Digital History | History 696 | Fall 2013

Fred Gibbs [email] (486 Research I)
If you'd like to meet for any reason, please suggest a time convenient for you.

Course Description

This course explores the theoretical and methodological issues raised at the intersection of the history profession and technology. It aims to provide conceptual fluency on broad topics such as the uses of new media in relation to history and historical narrative, the implications of copyright law on access to historical data and scholarship, the changing role of museums and libraries, and the politics of authority and expertise in knowledge networks. The course also examines in some depth the future of historical research, especially how powerful new research methodologies now allow historians to ask and answer fundamentally different kinds of questions. Overall, the course seeks to challenge the typical conceptions of how one ought to produce and consume history, and, more broadly, to provide guidelines for effectively using technology in the humanities.

Course Goals

- Understand the theories and principles of new media and their potential impact on the humanities, particularly the history profession.
- Conversational fluency: understand current debates and speak intelligently with both skeptics and advocates about the history and future of digital history.
- Appreciate the theoretical possibilities and practical limitations of digital archives, new research methodologies, and modes of scholarly communication.

Course Expectations

- Thorough preparedness and engaged participation in every meeting.
- Original 300-word critical reaction "essays" posted to the course blog before each class. These should NOT summarize the readings, but critically evaluate them and ask questions that will guide our discussion.
- Perseverance and tolerance for frustration with hypothetical discussions: digital humanities engages with new methodological problems and professional challenges raised by rapidly shifting technology and new media. Must be able to have fun while groping.
- Do not suffer in silence. I try to situate discussions squarely within course themes and readings, but I expect that you'll ask for clarification if such connections are not apparent.

Final Project

The goal of the final project is to show that you have grasped the topics presented in the course and can speak intelligently about how they are relevant to your research/career(s). You'll being evaluated on the extent to which you do that in the project. Start early and get help often. Some possibilities:

- ~4,000-word historiographical review on some topic related to the interactions between humanities and technology
- 4 ~1000-word book review articles related to history/new media/digital history/digital humanities
- begin a history project (ideally related to your research interests) that takes a non-traditional form:
    - a suite of blog posts about applying principles of this course to your own work or field
    - a digital whitepaper / manifesto that describes how you'd like to see digital history / humanities evolve over the next few years
    - a pictorial history of some topic that develops an argument (per Staley)
    - an on-line exhibit using Omeka a set of data visualizations and interpretations

Grading

Ultimately, you are whimsically and subjectively graded on my perceptions of your ability to show facility with course material. This happens mostly in your short essay responses (aka blog posts), but mostly in class discussions and the final project. I do not grade individual reaction essays, but I comment on them and will let you know if I find them lacking in some respect. All other work will be explicitly graded. If you have questions about your performance/grade during the semester, I will be very happy to meet with you to discuss how things are going. I understand that everyone comes into the course with different skills and backgrounds. **Serious effort goes a long way toward your grade!**

- Active and intelligent participation in class discussions: 30%
- Original and articulate blog posts: 30% (more about this on the blog guidelines page)
- Final project: 30% (you will be welcome to show me early versions to make sure you are on the right track)
- Presentation of Final Project: 10%

This syllabus only scratches the surface of the topics that inevitably arise during discussion. I expect that your particular interests will focus and direct the discussions. In fact, that you retain such control is central to the success of the course. This is a polite way of saying that you share some responsibility in making this class relevant to your life/work. With feedback from you, I'll do my best to make sure that it is.

Required books:

- Gregory and Ell, *Historical GIS* (Cambridge, 2007) ISBN: 978-0521671705
- Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture* (Penguin, 2004) ISBN: 978-143034650
- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (Verso, 2005) ISBN:978-1844671854
- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Harper, 1993) ISBN:978-0060976255
- Alex White, *The Elements of Graphic Design (2nd ed.)* (Allworth, 2011) ISBN: 978-1581157628
- John Willinsky, *The Access Principle* (MIT, 2006) ISBN:978-0262512664

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

I recommend you read the the assignments in the order presented, but you won't instantly fail if you don't.

