Charting the Course toward Modernity:
Early Modern Travel and the Public Digital Humanities

Course description: What exactly does it mean to be modern? What about how we perceive and interact with the world and each other differentiates us from those who came before us? This course seeks to explore notions of modernity through the examination of early modern travel writing. The early modern period varies from definition to definition but generally falls somewhere between the 1300s and the 1700s. In scholarship, many cultural, intellectual, economic, and political themes have been looked to as defining characteristics of the period – think, for example, exploration and science, capitalism and globalization. But the foundation for most of these phenomena lay in the fact that during the early modern period traveling long distances and contacting far-off people became much easier (not to say it was easy).

This course is the experimental educational component of a digital humanities project to compile and map early modern global travels in an online repository. As part of their final project, students will contribute to the project by creating a web-based exhibit on an early modern travel account of their choosing. For the exhibit, students will be required to present the travelogue's metadata and an itinerary and map of the travel discussed in the account. The rest of the exhibit is up to the student; photos with description, audio, and video are all possible forms of presentation. Students who complete the project will be accredited on the website as project contributors. Over the course of the semester, students will learn how to interrogate their chosen travelogue through relevant primary and secondary source readings as well as making their own weekly entries in a journal of travels. By completing the course, in addition to learning about early modern global history, students will also have the opportunity to become familiar with various digital humanities methodologies (that also certainly have application outside of the humanities), such as text analysis, database management, mapping, video and sound editing. This course prioritizes history from a transregional perspective and the inclusion of non-Western texts and narrators. For their final project, multilingual students are encouraged to focus on texts in the language of their choice. **This course fulfills CASE S&H.**

Learning outcomes: By the end of the semester, students who complete the course will have:

- Studied primary sources produced by individual historical actors of various geographic origins that shed light on the economic, intellectual, political, and religious themes of the global early modern.
- Considered how the development of the aforesaid themes reflect changes during the period in question and contribute to contemporary notions of modernity.
- Learned to think critically about prevailing historical narratives by studying primary sources produced by individuals of various geographic, intellectual, and cultural backgrounds and considering them alongside relevant contemporary scholarship.
- Crafted and presented a well-researched academic argument that employs the latest tools in the digital humanities.

Course format: Each week of class will consist of two components, with one class session dedicated to each component. The first class session of the week will consist of analysis and

discussion of secondary literature connected to the week's theme. The class session will open with a short (no more than 5-minute) introduction of the assigned reading(s) by one student. The second session of the week is an experiential "lab" section. The class will devote this session to analysis of primary sources, discussing how their own interactions with the world can help us understand early modern sources, and/or becoming familiar with the digital humanities tools and methodologies that will help them complete their final project. Weekly readings will not exceed 50 pages.

Grade breakdown:

Readings introduction	5 pts
Discussion board posts/travel journal	30 pts
Final project proposal	10 pts
Database metadata entry	10 pts
Itinerary map	15 pts
Final project digital exhibit	20 pts
Peer review	10 pts
Total	**100 pts**

Assignments:

Readings presentation (5 pts): Over the course of the semester, each student will present the secondary readings for one class session. This should not take more than five minutes. In their presentation, students should answer the following questions:

- Who is the author (including in what discipline they work)?
- When was the reading written?
- Is the reading from a book, a journal, an edited volume? What is the major source titled?
- What is the author's primary argument?
- What support does the author provide for the argument? What are their main points?

Discussion board posts/travel journal (30 pts): Discussion board posts will be of two types. For the secondary readings discussed during the first class session of the week, students will be provided a discussion board prompt to which they are to provide a brief response. Responses should be no more than 200 words. If there is an aspect of the reading a student would prefer to discuss instead of responding to the provided prompt, they are free to do so. For the lab held on the second class session of each week, students will be prompted to describe an experience of their own corresponding to a weekly travel writing theme. This second discussion board will

form a travel journal over the course of the semester. For both discussion boards, upon making their own post, students are then to respond to one of their classmate's posts. Students will begin the semester with 30 discussion board points, and one point will be deducted for each post they fail to make.

[Students will receive more detailed instructions on the following assignments over the course of the semester.]

Final project proposal (10 pts): By the end of the fifth week of the semester, each student will propose the historical travel account that they would like to work on either individually or as a team of two. The written proposal will be no more than two-pages in length (double spaced) and consist of a brief description of the author and the account, followed by an explanation of the aspect of the account they would like to focus on, and concluding with the presentation method (i.e., paper, podcast, website, etc.). The proposal should also have a working title for your final project. If the project ends up changing from what is proposed, that is okay. The purpose of this assignment is to get students thinking about their project well in advance of the end of the semester.

Database metadata entry (10 pts): For this assignment, students will prepare their selected travelogue's metadata for entry into the project database in the form of a CSV file. Students will be provided the file format and entry criteria ahead of time.

Itinerary map (15 pts): For this assignment, students will extract the travel itinerary from their chosen travelogue and they will create a map using Google My Maps. Students may extract the itinerary using the method of their choice (manually or using text-analysis tools, including AI). Students will receive instruction on the methods available to them and on My Maps ahead of time.

Final project submission (20 pts): For their final project, students (individually or as a team of two) will construct an online exhibit that presents their chosen travelogue and discusses in the form of an argument a particular theme (or themes) that it contains. The exhibit may be limited to written word and images with description, or it may include audio and/or video. The only mandatory components of the exhibit are presentation of the travel account's metadata and a map reflecting the itinerary and route of the travel included in the account.

