Digital Public History, LSBC 708D

Library Science, 708D, Special Topics in Information Studies

Thursdays 6:00pm - 8:45pm, Spring 2015

Hornbake Library, 0108

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Course Description

This course explores the current and potential impact of digital media on the theory and practice of history. A central thesis behind this syllabus is that digital history is itself an increasingly public endeavor, and as such it makes sense to approach digital history as something very much in sync and in dialog with public history. We will focus on how digital tools and resources are enabling new methods for analysis in traditional print scholarship and the emerging possibilities for new forms of scholarship, public projects and programs. For the former, we will explore tools for text analysis and visualization and work on interpreting new media forms as primary sources for historical research. For the latter, we will explore a range of new media history resources, including practical work on project management and design. 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. 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.
- 2. Discover, evaluate, and implement digital tools and resources to support emerging and traditional forms of historical scholarship, public projects, and teaching.
- 3. Develop proposals for digital history resources with detailed plans for project management, design, outreach, and evaluation.
- 4. Understand and articulate the key issues in collecting, preserving and interpreting digital and digitized primary sources from the perspective of a historian.

Overview of Assignments

Blogging (40% of grade) Assignments are broken into three primary areas blogging, class participation, and projects. Below is an overview of the assignments followed by details about the particular assignments. 2 Reading response post (due Saturday by midnight the week before you lead discussion)

- 2 Digital tool or resource review post (due Saturday by midnight the week before you lead discussion).
- Proposal for print project blog post (Due on or before Feb 26th)
- Proposal for digital project blog post (Due on or before March 5th)
- Project reflection blog post (Due on or before May 7th)
- Commenting: 12 substantive comments on posts on the course blog. At least one comment a week.

In Class Participation (30% of grade)

- Tools/resources demonstration: Present a 10-15 min demonstrations of tools or resources which you reviewed for the blog to the class
- Lead discussion on a set of readings: What are the arguments of the readings you blogged about? How do they hang together or where are they in conflict? Come prepared with questions to keep discussion going.
- Class attendance and active participation in class discussions. Notify me in advance if you
 are going to miss class, missing more than two class sessions will significantly impact your
 class participation grade.

Project (30% of grade)

- Preliminary project pitches: a 3-5 minute "elevator pitch" for your research project or digital project. (In class, March 5th)
- Research paper (5,000-7,000 words) OR digital resource (digital resource and 300-700 word project statement). (Due April 23rd)
- Revision of research paper or digital resource. Posted online, either on the class blog or linked to from a post on the class blog. (Due, May 7th)
- Final project poster presentation: Create a conference poster and hand out to present your work in a mini-conference held on the last day of class (Due, May 7th)

Assignment Details

Read Strategically

Through out all of our readings here you are going to need to read strategically. You need to get what you need out of the book or article, this often does not require readying every word in an article or a book. On how to read for graduate seminars see, for example, Miriam Sweeney's or Larry Cebula's blog posts. The same is true for digital projects you are going to show and tell, you need to figure out enough of it to talk about it and think about it's implications but there is no expectation for you to master the given tool or digital resource.

Course Blogging

We are not simply going to learn about digital public history in this course, we are also going to do digital public history. That means we need to engage with the public web. To this end, a significant amount 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 readings you lead discussion on, once about the digital tools or resources you demonstrate, once with 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 thoughtful blogging. You need to get in, say something interesting, synthesize some thoughts and get out. Ideally briefly summarizing/explaining/showing what the readings or tools say or do, commenting on them or otherwise offering some new insights you think you can add, and then 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 this for a sense of the features of an academic book review. For notes on how to write blog posts see this post. Posts for a given week must be on the web at least four days before class (yes, if you want you can post it at 11:59 PM on that day).

Do not assume your reader has detailed knowledge of the things 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.

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 interdisciplinary field of digital humanities you can either "be online or be irrelevant." With that said, many 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 or a handle. 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. Do not hesitate to ask if you would like help with this process or want any advice about how to keep the conversation going.