1. Introduction to the Course and Digital History

- In honor of Roberto Busa (d. Aug 2011): *TIME Magazine* (1956): "Religion: Sacred Electronics"
- Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, What Is Digital humanities...?
- Susan Hockney, History of Humanities Computing
- Cathy Davidson, Humanities 2.0: Promise, Perils, Predictions
- Discussion: What *is* digital humanities? Digital history? Studying vs. using "the digital"

13. New Scholarly Spaces: Blogs, Tweets, Wikis, and Digital Identities
- Dawn Gilpin, Working the Twittersphere
- (various), pick an article (and prepare to summarize it) from the Twitter Reading List
- Martyn Jessop, Digital Visualization as a Scholarly Activity
- Chuck Tyron, Blogging, Scholarship, and the Networked Public Sphere
- Roy Rosenzweig, Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past
- Discussion: How is new media transforming hierarchies and relationships in Academia?

2. History and Narrative
- Hayden White, The value of narrativity in the representation of reality [@JSTOR via GMU Libary]
- Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*
- Discussion: What are the principal criticisms of narrative? How might new media improve historical scholarship?

3. History and Principles of New Media
- Espen Aarseth, Nonlinerarity and literary theory
- Alan Liu, When Was Linearity? The Meaning of Graphics in the Digital Age
- David J. Staley, Sequential Art and Historical Narrative: A Visual History of Germany
- Marshall McLuhan, The medium is the message [excerpt from *Understanding Media*]
- Discussion: How is new media relevant to historical research and writing?

4. Designing History
- Alex White, *Elements of Graphic Design (2nd ed.)*
- Jason Santa Maria, Critiquing

5. Distant Readings
- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (skip last section on evolutionary theory if so inclined)
- Timothy Burke, a response to *Graphs, Maps, Trees*
- Discussion: Pros and cons of distant reading for historical inquiry

6. Text mining
- Michael Wesch, The Machine is Us/ing Us (4.5 min. video)
- Marc Parry, The Humanities Go Google
- Douglas Oard, A Whirlwind Tour of Automated Language Processing...
- Literary Lab, Quantitative Formalism: an Experiment

7. Columbus Day

8. Metadata, Mark-up, and Text Encoding
- msporny, Introduction to the Semantic Web (6 min. video)
- Allen Renear, Text Encoding

- Buzzetti and McGann, Critical Editing in a Digital Horizon
- Problems with searching and metadata
- Discussion: Why do machines need to read, anyway?

9. Databases & APIs
- Julie Meloni, "Working with APIs", parts 1, 2, and 3.
- Google, Introduction to Databases.
- CHNM, Omeka Introductory video.
- Demo: Creating Visualizations with APIs
- Lab: Using Google Fusion Tables in your own research
- Discussion: Why should historians care about programming?

10. Mapping and GIS
- Richard White, What is spatial history?
- Ian N. Gregory and Paul S. Ell, *Historical GIS. Technologies, Methodologies and Scholarship.*
- Discussion: Is mapping just too complicated to be useful?

11. Copyright
- Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture*
- Fair Use Example: crash course | blue puppies | court case (read the DISCUSSION section)
- Brian Lamb, Dr. Mashup
- Overview of Licenses: GNU GPL, Creative Commons
- Discussion: What's at stake for historians?

12. Access
- John Willinsky, *The Access Principle*
- Steve Kolovich, very short update in Inside Higher-Ed
- Discussion: How does copyright and access matter to historians?

14. Scholarly Critiques, Peer Review, and Publishing
- William Thomas III, Writing a Digital History Journal Article from Scratch
- Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Planned Obsolescence
- Robert B. Townsend, How is New Media Reshaping the Work of Historians?
- Robert B. Townsend, Assessing the Future of Peer Review
- Scott Jaschik, Tenure in a Digital Era
- Lab: Create a wiki that outlines a digital review rubric

15. Presentations & Conclusions

Presentations are limited to 5 minutes! There are no specific form or style requirements, but you should have visual aids to make the ridiculously short time limit more useful. Your main goal is to highlight the intellectual merit and originality of your final project.

SEND SUPPORTING MATERIALS (powerpoints, links, bribes) BEFORE CLASS so we don't have to waste time swapping out computers.

Discussion: What did you learn in this course? What do you wish you had learned more about? How does one be a digital historian? Why won't you be one?