History 377/677: History in the Digital Age

Department of History, American University

Summer 2010
MW, 5:30-8PM
Anderson Hall, Room B-11

Course Website: http://clioweb.org/courses/digitalhistory/summer10/

Instructor: Jeremy Boggs
Email: jeremy@clioweb.org, boggs@american.edu
Office: 141 Battelle Memorial
Hours: MW 3:30–5PM (in-person)
IM: jboggs22 (AIM); jeremyboggs (Yahoo! IM)
Twitter: http://twitter.com/clioweb
Weblog: http://clioweb.org
Cell: 703.244.1139
Office: 202.885.6382
Skype: 703.596.0342, or chnm_jeremy_boggs

Introduction

What does it mean to study history in the digital age? How have relationships among teachers, researchers, students, librarians, archivists, curators, and the general public changed because of digital technology? What does the impact of digital technology mean for the future of the past? To explore those questions, this course introduces students to some of the major themes and developments in doing history with digital media and technology. As such, it a blend of the theoretical and practical, so we will be discussing intellectual problems with doing digital history while learning practical skills and applications in a variety of settings. Topics include methodologies for research with digital tools, the impact of collaborative and social media on the practice of history, teaching and learning history with new media, and basic web site design and development. Students will investigate the potential advantages and disadvantages of a variety of web technologies, and focus on a particular question or theme within digital history to produce a digital history resource.

Goals

By the end of the course, students will be familiar with:

- Current trends and issues in digital history, from a variety of perspectives (academia, education, museums/public history, libraries, and archives)
- Communication and networking: Weblogs, Microblogging, syndication, collaborative writing, wikis.
- Digital research tools and methodologies.
- Basic image editing and restoration.

- Basic understanding of HTML/CSS, web servers, databases, and content management systems.
- Basic project management, including steps and skills to concieve, design, develop, and implement an online digital histotory resource.

Schedule (Tentative, subject to change)

May 10 – Introduction and Housekeeping / Introduction to HTML and CSS

- Introduction to Course
- Getting Started with Social Media
  <http://clioweb.org/wiki/Getting_Started_with_Social_Media>
- **Lab: HTML and CSS**
  - XHTML Tutorial <http://www.w3schools.com/Xhtml/>
  - CSS Tutorial <http://www.w3schools.com/css/default.asp>

May 12 – Introduction to WordPress; Project Management

- **Lab: Installing and Modifying WordPress** - We will be installing WordPress on your web host. Be sure to bring information about your hosting account to class.
- Some sites built with WordPress:
  - THATCamp <http://thatcamp.org>
  - CHNM <http://chnm.gmu.edu>
  - Kathleen Fitzpatrick's Promotion Dossier
    <http://machines.pomona.edu/dossier/>
  - Conflict and Consensus <http://chnm.gmu.edu/mcpstah/>
- **Lecture: Project Management**
  - Cohen and Rosenzweig, Ch. 2–5.
    <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/starting/>
  - Boggs, "Digital Humanities Design and Development Process" series.
    <http://clioweb.org/2008/04/06/digital-humanities-design-and-development-process/>

May 17 – State of Digital History; Personal site address due

- Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*, Introduction and Ch. 1
  <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/introduction/>
- Ayers, "The Pasts and Futures of Digital History,"
  <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/PastsFutures.html>
- O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0?" <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>
- Wesch, Web 2.0...The Machine is Us/ing Us, 2007
  <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE>
- D. Parry, "Be Online or Be Irrelevant," *academhack* <http://academhack.outsidethetext.com/home/2010/be-online-or-be-irrelevant/>

- French, "Make '10' louder, or, the amplification of scholarly communication." <http://amandafrench.net/2009/12/30/make-10-louder/>
- **Discussion: Potential Final Project Ideas.**

