HIST 4501: From Vellum to Very Large Databases: Historical Sources Past, Present, and Future

This course will examine how information about the past has been (and is being) preserved. Historians rely on primary sources to inform and defend their arguments about the past, but digital technology is altering the form and the content of available records and, in the process, raising fundamental questions about the nature of historical analysis.   Students will examine illuminated manuscripts, operate an early printing press, and geo-reference historical maps as they explore familiar and unfamiliar ways of recording information and reflect on how these formats affect the study of history.

Instructor
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 10am - 12pm, Scholars' Lab, Alderman Library and by appointment

Schedule

Wednesday 3:30-6:00pm
Scholars' Lab, Think Tank (unless otherwise indicated)

For the first five weeks, weekly class readings will highlight the origins and early interpretations of 5 formats: handwritten manuscripts, early printed books,p hypertext and digital humanities, databases and digital history, and geographic information systems (GIS). Along with the readings, the course is designed to be "hands on" and will meet in several locations: Small Library, the Virginia Arts of the Book Center, to operate an early printing press, and the Scholars' Lab in Alderman Library to receive a tutorial on geographic information systems (GIS). Starting with the seventh week, students will be expected to conduct and present their original research as they complete their final paper. Finally, each student will present a nearly final draft to the class and each student will assist in evaluating her or his classmate's papers.

Requirements

Each student will be required to produce an extended paper (25 to 40 pages) on a topic, approved by the instructor, that relates the study of history with changes in media formats over time (the paper will conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*). That paper will be based on an appropriate analysis of primary source documents. Grades will be primarily based on the final paper, but class participation and the timely completion of smaller assignments will be taken into account.

Books to Purchase
Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship.
      Anne Kelley Knowles, Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2008.
Glut: Mastering Information through the Ages. Alex Wright, Washington, D.C. :
      Joseph Henry Press, 2007.

January 20: introduction to the class and handwritten manuscripts, class meets in the Small Library

> *Readings*
> "In praise of scribes" Johannes Trithemius
> *The Coming of the Book* Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin trans. David Gerard,New York: Verso, "Manuscripts"

January 27: printed books, location TBA

> *Readings*
> "Introduction," *The Nature of the Book*, Adrian Johns
> "The Word Made Print: Luther's 1522 *New Testament* in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Jane O. Newman *Representations*, No. 11 (Summer, 1985), pp. 95-133
> "Andreas Vesalius and the Anatomy of Antique Sculpture" G. Harcourt *Representations*, No. 17, *Special Issue: The Cultural Display of the Body* (Winter, 1987), pp. 28-61

> *Discussion Questions*
> How different were early books from the manuscripts they began to replace?
> What was the relationship between the author, the publisher, the bookseller, and the printed volume in the early years of printing? How does it differ from current notions of these roles?
> Why did Vesalius place his diagrams within sketches of classical statuary? What can his choice tell us about communicating knowledge in the midst of a scientific revolution?

February 3: printing books, class meets at Virginia Arts of the Book Center
> VABC is located at
> 977 Second Street, SE
> Charlottesville, VA 22902

Carpooling will be arranged. There is a fee for using the facilities, part of which may be reimbursed by the History Department. You will be able to take home one piece that you create.

February 10: hypertext and digital humanities, meet in NINES Office (5th Floor Alderman)

Readings

"As we may think" Vannevar Bush, *Atlantic Monthly* July 1945

A Companion to Digital Humanities, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, John Unsworth. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
www.digitalhumanities.org—companion

"The History of Humanities Computing" Susan Hockey
"How the Computer Works" Andrea Laue
"Classification and its Structures" C.M. Sperberg-McQueen
Jerome McGann "Marking Texts of Many dimensions"
"Text Encoding" Allen H. Renear
"Electronic Texts: Audiences and Purposes" Perry Willett

Assignment

Spend at least one hour searching through NINES (www.nines.org) an online textual archive to investigate possible paper topics. Create an account so that you can tag documents as you find them useful and save your searches. Then, write a 2 page paper to answer the following questions: How closely does the archive adhere to Vannevar Bush's description of hypertext? Can you tell how the text was (probably) marked up? Can you tell how the search engine was designed? Did these choices in markup and searching help or hinder your ability to find what you needed?

February 17: GIS, class meets in the Electronic Classroom in the Scholars' Lab

Readings

Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship, Anne Kelley Knowles

Assignment

Go to David Rumsey's historical map collection www.davidrumsey.com. Investigate the site and then create (in his Luna browser) a mashup (digital collage) of four historic maps that relate in some way to your research topic. Post the mashup to the Collab site along with a brief (2 paragraph) description of the maps you chose, why you chose them, and how the mashup has changed your understanding of them individually and collectively.

