Veins Filled with the Diluted Sap of Rationality: A
Critical Reply to Rens Bod," *BMBN-Low Countries Historical
Review,* Vol. 128, No. 4 (December 2013): 155-163. (see also,
Bod's essay same issue)

Assignment due Friday: Set up CreateUNL account. Set up either *Scalar, Wordpress, or OMEKA* install on CreateUNL account. Digitize a historical object (text, image, media) and place it in one of the three content management systems. What does the migration from analog to digital to embedded in a CMS do to the source? Write a two-page assessment of how the implementation either achieves or fails to achieve your vision of the design of your research project. What limitations do these content management systems impose? What opportunities?

9/5   Week 3:   What is Digital History Scholarship?

Readings:
Philip J. Ethington, "Los Angeles and the Problem of Urban Historical Knowledege," *American Historical Review* 2000. <http://cwis.usc.edu/dept/LAS/history/historylab/LAPUHK/>

William G. Thomas III, and Edward L. Ayers, "The Differences Slavery Made: Two Communities in the American Civil War," *American Historical Review*, December 2003. <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/AHR>

Vincent Brown, *A Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760-1761: A Cartographic Narrative*
http://revolt.axismaps.com/

Richard White, *Shaping the West*
https://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/project.php?id=997

Clifford Lynch, "The 'Digital' Scholarship Disconnect," *Educause Review*, May 2014. <http://er.educause.edu/articles/2014/5/the-digital-scholarship-disconnect>

Edward L. Ayers, "Does Digital Scholarship Have a Future?" *Educause Review*, August 2013. < http://er.educause.edu/articles/2013/8/does-digital-scholarship-have-a-future>

Assignment due Friday: Complete the W3 HTML5 tutorial.
Inventory your sources and research materials. Design a curriculum
for self-instruction based on the needs of your project using the
following resources.

W3 Schools Tutorials https://www.w3schools.com/
  W3 HTML tutorial
  W3 SQL tutorial
  W3 PHP tutorial
  W3 XML tutorial
  W3 CSS tutorial
  W3 Javascript tutorial

The Programming Historian
http://programminghistorian.org/lessons/

Set benchmarks for the lessons you will take in weeks 4 and 5. Turn
in your one-page outline of lessons with commentary on how you
think each lesson fits with the goals of your research project.

9/12 Week 4: Consequences

Readings:
Roy Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a
Digital Era," *American Historical Review* 108, 3 (June 2003): 735-
762
http://chnm.gmu.edu/essays-on-history-new-
media/essays/?essayid=6

Lara Putnam, "Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized
Sources and the Shadows They Cast," *American Historical Review*
(March 2016). <in Jstor>

Anne Rigney, "When the Monograph is no Longer the Medium:
Historical Narrative in the Online Age," *History and Theory, Theme
Issue* 49 (December 2010), 100-117. <in Jstor>

American Historical Association, Guidelines for the Evaluation of Digital History Scholarship

Assignment due Friday: Complete at least 2 lessons related to your project. Write a two-page assessment of what you have learned and how your conception of digital narrative based around historiographical questions has either changed or adjusted. How do the affordances of the digital medium, rooted in the technologies you plan to deploy, affect the historical argument you are making?

9/19   Week 5:   Design

Readings:
Janet Murray, *Inventing the Medium: Principles of Interaction Design as a Cultural Practice* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013)

Johanna Drucker and Bethany Nowviskie, "Speculative Computing: Aesthetic Provocations in Humanities Computing," in Susan Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth, *A Companion to Digital Humanities* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004). <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/>

Assignment due Friday: Create a paper and material model prototype of your project's design and sources. Represent materially your digital project and its capabilities paying attention to Murray's design affordances and principles.

9/26   Week 6:   Mini project 1: Modeling

Reading:
Tim Hitchcock, "Big Data for Dead People: Digital Readings and the Conundrums of Positivism."
http://historyonics.blogspot.com/2013/12/big-data-for-dead-people-digital.html

Frederick W. Gibbs and Trevor J. Owens, "The Hermeneutics of Data and Historical Writing (2011 peer review version with open

comments)," in *Writing History in the Digital Age: A Born-Digital, Open-Review Volume*, ed. Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/data/hermeneutics-of-data-and-historical-writing-gibbs-owens/

Assignment due Friday: Using a small subset of primary sources for your project, implement a digital representation of these sources that exploits the processing capability of the digital medium based on your material model. Create a demonstration model (in CreateUNL) using HTML/CSS or the LAMP (Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP) stack.

10/3   Week 7:   Mini project 2: Visualizing

Readings:
Ben Schmidt, "Reading digital sources: a case study in ship's logs," and other posts starting with "Data narratives and structural histories: Melville, Maury, and American whaling," *Sapping Attention*, 15 November 2012, http://sappingattention.blogspot.com/2012/11/reading-digital-sources-case-study-in.html

Richard White, "What is Spatial History?" https://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29

John Theibault, "Visualizations and Historical Arguments," Writing History in the Digital Age (2012 revision) http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/evidence/theibault-2012-spring/

Assignment due Friday: Using a small subset of primary sources for your project, implement a basic visualization of these sources using one open source tool, such as:

        QGIS--geographic information system
        Palladio--data visualization
        Voyant--text visualization
        Gephi--graph and network visualization

MALLET--natural language processing
TimelineJS

10/10 Week 8:   New Media Storytelling

        Readings:
        "Snow Fall: An Avalanche at Tunnel Creek," John Branch (2012)
        http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/ - /?part=tunnel-creek

        "Welcome to Pine Point," Paul Shoebridge, Michael Simons (June 2011)
        pinepoint.nfb.ca

        QSWG--Queering Slavery Working Group (Tumblr)

        "Every Three Minutes" (Twitter)

10/17 Week 9   Fall Break

10/24 Week 10:   Research and Ethics

        "'This is Why We Fight': Defining the Values of the Digital Humanities," Lisa Spiro in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*

        "The Ethics of the Algorithm: Close and Distant Listening to the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive," Todd Pressner (2014)

10/31 Week 11:   Research

11/7 Week 12:   Research

11/14 Week 13:   Revision and Editing

11/21 Thanksgiving Break

11/28 Week 14:   Final Project Presentations

12/5   Week 15:   Revisions