May 19 – Historical Scholarship in the Digital Age

- Ayers and Thomas, "The Difference Slavery Made," <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/AHR/>
- Thomas, "Writing A Digital History Journal Article from Scratch: An Account." <http://digitalhistory.unl.edu/essays/thomasessay.php>
- "Making it Count," *Digital Campus*, episode 29. <http://digitalcampus.tv/2008/07/03/episode-29-making-it-count/>
- *Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence* <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/mcpress/plannedobsolescence/>.
- **Lab: Open**

May 24 – Museums, Libraries, and Archives

- Cohen and Rosenzweig, Ch. 6.
- Shirky, *Smithsonian 2.0* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=010SI6m9sfI>
- *Schnapp, "Animating the Archive," *First Monday*. Vol. 13, no. 8 (4 August 2008) <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2218/2020>
- Visit several of the following:
    - Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives <http://gulaghistory.org>
    - Flickr Commons <http://flickr.com/commons/>
    - America on the Move <http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/>
    - Museum of Modern Art: Online Communities. <http://moma.org/explore/communities>
    - Google Books <http://books.google.com>
    - September 11 Digital Archive <http://911digitalarchive.org/>
    - Transatlantic Slave Trade <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>
- **Lab: Using Omeka**

May 26 – Images and Imagination; Introduction to Web Design

- Morris, "Photography as a Weapon" <http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/08/11/photography-as-a-weapon/>
- Liu, "When Was Linearity?: The Meaning of Graphics in the Digital Age." <http://digitalhistory.unl.edu/essays/aliuessay.php>
- *Morris, "Which Came First?"
    - Part 1 <http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/09/25/which-came-first-the-chicken-or-the-egg-part-one/>
    - Part 2 <http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/10/04/which-came-first-part-two/>

- o Part 3 <http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/10/23/which-came-first-part-three-can-george-lionel-and-marmaduke-help-us-order-the-fenton-photographs/>
- **Lab: Introduction to Photoshop**
  - o Restore an old, damaged photograph.
  - o Create a header graphic for your WordPress site.
  - o Create a color mockup for your final project.

May 31 – No Class (Memorial Day)

June 2 – **HTML/CSS/WordPress**

- **Lab: Advanced HTML and CSS / WordPress.**

June 7 – No Class

June 9 – No Class

June 14 – Mockup Presentations; Mockups Due

June 16 – Project Meetings

June 21 – Project Meetings

June 23 – Final Project Presentations; Final Projects Due; Grant Proposals Due.

Requirements

Books

- Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digtial History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* (2006). Full text available at http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/

Software, Hardware, Hosting

Since this course uses computers and the Internet extensively, familiarity with both is essential. Please obtain an internet account at the earliest available moment and become comfortable with the software and protocols. Should you work at home or off-campus, learn how to do remote access so that you can be productive no matter your location. Although the university does not require the purchase of a computer, I would encourage you to consider the investment. You might also find a laptop handy if you are accustomed to a particular OS and web editor. Because of the nature of the course, you cannot depend on the university's public clusters or the availability of software. Your enrollment in the course indicates your interest in computerish things, and your tool set should reflect that interest.

Standards-based design is, on the whole, much more tractable than its predecessor,

convoluted table-based design. Semantic HTML is much easier to write, but Internet browsers carry the baggage of the Browser Wars and, as result, render pages styled with CSS differently. As any experienced web design and developer can attest, you will need several browsers to test your web work. For Macintosh, you'll need Firefox 3, Safari, and Opera. For Windows, you will need to test on Firefox 3, IE 7, and IE 6. While IE 7 is rapidly replacing IE 6 on Windows machines, IE 6 still has a significant market share, so testing on it is required.

You will need access to an image editing program. For those who envision using new media as an ongoing part of their history graduate work, Adobe Photoshop is the de facto standard. For those who see their new media work as occasional, Adobe Photoshop Elements (5.0 for Wintel and 4.0 for Mac) is an extremely powerful (and inexpensive) program that, except for some advanced color capabilities, has the same features as Photoshop CS4. There are open-source alternatives to Photoshop (Gimp is one such alternative) that you are free to use.