Commenting is also an assignment

Beyond posting you are expected to contribute substantive comments to a minimum of 12 of your peers posts. Your comments should extend and contribute to the conversation. Good comments are an important genre unto themselves. Profhacker's guidelines for comments for a sense of the kind of comment ecosystem we are trying to produce. Along with that, see this piece on 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.

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. The blog extends the function of classroom and it is essential that everyone follow and participate in it.

Course Project(s)

Everyone will write two proposals: 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 5,000-7,000 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 that 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.

Print Project, study something digital:

The objective here is to approach digital media and content as historians. To that end, you are going to think about how to write something about digital that has to do with history. 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 public 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 regular appointments with a writing consultant in the writing center. (As an aside,

you have no idea how invaluable the sustained attention of someone from a writing center is, outside of a university environment this kind of attention to your writing costs a fortune and it is there waiting for you to use it for free.) 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. Along with that, you will likely end up with something you could publish in an academic journal.

Digital Project, build something scholarly:

In terms of a digital project, you should 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) A description of audience
- b) A comparison to existing projects
- c) A detailed description of the thing to be created
- d) A plan for outreach and publicity
- e) A 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 tours using a mobile app like HistoryPin that gives an interpretive tour of the history of the design of the national mall.

In the real world, basically all digital projects in this field are the result of the work of teams. To that end, if you want to work with a partner on a project please feel free to. However, I would like to see you break the work up between the partners and have each of you still do each of the individual parts of the writing and reflection bits.

If you decide to finish your digital project as your final project the expectation is that you have something that is at least a working proof of concept. In some cases, it will be possible to scope something tightly enough that you can make the whole thing during our course. That is, however, not necessary. The essential part of this assignment is to show that you can conceive of this kind of project and that you can make the large moving parts come together. However grand the thing you would like to see in the world is, there is some version of it that you can sketch out and put out there for everyone to see that you can get together during our time together in this class.

Books:

- 1. Gee. (2007). What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy.
- 2. Brown. (2006). <u>Communicating Design: Developing Web Site Documentation for Design and Planning</u>. Note: Be sure you buy the 2006 edition. The 2010 edition is structurally a

completely different book and the way the 2006 version is put together as steps in a process is part of the whole point of reading it.

- 3. Kirschenbaum. (2012). Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination.
- 4. Moretti. (2007). Graphs Maps and Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History.
- 5. Farman. (2012). Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media.
- 6. Rinehart & Ippolito. (2014). Re-collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory

Week By Week

1. Becoming digital public historians (week one, Jan 29th):

This is our first class; we will introduce ourselves to each other and spend a lot of time reviewing the syllabus. I will make sure everyone leaves with an understanding of how to register, post and work with the course blog. We will then take a bit of time to quickly read short posts about blogging as an academic.

In Class Readings for discussion

- 1. Scheinfeldt, Brand Name Scholar
- 2. Cohen, "Professors, Start Your Blogs"
- 3. Posner & Croxall, "Creating Your Web Presence: A Primer for Academics"

2. Defining digital history & public history (week two, Feb 5th):

This week is largely about defining digital history and its relationship to public history and the digital humanities. It's also about what the stakes in all this are. Across all of the readings consider both the arguments and the genre of writing they are being presented in. Format and genre are critical components of our work this semester and the differences between blogging, books and articles are as much on the table for discussion as the points in these pieces. PhillaPlace is an example of the kind of projects folks are creating in digital public history and Wordle is here as a kind of toy for starting to think about visualizing texts and the possibility of visualization as a mode of public history communication.

Readings

- 1. Cohen & Rosenzweig, Digital History, Introduction, Ch. 1
- 2. Weible, "Defining Public History: Is it Possible? Is it Necessary?"
- 3. Robertson, 'The Differences Between Digital History and Digital Humanities',
- 4. Spiro, Getting Started in the Digital Humanities
- 5. Cicire, Theory and the Virtues of Digital Humanities
- 6. Onion, <u>Snapshots of History: Wildly popular accounts like @HistoryInPics are bad for history</u>, bad for Twitter, and bad for you.

