HIST 7370
Texts, Maps, and Networks:
Methods and Readings in Digital History

Professor Cameron Blevins
Northeastern University, Fall 2018
Meserve Hall, Room 206
Weds. 4:35-7:05pm

Course Description

This course explores different ways of doing history in a digital age. It is designed to expose students to the wide variety of work being done computationally by historians and other humanities scholars. Each week, we will look at a different topic in the emergent field of digital history. We will spend the first half of class discussing readings and projects related to that week’s topic. During the second half of class, students will get a hands-on introduction to a particular tool or method, such as building an online public history exhibit in Omeka or constructing a 3D model of a historical building using SketchUp. During the last several weeks of the course, students will choose a particular topic or method and develop their own expertise in that area.

Learning Goals

- **Literacy**: Understand the field of digital history and be able to critically read and evaluate the work that is being produced in this field.
- **Methods**: Gain familiarity with a suite of digital tools and develop more advanced expertise in one of these methods or applications.
- **Learning How to Learn**: Build a foundation of knowledge, skills, and strategies that you will be able to apply to our own work moving forward.
- **Professionalization**: Become a better graduate student, historian, and digital citizen, from practical tips and tricks to larger ethics and values.

*Note: This course satisfies the introductory requirement for the Graduate Certificate in Digital Humanities.*
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Assignments

Participation

You are expected to attend each class having completed the week’s readings and/or tutorials and be prepared to discuss them. As part of that preparation, you will write 2-3 questions related to the week’s theme and post these questions to the course Slack channel by midnight the night before class. Please read each of your classmate’s questions prior to the start of class. If you need to miss a class, notify me ahead of time and we will then come up with a plan or alternative assignment to catch you up on what you missed.

Professionalization

As part of your participation in this class, I would like you to get to know the wider digital humanities community at Northeastern. Please attend at least three digital humanities events on campus (talks, brown bag lunches, etc.) sponsored by NULab or the Digital Scholarship Group and write a 500-word reaction on your personal website/blog. I will be alerting you to upcoming events over our Slack channel.

Discussion Leader

Each week, one or students will act as the “discussion leader.” You have two responsibilities in that capacity:

1. Give a short (five to seven minute) presentation on at least one supplemental reading or digital history project related to that week’s theme, explaining its significance and how it relates to the topic and other readings for that week. These presentations will help expose the entire class to a wider look at the field. Please consult with me over the preceding week to get ideas for readings/projects.
2. Kick off discussion for that week. I will not talk during the beginning of discussion; you are expected to have synthesized your classmates’ discussion questions and have a plan for what discussion avenue you wish to pursue.

If multiple people are interested in the same topic, you are welcome to pair up as discussion leaders. In those weeks, the two of you will work together to coordinate the presentations and lead discussion jointly.

Final Project

https://cblevins.github.io/18-dig-hist/assignments
In your final project, you be completing your own work of digital history. The particulars of the project are up to you, including its topic or content and the mode of analysis and interpretation. This project can be created collaboratively or individually, and I will be working with you over the course of the semester to develop a feasible project and plan for completion. My only requirement is that you: a) create a clear historical interpretation or narrative, and b) develop new technical skills - either by learning an unfamiliar method or by developing a substantially new level of expertise in a tool or technique with which you are already familiar.

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Assessment

Assessment will be tailored to fit each student’s needs. At the beginning of the semester, you will work with me to define: a) your individual learning goals for the course, and b) your strategy for how to achieve those goals. During the semester I will be giving you qualitative feedback on how you’re progressing towards those goals in terms of assignments, activities, and contributions to the class. You will have opportunities to change paths during the course of the semester depending on how your interests develop. Finally, at the end of the semester you will be evaluating and reflecting on your work during the semester. Different students will have different learning goals and pathways towards those goals. Although I will be giving you a final grade, I will not be using standardized criteria for determining that grade. In short, I don’t want you to ask “What do I need to do to get a good grade?” and instead ask “What do I want to get out of this class and how will I accomplish that?”

Office Hours

My office is located in Meserve Hall Room 237. Given the variability of graduate student schedules, I will not be holding weekly office hours at a set time. Instead, please contact me to set up a time to meet that works for both of us.

Computers

Because this is a digital history course, we will be using a variety of software and applications both inside and outside of the classroom. Please bring a laptop to class - if you do not have access to one, look into borrowing one from the library’s different options or contact me to make alternative arrangements.

Slack Workspace

We will be using a Slack workspace: https://fl8-dig-hist.slack.com/ for announcements, posting discussion questions, distributing readings, sharing datasets, etc.

Health and Wellness
Your ability to learn is shaped by external factors outside of the classroom. Every student should prioritize their physical, emotional, and mental health. Any student who is struggling to do so (lacking a safe and stable place to live, having difficulty affording sufficient food to eat every day, facing financial stresses, etc.) is urged to contact We Care (https://studentlife.northeastern.edu/we-care/) or the University Health and Counseling Services staff (http://www.northeastern.edu/uhrs/). If you are comfortable doing so, please contact me directly if you need to discuss any issues that are impacting your ability to learn in this class.