A good text editor is also a must. Adobe Dreamweaver is a good option, but there are many text editor applications. Mac folks, for instance, can use Textmate, BBEdit, or Coda, among others. For Windows folks, there are Notepad ++ and TextPad. But remember: this class focuses on how to write clean, semantic code, regardless of the text editor you use. I can try my best to help troubleshoot software questions in and out of class, but you should rely primarily on the software's documentation and company for support.

This class also requires access to web hosting that has, at minimum, PHP5 and MySQL5. Good web hosting is extraordinarily cheap: Dreamhost, for instance, provides a variety of plans that, after paying upfront for a year, end up costing $8/month. If you decide to go this route, consider teaming up with classmates to share an account and divide costs. Alternatively, I can provide free access on my own hosting account. This would include your own folder, username, and MySQL database. With this option, however, you work will be wiped at the end of the semester. If you are serious about making digital work an integral part of your history career, I highly recommend getting your own server space, to host your own blog/website and develop your projects.

A few suggested providers:

- Dreamhost (http://dreamhost.com)
- Bluehost (http://bluehost.com)
- GoDaddy (http://godaddy.com)

To connect to your server, you'll need File Transfer Protocol (FTP) software. There are plenty of cheap or free options here too. For Mac users, Cyberduck (free) or Transmit (~$30) are good choices. SmartFTP (free) and SSH Secure Shell (free) is available for Windows. FileZilla is a free, cross-platform options. There are a host of Firefox addons available as well.

You should also register a domain for your class weblog/portfolio, if you do not already have one. Domains, like hosting, are also incredibly cheap. Most web hosts will offer a free domain registration if you purchase server space.

Social Media and Publishing

- Blog - We will install WordPress on your server space in class.
- Twitter - Sign up for a Twitter account at twitter.com
- Zotero - Download the browser add-on, and sign up for a Zotero account at zotero.org.

Assignments

Class Participation – Class participation, in a variety of forms, is crucial to this course. In addition to leading or contributing to in-class discussions, I expect you to write regularly on your course weblog. I will on occasion ask you to write about specific topics or answer a specific question, but in general you are free to write about whatever you think is relevant, or will contribute, to the course. In addition to writing your own blog posts, I expect you to comment or link to the posts of your fellow classmates. Keep in mind that the audience for your blog is far broader than the instructor: Other students in class, and other interested individuals in the digital history field, will read your posts. Similarly, I expect regular participation on Twitter, in the the form of links relevant to readings or topics discussed in class, or conversation with people in and out of class. Participation is not about getting in a specific number of comments in class, or writing a specific number of blog posts or messages on Twitter. Its how well you contribute to the class, what others learn from you, and how you make.

Readings – All readings assigned on a particular date should be read before class. Come prepared to discuss the readings in a thoughtful, critical manner. You can easily prepare for discussion by writing a post reacting to the readings on your weblog. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are required readings for graduate students in the class, but undergraduates should, of course, feel free to read them as well. Additionally, if you know of, or find, other readings that are just as relevant to the course as what I have assigned, feel free to read and comment on those as well. The Web has made writing and publishing academic work extremely easy, and you can easily find dozens of other sources relevant to our topics.

Website Review – Write a 2-page review of a website on your blog, following the guidelines set in the *Journal of American History* <http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/submit/websitereviews.html>. Ideally, the website would cover a similar area or approach that your Digital History Resource would cover, but this is not required. I encourage you to look at past sites reviewed in the *JAH.*

Digital History Resource - Create a prototype for a web-based digital history resource. This can take on many forms: A collecting site, an online archive, an educational resource, an online museum exhibit. The resource can be static HTML, or it can use a content management system (CMS). The only restriction is that the resource must be content-based, and must present some argument or rationale for its existence. I highly recommend you use

previous research for this project, instead of starting something entirely from scratch. I also recommend you work in groups of 2-3. This assignment includes the following milestones:

- One-page proposal, as a blog post, detailing the scope of the project, the topical focus, the technologies and resources you plan to use, and a timeline of steps for completion.
- Color mockups (at least three pages) for your final project, saved as a PDF, and added as an attachment to a blog post explaining the design rationale for your site. Students will present their mockups to the class for critique.
- A One-page summary of the final project as a blog post, reflecting on the process of creation, and including a URL to the project.
- The project itself.