Practicums:

- a) Practicum: PhilaPlace: Demo the site, how it works, what it accomplishes
- b) Practicum: <u>HistoryPin</u>: Show us how the site works, how to add pins, how to create tours, how small organizations are using it.
- c) 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

Further Reading:

1. Guldi & Armitage, *The History Manifesto* Introduction (p. 1-14) and on chapter 4 big questions big data (p. 88-117)

3. The Web: Participatory? Collaborative? Exploitive? (week three, Feb 12th):

In public history we work to connect audiences and publics with the past. In this vein, the participatory and collaborative rhetoric that surrounds the web fits many of the values of public historians like a glove. This weeks readings explore issues around crowdsourcing and public participation in history on the web. This includes both the potential to connect with the missions and values of cultural heritage institutions and opens questions about what constitutes participation and what becomes exploitive.

Watch in Class: The Machine is Us/ing Us

Readings:

- 1. Rosenzweig, Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past
- 2. Ford, Why Wasn't I Consulted: The Web as A Customer Service Medium
- 3. Causer & Wallace, "Building a Volunteer Community; Results and Findings from *Transcribe Bentham*,"
- 4. Edson, <u>Dark Matter: The dark matter of the Internet is open, social, peer-to-peer and read/write—and it's the future of museums</u>
- Brabham, <u>The Myth of Amateur Crowds: A critical discourse analysis of crowdsourcing</u> coverage
- 6. Miner, <u>if everything on the internet has to be free, why isn't my healthcare, too?</u> (Read the comment thread too)
- 7. Frankle, More Crowdsourced Scholarship: Citizen History

Practicums:

- a) <u>Wikipedia</u>: how it works. Analyze three related wikipedia pages and talk pages what their history is. Teach the class how to do this.
- b) 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
- c) What's On the Menu?

Further Reading:

1. Saylor, Crowdsourcing the Civil War: Insights Interview with Nicole Saylor

4. Distant reading, text analysis, visualization as scholarly communication (Week 4, Feb 19th)

One of the most active strands of digital history and the digital humanities more broadly focuses on computational analysis of texts and the interpretations of abstractions of those texts. For the most part, texts has meant words, but we starting to get into computational modes of engaging with images and audio too. This week is about all of that, in particular, under the heading of distant reading. Throughout this week's readings think both about the subject (visualization) and about the formats of the readings (blog posts, books, open review publications, etc.) Because we are focused on public history in our course keep thinking about how these ideas translate and fit with ideas about communicating about the past to broader publics.

Readings:

- 1. Morretti, Graphs Maps and Trees
- 2. Jessop, <u>Digital Visualization as a Scholarly Activity</u> (This is behind a paywall but should be available when you are on campus or using the proxy)
- 3. Underwood, We don't already understand the broad outlines of literary history.
- 4. Schmidt, Making Downtown More Traditional
- 5. Blevins, Topic Modeling Martha Ballard's Diary
- 6. Graham, Milligan, Wiengart Writing the Historian's Macroscope
- 7. Fitzpatrick, Galloway & English Franco Moretti's "Distant Reading": A Symposium

Practicums:

- a) <u>Voyant</u>: Show us a bit of how it works, show us an example of how you might use it for historical research
- b) <u>HistoryWired</u>: Show us a bit of how it works. Does this change how you think about their collections?
- c) <u>Time Magazine Corpus of American English</u>: Think about how this interface enables different kinds of questions. Show us some examples.
- d) <u>Google n-gram</u>: Think about how this interface enables different kinds of questions. Show us some examples.

5. Designing digital projects: (week 5, Feb 26th):

Due: Print Project Proposals (400-800 Words posted to the Blog)

It's likely that many of you don't have experience with planning and developing projects, in particular digital projects. So, this week is about planning projects and drafting the documents involved in making a digital project, in particular a web project, happen. Brown's book is our main text, providing a roadmap for what decisions get made when. The NEH guidelines contextualize the format for a project proposal in a humanities context. Lastly, Kirshenbaum's piece get's at the vexing issue of sustainability. The practicums this week are two general purpose tools you might end up using for your projects.