Peer review (10 pts): Each student will be assigned another student or pair's exhibit for peer review. Each individual student will write a short review (one double-spaced page) on the exhibit they received for review. Reviews should consider how effective the exhibit was in conveying information and how convincing the argument it presented was. All critiques in the review should offer solutions on how the project might be improved. **Note:** The review has no bearing on the final grade that the exhibit under review will receive. Final project grades will be given by the instructor.

Class schedule:

Week 1: **Introduction to early modern history and the public digital humanities**

16 January lecture readings:

- Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "Introduction," in *What is Early Modern History?*, pp. 1-12;
- Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "The Global Early Modern" in Wiesner-Hanks, *What is Early Modern History?*, pp. 80-94

18 January lab:

- R. Busa, "The Annals of Humanities Computing: The Index Thomisticus," pp. 83–90
- The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2
- Digital exhibit final project overview

Week 3: **Travel writing: documenting the early modern world**

21 January lecture readings:

- Peter Mancall, "Introduction," in *Travel Narratives from the Age of Discovery: An Anthology*, pp. 1-48

23 January lab:

- Visit from Wells librarian to familiarize students with routes for identifying a final project source; if time, in-class preliminary research

Week 3: **Travelling a shrinking world**

28 January lecture readings:

- "Rethinking the History of Europe's Expansion" and "Medieval Eurasia" in John Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, pp. 14-45

30 January lab:

- Sandra Young, "Navigating across Oceans," in *The Early Modern Global South in Print*, 81-100

Week 4: **Cartography: mapping the early modern world**

4 February lecture readings:

- Pinar Emiralioglu, "Projecting the Frontiers of the Known World," in *Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, 117-42

6 February lab:

- Sandra Young, "Mapping the Whole World," in *The Early Modern Global South in Print*, 61-79
- [Examination of early modern maps]

Week 5: **Science, curiosity, and wonder**

11 February lecture:

- Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, "Introduction: At the Limit," in *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, pp. 1-19
- Brian Ogilvie, "A Science of Describing," in *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe*, pp. 139-50

13 February lab:

- Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Iraj Afshar, "'Ajā'eb al-Maḵlūqāt," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*

Final project proposal due 15 February by midnight

Week 6: **Ethnography: early modern cultural encounters**

18 February lecture reading:

- Surekha Davies, "The epistemology of wonder: Amazons, headless men and mapping Guiana," in *Renaissance Ethnography*, pp. 183-216

20 February lab reading:

- Peter Mason, "Hermeneutics of the other: Montaigne and Columbus," in *The Ways of the World: European representations of other cultures, from Homer to Sade*, pp. 81-99
- [Group projects examining different examples of ethnography in travel writing]

Week 7: **Diplomacy**

25 February lecture reading:

- Kaya Şahin and Julia Schleck, "Courtly Connections: Anthony Sherley's *Relation of his travels* (1613) in a Global Context," pp. 80-108

27 February lab:

- Excerpts from Guy Tachard, *Relation of the Voyage to Siam* and Muhammad Rabi' ibn Muhammad Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaiman*

Metadata entry due 29 February by midnight

Week 8: **Text analysis and mapping double lab week,**

4 March: Text analysis

6 March: Mapping

Week 9: **Empire**

11 March lecture reading:

- Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A Tale of Three Empires: Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs in a Comparative Context," pp. 66-92.
- Bill Ashcroft, "Afterword: Travel and Power," in *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*

13 March lab reading:

- Excerpts from Camões, *The Lusíads*

Spring break: 16-23 March

Week 10: **Religion I: Pilgrimage**

25 March lecture reading:

- Shayne Aaron Legassie, "Pilgrim as Investigator," in *The Medieval Invention of Travel*, pp. 141-164

27 March lab reading:

- Miguel Ángel Vázquez, "'Coplas del peregrino de Puey Monçón': A Sixteenth-Century Spanish Poem about the Hajj," in *Narrating the Pilgrimage to Mecca*, pp. 74-90

Week 11: **Religion II: Proselytization**

1 April lecture reading:

- Liam Matthew Brockey, "Introduction," in *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China 1579-1724*, pp. 1-21

3 April lab reading:

- Excerpts from Pierre du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits: An Account of the Jesuit Missions to the Court of Akbar*

Itinerary map due 8 April by midnight

Week 12: **Commerce**

8 April lecture reading:

- Andrew Phillips and J. C. Sharman, "Introducing the Company-State," in *Outsourcing Empire: How Company-States Made the Modern World*, pp. 1-21

10 April lab:

- Excerpts from John Fryer, *A New Account of East-India and Persia*

Week 13: **Slavery and the slave trade**

15 April lecture reading:

- David Richardson, "Involuntary Migration in the Early Modern World, 1500-1800," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Vol. III: Dependence, Servility, and Coerced Labor in Time and Space*, pp. 563-93

17 April lab reading:

- Excerpts from Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job*

Week 14: **Women writing the world**

22 April lecture reading:

- Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Introduction: the travel-account," in *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800,* pp. 24-44

24 April:

- **Excerpts from Celia Fiennes, *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes***

Week 15: **Course summary and reflections**

29 April:

- Alain Touraine, "Introduction" and "The Light of Reason," in *Critique of Modernity*, pp. 1-32

1 May:

- Paul Longley Arthur and Tom van Nuenen, "Travel in the Digital Age," in *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, pp. 504-518

Completed exhibit due by 4 May at midnight