February 24: databases and digital history
Readings

Blackwell's *Companion to Digital Humanities*
"Databases" Stephen Ramsay
"Computing and the Historical Imagination" William G. Thomas, II
"Enlisted Men in the United States Army, 1812-1815: A Preliminary Survey" J. C. A. Stagg, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), pp. 615-645
"History in Hypertext" Edward L. Ayers www.vcdh.virginia.edu—Ayers.OAH.html

Assignment

Spend at least one hour exploring an on-line historical database as you further hone your paper topic. Then write a 2 page paper to answer the following

questions: How did the database represent its key sources (primary and secondary)? What paths were available for moving between sources (or people, or events, or places)? Did those paths follow a logical progression? Were you able to find what you were looking for? If not, why? Finally, how would an article based on information in your chosen database differ from the work of quantitative historians 20 years earlier? (See the suggested resource page for possible websites.)

March 3: trip to Alderman Library to explore research tools
> **4-5 page proposal due 72 hours before class**
>> Proposals should state a topic, discuss a possible thesis, present questions to be answered, and provide an early list of source material to be consulted. If possible, the proposal should also contain a tentative conclusion. Students are highly encouraged to discuss the proposal with the instructor prior to submission.
> **students will schedule individual meetings with the instructor this week**

Wednesday, March 10: spring break

March 17: students present research
> Each student presents a document they have encountered in their research which is causing a problem for them and receives feedback from the rest of the class on how best to proceed.

Monday, March 22: outlines due

Wednesday, March 24: discuss outlines
> students will schedule individual meetings with the instructor for this class period

March 31: no class, work on your first drafts

Monday, April 5: 1st drafts due

Wednesday, April 7: discuss first drafts
> students will schedule individual meetings with the instructor for this class period

Wednesday, April 14: no class, work on your drafts

Friday, April 16: second drafts due

Wednesday, April 21: students workshop second drafts

Wednesday, April 28: Too much information?
> Readings
>> *Glut: Mastering Information through the Ages,* Alex Wright, Washington, D.C. : Joseph Henry Press, 2007.

Tuesday, May 4: final paper due

Possible paper topics
Students are encouraged to use their imagination in designing an original research project that draws on the themes of the class and utilizes the resources of the University of Virginia Library System. However, here are a few topics which would be well within the scope of the course.

Printed Books: Special Collections has a complete copy of both Denis Diderot's original *Encyclopédie,* the first enlightenment attempt to compile all knowledge, and of its supplemental volumes. A paper could compare Diderot's organizational methods with earlier compilations and later encyclopedias to see how the organization of knowledge has changed over time.

Newspapers: Students will not be restricted to the five media discussed in the readings. The University of Virginia has a rich collection of early newspapers (in hard copy, microfilm, and digital collections). A student could analyze the way newspapers were formated over time and how each new format requires the reader to approach the text in a different way. The project could begin with newspapers' initial appearance in the early 17th century and continue through to the current on-line edition of *The New York Times*.

Digital Humanities/ History: The University of Virginia is a world leader in Digital Humanities research and publication with the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, the Virginia Center for Digital History, Rotunda (the electronic imprint of the University of Virginia Press), the Digital Scholars' Lab, and the newly created Center for Emerging Research, Scholarship, and Arts. Several of these organizations have been operating for over a decade, but no one has written a history of how they got started, or formally related their early struggles with the origins of digital humanities as a field or with the history of the internet. Along with the necessary documentation, all the people required for an oral history of these projects have offices in Alderman Library.

Overview of primary sources: This list barely scratches the surface of the library's collections.

Small Library, Special Collections: While all of Special Collections is a possible source for this class, here are several key collections which encompass many different media, and thus provide particularly rich food for thought:

> The Jorge Luis Borges Collection
> The Jackson Davis Collection of African-American Educational Photographs
> The William Faulkner Collection
> The Thomas Jefferson Papers
> The Cabell Family Papers (alone or with the Digital Archive)
> Newspapers in Special Collections
> Chappell, Ogg, and Tompkins Collections in the Art of the Book
> The Paul Mellon Collection and its website *Private Passions: Public Legacy*
> The Paul Victorius Evolution Collection

Digital Collections: Along with the many digital humanities projects created and maintained at the University of Virginia, as well as those made freely available by other institutions, Alderman Library has subscriptions to crucial collections of primary sources. Some of the more developed projects are listed below.

The Dolley Madison Digital Edition

The Papers of George Washington (online)

The Valley of the Shadow

Virtual Jamestown

Civil RIghts Television News Archive

The Virginia Emigrants to Liberia Project

The Countryside Transformed: The Eastern Shore of Virginia and the Railroad

Race and Place: An African American Community in the Jim Crow South

The Geography of Slavery Project

The Ground Beneath our Feet

One Hundred Years of Life on the Lawn

Wednesdays in Mississippi

The World of Dante

Aquae Urbis Romane: The Waters of the City of Rome

Lives of the Saints: The Medieval French Hagiography Project

Digital Roman Forum

The Rossetti Archives

The NINES Project

The Tibetan & Himalayan Digital Library

Rome Reborn

Early English Books Online

Early American Imprints

Early American Newspapers

Monticello Plantation Database

The Medici Archive Project

The Circus in America

Documentary History of the Construction of the Buildings of the University of Virginia 1817-1828

Monuments and Dust: The Culture of Victorian London

The Salisbury Project

The Salem Witch Trials: Documentary Archive and Transcription Project

Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture: Media Archive

The Walt Whitman Project