Readings:

- 1. Brown, Communicating Design
- 2. <u>NEH Start-up guidelines, Section IV, Part 4.</u> Focus on the narrative section and talk through how this NYPL proposal illustrates those sections.
- 3. Kirschenbaum, "Done: Finishing Projects in the Digital Humanities"
- 4. Scheinfeldt, "Omeka and Its Peers"

Practicums

- a) Practicum: Omeka.net:
- b) Practicum:WordPress.com:

6. "MTV Cops" proposal pitch week (week 6, March 5th):

Due: Digital Project Proposals (400-800 Words Posted to the Blog)

Everyone in class is going to give the elevator pitch for the project that they intend to finish. No slides or anything. Just stand up, and in three minutes present the elevator pitch. Answer what you are going to do? Why it's worth doing? You'll explain how it is like things before, but also how it's different. It's important to be able to give the "MTV Cops" level explanation of your work. So work on that. After discussing the proposals, we will use remaining time in this session to check in on how the course is going. Think of it as a formative evaluation of the content and process of the course. It is great to get this kind of information in the middle so that it is still possible to tweak parts of the course going forward.

7. Digital media, materiality and formats (week 7, March 12th)

To really do digital public history, we need a very solid understanding of what exactly digital stuff is. This week we dig into what exactly digital objects are. We likely all have a sense of what things like documents, spreadsheets and digital photos and videos are, but it is essential that we go beyond their appearance on the screen to understand a bit about what bits, bytes, files, and file formats are.

Readings:

- 1. Kirshenbaum, *Mechanisms* (F0cus on the chapters 1, 2 & 3 pages 1-159)
- 2. Nilsson, File Format Action Plans in Theory and Practice
- 3. Arms & Fleischhauer, <u>Digital Formats: Factors for Sustainability, Functionality, and</u> Quality
- 4. Owens, The is of the digital object
- 5. Lowood, The Three Lures of Software Preservation, (pages 4-12) in <u>Preserving.exe:</u>
 Toward a National Strategy for Software Preservation
- 6. Bailey, TAGOKOR: Biography of an Electronic Record

Practicum:

- a) <u>Demo Mystery Hous</u>e: (Be able to explain what Kirshenbaum did with it in Mechanisms with the Hex-editor)
- b) Glitch some audio and image files -> Show us how to do this and what it means.

8. Spring Break: (March 19th) No Class

9. What are digital archives and what do they have to do with the public (week 9, March 26th):

Public historians and other humanists have been exuberant about the possibility of providing broad public access to primary source documents and the contents of archives. In this context, the use of the term "digital archive" has become a bit fraught. This week we figure out what different folks mean by the term in different situations and explore some exemplars of different notions of digital archives and their potential as modes of public history work.

Readings:

- 1. McGann, The Rationale of HyperText
- 2. Theimer, Archives in Context and As Context and A Distinction worth Exploring: "Archives" and "Digital Historical Representations"
- 3. Owens, What do you mean by archive
- 4. Bailey, <u>Disrespect des Fonds: Rethinking Arrangement and Description in Born-Digital</u>
 Archives
- 5. Schmidt & Ardam, On Excess: Susan Sontag's Born-Digital Archive
- 6. Phillips, Close Reading, Distant Reading: Should Archival Appraisal Adjust?

Practicum:

- a) September 11th Digital Archive,
- b) Bracero Archive
- c) The Shelley-Godwin Archive
- d) Rossetti Archive

10. Digital exhibition, hypermedia narrative & bots (week 10, April 2nd):

What does it mean to collect and exhibit/present/interpret digital objects? This week we explore this issue across new media art, source code and digitized materials. Along with thinking through issues of presenting digital objects we also explore the potential of turning our interpretations and exhibitions over to the machines themselves.