**Reasonable Accommodation**

Students with documented learning disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation in this class. If you have a learning disability, please notify me and also register with [Northeastern’s Disability Resource Center](https://studentlife.northeastern.edu/disability-resource-center/) at 20 Dodge Hall or call 617-373-4428.

**Academic Integrity**

All students are responsible for understanding and complying with Northeastern University’s policy on Academic Integrity. Cheating or plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated and will be immediately referred to the Office of Student Council and Conflict Resolution. For more details, see [http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/](http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/).

**Title IX**

Northeastern’s Title IX Policy prohibits discrimination based on gender, which includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship or domestic violence, and stalking (for more information, see the website for the Office for University Equity and Compliance (https://www.northeastern.edu/ouec/). The Title IX Policy applies to the entire community, including male, female, transgender students, and faculty and staff. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, confidential support and guidance can be found through University Health and Counseling Services staff (http://www.northeastern.edu/uhrs/) and the Center for Spiritual Dialogue and Service clergy members (http://www.northeastern.edu/spiritual-life/). By law, those employees are not required to report allegations of sex or gender-based discrimination to the University. Alleged violations can be reported non-confidentially to the Title IX Coordinator within The Office for Gender Equity and Compliance at: titleix@northeastern.edu and/or through NUPD (Emergency 617.373.3333; Non-Emergency 617.373.2121). Reporting Prohibited Offenses to NUPD does NOT commit the victim/affected party to future legal action.

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Schedule

I. Orientation

Week 1, 9/5: Introduction

Week 2, 9/12: The Digital Age

Reading

- Julia Angwin, Jeff Larson, Surya Mattu and Lauren Kirchner, “Machine Bias”, ProPublica, 23 May 2016.

Assignments

- Register for an account and domain name with Reclaim Hosting (Cost: $25).

II. Approaches and Methods

Week 3, 9/19: Archives and Historical Data

Reading

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past (1997), Chapter 1 (pp. 1-31)

Assignments

- Complete tutorial: Miriam Posner, “Get started with OpenRefine”
Note: Digital Scholarship Group / NULab Fall Welcome Event on Monday, 9/24, from 3:00-5:00pm

**Week 4, 9/26: Public History and Digital Collections**

**Reading**

- Sheila A. Brennan, “Public, First”, *Debates in Digital Humanities 2016*.

**Assignments**

- Choose one public history website built with Omeka and write a 500-700 word review of the website on your personal webpage. Here’s a list of showcased projects: [https://omeka.org/classic/showcase/](https://omeka.org/classic/showcase/). Include screenshots of relevant points.

**Week 5, 10/3: Virtual Reality**

Note: Class will meet in Snell Library Room 140

**Reading**

- Nikki Erlick, “20,000-year-old artifacts, 21st-century technology: Museums are turning to virtual reality, apps, and interactive experiences to keep tech-savvy visitors engaged” *The Verge*, 6 May 2017.

**Assignments**

- Complete “Getting Started With SketchUp” tutorials, [Parts 1 and 2](https://www.vectary.com/video/127). *Note: You can either download a trial version of SketchUp or use Snell library’s computers*

**Week 6, 10/10: Visualization**

**Reading**

- Lauren Klein, “Feminist Data Visualization; Or, the Shape of History”, 24 January 2017.

**Assignments**

- Erin Bush, “Creating a Narrative Timeline with Timeline JS”

**Week 7, 10/17: Maps**

**Reading**


Assignments

• Jim Clifford, Josh MacFadyen, and Daniel Macfarlane, “Installing QGIS 2.0 and Adding Layers” The Programming Historian

Week 8, 10/24: Texts

Reading


Assignments

• Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, Voyant Tutorial, Doing Digital History: 2016

Week 9, 10/31: Networks

Reading


Assignments

• Miriam Posner, “Getting Started with Palladio”

III. Putting it Together

YOU will be in the driver’s seat for Weeks 10 and 11.

1. The class will vote on a topic(s) that you would like to learn more about. This can consist of revisiting a topic (ex. “we want to know more about spatial history”) or exploring a brand-new topic (ex. “we want to learn about machine learning”). I will then select readings for these two weeks and we will discuss them during the first hour of class.
2. Each student will choose one method or skill that you want to learn in more depth. I will be working with each of you to find tutorials, hands-on
practicums, or other strategies that you will work on during the second half of these classes.

**Week 10, 11/7: Practicum**

*Reading*

- TBD

**Week 11, 11/14: Practicum**

*Reading*

- TBD

**Week 12, 11/21: No Class, Official Holiday**

**Week 13, 11/28: The Big Picture | Project Workshop**

*Reading*


**Week 14, 12/5: Presentations and Wrap-Up**