Grant Proposal* – Graduate students taking this course must complete a grant proposal of six (6) pages for the development of their digital history resource, using the National Endowment for the Humanities' Digital Humanities Start-up Grants Format as the basis for the grant. See http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/digitalhumanitiesstartup.html#howto for details. Turn this in as a Word document or PDF to the instructor by email or download on your site.

Grades

Grades represent an evaluation, not a reward. They will be assigned in the following manner:

A—Outstanding work, complete mastery of the material presented, combined with some originality.
B—A solid command of the material with some minor gaps or mistakes.
C—Some knowledge of the material; Infrequent but significant confusions and errors present.
D—An incomplete, minimal knowldge of the material; Frequent and/or major confusions and errors
F—A complete lack of understanding of the course material.
I—There are no incompletes given in this course except in cases of bona fide and documented instances in accordance with the regulations of the university.
P—For a "pass" a "B" average is required.

In a class where collaboration and peer feedback are frequent, punctuality is absolutely necessary. Assignments not ready for presentation cannot benefit from class feedback; late blog posts, for example, result in fewer comments and less exchange among participants. Therefore, assignments are due on the date indicated on the syllabus; blog posts that reflect on readings, for example, should be posted at least a day before the class meets in order to give me and your fellow classmates a chance to comment.

If you receive a grade or criticism from me with which you do not agree, feel free to discuss it with me during my office hours or by appointment. I am open to changing a grade if given sufficient reason, but be *very* prepared to make your case. I will not discuss grades by email, phone, or instant messenger; only in person, by appointment.

A Word of Warning: I will not accept technology-related excuses for late or incomplete assignments. Computers, like many other things built by human beings, are imperfect. A computer or other technology-related problem can (and probably will) occur, so you should take steps to minimize these problems. Back up your work obsessively. Complete your assignments as early as possible. If your computer fails, your hard drive crashes, or your Internet service goes down, make sure you have access to other computer resources. There are several computer labs for students on campus, which are free to use.

Assignments in the course are weighted as follows:

Undergraduates:

- Class Participation - 50%
- Website Review - 15%
- Digital History Resource - 35%

Graduates:

- Class Participation - 50%
- Website Review - 10%
- Grant Proposal - 10%
- Digital History Resource - 30%

All assignments are required to receive a passing grade for the course.

Policies

Communication

I have provided numerous ways which which you can contact me. Feel free to use any, and do not hesitate to ask questions or get help if you need it. Please note, however, that I will not discuss grades by phone, email, or instant messenger. If you'd like to discuss your grade, please make an appointment to talk with me in person. All class announcements and any individual correspondence will go to your AU email account, as well as on the course website.

Attendance

Attendance in class is required. Despite this being a course about doing history in the digital age, few if any digital tools can replicate the benefits of sitting together in a room with other individuals and talking. We will do plenty of communicating outside of class, but mainly to make the limited time that we have in-class much more meaningful. Excused absences include religious holidays, athletic meets (if you are on a team you must submit a copy of all absences at the beginning of class) and illness with a doctor's note. In the event that students miss class, they are still responsible for all assignments.

Students with Disabilities

I am more than happy to work with all students to accommodate any disability. Please provide documentation of your disability and a summary of your needs by the second week of class.

Academic Integrity

In a world where borrowing/remixing/republishing content has become the norm, proper use of materials—citations, quotes, et. cetera—is required. Additionally, entirely passing off the work of someone else as your own, or blatant copying of work without permission, whether its content, code, or design, will not be tolerated. Enrollment in this class means you must be familiar with the Academic Integrity Code for American University. The Code can be read at <my.american.edu/gateway.cfm?group=acad>.