Readings

- 1. Ippolito & Reinheart. *Re-collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory* (focus on the chapter on social memory and on their suggestions at the end.)
- 2. Brennan, "Getting to the Stuff: Digital Cultural Heritage Collections, Absence, and Memory,"
- 3. Espenschied, Big Data, Little Narration
- 4. Sample, bots of conviction
- 5. Sherret, Conversations with Collections
- 6. Lubar, Museum Bots: An Appreciation
- 7. Kazumi, @TwoHeadlines: Comedy, Tragedy, Chicago Bears

Further Readings

- 1. Chan & Cope Collecting the present: digital code and collections
- 2. Owens, A Draft Style Guide for Digital Collection Hypertexts

Digital audio, oral history and sound studies (week 11, April 9th):

A huge area of work in public history is oral history and at this point that is basically entirely a digital affair. This week we explore what it means to do <u>oral history in the digital age</u>. Aside from the great work tied up in that particular program, we need to think about how <u>computational approaches to working with audio</u> can change what it is that we do in this space (bring in some pop-up archive links). Similarly, it's critical to remember that all formats and media have histories

and politics, hence why we are using this as an opportunity to better understand that through the introduction to Sterne's MP3: The Meaning of a Format.

Readings

- 1. Frisch, Oral History and the Digital Revolution
- 2. Boyd, Designing an Oral History Project: Initial Questions to Ask Yourself,
- 3. Van Malssen, <u>Digital Video Preservation and Oral History</u>
- 4. Sterne, Format Theory chapter of MP3: The Meaning of a Format
- 5. The HiPSTAS website and their grant proposal
- 6. Hsu, <u>Digital Ethnography Toward Augmented Empiricism: A New Methodological</u> Framework

Practicum:

- a) Audacity
- b) Soundcloud
- c) Popup Archive

11. Mobile media, place & mapping in public history (week 11, April 16)

Special Guest, Jason Farman

Increasingly, the screens people are turning their attention to are in their hands and their pockets. In this vein, there is tremendous potential for mobile media and mobile media has a direct and clear connection to place and location. There are projects like the Museum from Mainstreet app and the Will to Adorn app that try to enable participatory collecting, projects like Histories of the National Mall that work to situate events in historic sites. This week we look at these, and related projects, and read Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media to add a theoretical layer/framework for thinking about this work. We haven't talked about maps and place in general yet either, so we will also consider the "spatial turn" as one of the ongoing developments and areas of interest in digital history scholarship.

Readings:

- 1. Farman, Mobile Interface Theory
- 2. Tebeau, Listening to the City: Oral History and Place in the Digital Era
- 3. Guldi, "What is the Spatial Turn?" and the Spatial Turn in History
- 4. Leon, Brennan, Lester Mobile For Museums
- 5. Durington & Collins, New App City
- 6. Russick, A Place For Everything Museum Collections, Technology, and the Power of Place

Practicums:

- a) Mall History
- b) ARIS Games
- c) HistoryPin
- d) Museum from Mainstreet App
- e) Will to Adorn App

12. Playing the Past: Videogames, Interactivity & Action (week 12, April 23rd):

Videogames have rapidly become potent media for communicating ideas about the past. Historians, librarians and archivists have begun creating games and a range of interactive transmedia modes of communicating about the past. At the same time, many very successful commercial games, like Sid Mier's *Civilization*, *SimCity* or *Assassin's Creed* have invited a generation of players to enact or replay models of the past. In this session we will spend half of the class discussing Gee's book, which will help us unpack a range of ways to think about games and learning and how to read games and the other half discussing how ideas are represented and enacted in games that are specifically about the past.

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.

Readings:

- 1. Gee, What Videogames Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy
- 2. Mir & Owens, <u>Modeling Indigenous Peoples: Unpacking Ideology in Sid Meier's</u>
 Colonization
- 3. WNET, <u>Mission America Online Games about American History</u> (this is a grant proposal, you should also read the <u>NEH Digital Programs for the Public</u> grant guidelines for context)

Practicums:

- a) Playing and reading Argument Wars:
- b) Playing and reading 1066:
- c) Playing and reading Jamestown Adventure:
- d) Playing and reading Cotton Millionaire:

13. Makeup Week: (week thirteen, April 30th):

14. Class Conference Poster Presentations (week 14, May 7th):

Bring a poster reporting on the results of either your research project or your digital project. We are going to run the classroom as a conference and I will see if I can get folks from around the