A Domain of Your Own

Assignments

Assignment Overview

- Requires students to secure a domain and server space, install web software, and customize their sites
- Students will work individually, though they can help each other if they encounter rough patches
- Due by Friday, September 14
- Must be completed in order to finish many other assignments, particularly the blog

Acknowledgments

This assignment was adapted from the sterling model developed by Brian Croxall.

Rationale

So: the internet. It's kind of a thing, and it doesn't appear to be going away. It is the new media of our historical moment. There are many things that are important about the internet, but most importantly for our class: the internet is a space where writing happens. A ton of it, actually. For at least this one very important reason, learning how to make use of the internet is important for students working in humanities fields, especially in the context of a writing-intensive class. You of course know how to use the internet for finding information, but you will now get some experience creating information: about yourself and your investigation of technology, literature, and new media. I have four primary goals in asking you to build your own website:

1. Becoming facile with web publication is a good first step toward gaining skills you can use in your college career, co-ops, and careers.

2. Having your own website provides you a platform to begin doing and sharing that work with others in the academic and professional communities.
3. Having your own website will enable you to complete your blogging assignment for this class while beginning while building a portfolio of work for use after and outside this class.
4. Finally, I believe it's important for you to have a voice on the web that's *yours*, something beyond content you contribute freely to whatever commercial platforms are currently popular (though those platforms have their place). By the end of the semester you may agree with me about this or disagree, but I would like you to experiment with having a domain of your own, at least for a little while.

The Nitty Gritty

Option 1: Jekyll and Github Pages

We will explore Markdown, Jekyll, and Github Pages in class during our first week or so together. Recently flat HTML platforms like Jekyll have been getting lots of buzz: they load quickly and don't have all the overhead of a database-driven platform like Wordpress. Once the system is set up they're remarkably easy to use, but the setup is more complicated than WP.

We will largely follow Barry Clark's tutorial, Build A Blog With Jekyll And GitHub Pages, though some details have changed since 2014. If you want to prepare for this option ahead of class, you might peruse the supported Jekyll themes for GitHub Pages. There are other Jekyll themes that will work with Github Pages, but the ones on that list work best if you're not familiar with Github or Jekyll. Once your blog is setup, you can edit your Markdown locally and sync with Github, or you might consider Prose.io to create and edit blog posts directly online. For additional help, see Amanda Visconti's Jekyll/Github Pages tutorial at the Programming Historian

Option 2: Wordpress

If you prefer to use a Content Management System to create your website, Wordpress is a popular option, and an easy one using a domain service such as Reclaim Hosting. These directions assume you are using Reclaim, but if you already use another host, or if you prefer to start using another one for this assignment, let me know. I won't require you to use Reclaim Hosting to complete this assignment successfully. I strongly recommend Reclaim because they grew from the Domain of One's Own initiative from the University of Mary Washington, they support academic users phenomenally, they offer the cheapest hosting and domain service I know of for students, and their customer support is phenomenal. Every semester a few students will ask me about various free

Wordpress options, which is totally understandable! In general these services do not give you the back-end access to your domain that I want to cultivate in this assignment and are more in line with option #3 outlined below. Note that option #1 is totally free if that is a primary concern for you and you are fulfilling a contract for an "A" or "B" grade.

Wordpress Procedure

1. Purchase a domain from www.reclaimhosting.com and **send me an email letting me know your domain name**. You are not required to use your own name in the domain; there are certainly arguments to be made for anonymity. If you think you might turn this domain into a professional site in the future, however, consider domain names that will convey the right image.
2. Install WordPress on your domain.
3. Choose a new theme to install on your site and activate it.
4. Because Wordpress is such a common platform, spam is a real problem in comments for any new WP site. To help with this, install Akismet as a plugin. Get an API key and activate it.
5. Create an "About" page. On that page write a brief paragraph or two about yourself that includes the following information: a brief paragraph about yourself. You might discuss what you're studying (generally) in school and what your educational or career goals are, or you might choose to describe some other aspect of yourself. You do not have to name yourself here, either—you are allowed to adopt a pseudonym or personae.
6. Create one other static page about *something*. It could be where you post an assignment you do for class. It could be about a hobby.
7. Find one thing that you wish your website could do. Find a plugin to do it, install it, and activate it.

8. Post your first blog entry for the blogging assignment. The precise date of this post might vary depending on your agreed grade contract, but I *strongly advise* you to complete this first entry in the first few weeks of the semester regardless of how many total posts you will be writing over the semester. Remember you are not allowed to write more than one post per week for credit and I find it is much easier on students to work hard early in the semester so they can be more flexible later in the semester.

9. When you post your first blog entry, email me your domain, the name of the theme you installed, links to the two pages you created, and the name of the plugin you installed. and, by this deadline.

Option 3: "Out of the Box" Website

This option is the broadest, and so I won't outline all of the steps as precisely as in Options 2 and 3. This option is only available to students who contracted for a "C" grade. In short, however, under this option you may choose any "out of the box" blogging solution you like, such as Tumblr, Wix, &c. You will likely have a bit less control over your domain using this option but you will be able to complete and submit your required blog posts.