

History 9808A: Digital History (Fall 2014)

Department of History, Faculty of Social Science, Western University of Guelph

Credit weight: 1.0 credit

Prerequisite: none

Restrictions: Restricted to students in the Public History programme, or with instructor permission.

Instructor: J. Andrew Ross, PhD
Office: Room 1208 Lawson Hall
Hours: Mondays 10:00-12:00, and any other time by appointment
Email: jarring@gmail.com

Class Schedule and Location: Wednesday 12-pm, Lawson Hall 2270C

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to new and inter-disciplinary digital history approaches, methodologies, and tools, and to explore applications to text, image, map, and other media sources. There will be flexibility to accommodate the specific disciplines and interests of the students and a special focus will be on the application of digital history to public history practice.

The class will be held once a week and will feature instructor and expert presentations, demonstrations, workshops and discussion. Students will complete weekly readings, contribute to discussions, and complete two projects that apply digital humanities tools. Participation will be evaluated through blog posting, in-class discussion, and peer review.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students will

- Have increased digital history skills, and be able to comprehend and use appropriate language of digital history research and practice
- Be able to understand and discuss the advantages of different methodologies of digital history inquiry and presentation
- Have learned to collect, manage, and manipulate digital data from various sources
- Be able to formulate, direct, and complete digital history projects
- Have communicated digital history topics in a public forum

Evaluation

Participation and Blogging (50%)

- In-class participation (20%)
 - Students will be evaluated on the insights they bring to discussions based on readings
- Online (blog) participation (30%) and responses
 - Students will set up and maintain *personal blogs* that will serve to communicate and project updates. Please note that these will be publically accessible (now and for the foreseeable future) so proper standards of decorum are expected. [Blogger](#) and [Wordpress](#) are two popular blogging sites. Please make sure to use an app that has a comments feature. (Tumblr does not).
 - Blog addresses must be emailed to the instructor ASAP (no later than before class **September 15**).
 - Specific students will be assigned to lead the blogging each week.
 - A minimum of **six** (6) substantial blogs (over 500 words) is required
 - Students should also set up a [Twitter](#) account (optional). Mine is @hoghee

Digital Landscaping Project (25%)

- There are two options for this project, for which we will discuss appropriate resources and applications in class.
 - Option A:
 - Using images, maps, art, and textual descriptions, students will recreate an interesting or significant historical landscape, historical site, or property. Special attention should be paid to *change* in the landscape. The project will include a short essay (800-1200 words) on the digital methods and process of producing the project, as well as an explanation of its historical significance. We will discuss appropriate resources and applications in class.
 - Option B:
 - Using floor plans, blueprints, insurance maps, images, art and textual descriptions, students will reconstruct a historic building or historically significant site. Special attention should be paid to *change* in the building's purpose or form.
- Both options require a short essay (800-1200 words) on the digital methods and process of producing the project, as well as an explanation of its historical significance.
- Proposals due **October 15**
 - A 500-word blog post that discusses the choice of subject, the sources to be used, and the digital tools to be applied
- Project due **November 3**.

Historical Website or Visualization Project (25%)

- Option A (Historical website)
 - Students are to construct a website about a historical topic of their choice. You are required to use the knowledge, skills, and research from course workshops and seminars, and encouraged to build on the acquired research from assignment #1. The website will be complimented by a 1200-1500 words of new text on the project.
- Option B (Historical visualization)
 - Alternatively, students may focus on creating detailed visualizations of a historical topics using at least two of the following formats:
 - 3D modelling using [SketchUp](#) and GoogleEarth 3D Warehouse
 - Before and after presentation
 - A webmap
 - A visualization based on database or textual analysis (e.g. [Voyant](#))
 - Other format that meets with instructor approval.
- In-progress projects will be presented in-class (5-10 minutes each) on **November 24** for peer and instructor feedback and commentary
- Due: **December 8**

Course Resources

The course website (<http://jandrewross.ca/history-9808a.php>) will function as a noticeboard, the central repository for weekly readings, updates and links to assignments. Make it your first stop!

Required Texts

There are no required texts for the course, but weekly readings will be posted on the course website.

Optional readings

Students looking to get a broader of digital history issues in preparation for the course are encouraged to read:

Hal Abelson, Ken Ledeen & Harry Lewis. *Blown to Bits: Your Life, Liberty, and Happiness after the Digital Explosion*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Addison--Wesley, 2008. Full text is freely available online at <http://www.bitsbook.com/>

Daniel J. Cohen & Roy Rosenzweig. *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005. Full text is freely available online at <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/>

Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (not available online – see <http://www.nicholascarr.com/> for purchase options.) Get a basic idea from his 2008 article in *The Atlantic* – [Is Google Making Us Stupid?](#)

Class Schedule

Date	Theme
Sept 8	What is Digital History?
Sept 15	Internet, Media and History
Sept 22	Digitization and the Infinite Archive
Sept 29	Image manipulation and Intellectual Property
Oct 6	Digital Maps: The Potential of Spatial Humanities
Oct 13	NO CLASS – Thanksgiving (Assig #1 proposal due Oct 15)
Oct 20	3D visualization
Oct 27	Big Data and Programming
Nov 3	Text Transformation and Mining (Assignment #1 due)
Nov 10	Digital Exhibition and Web Design
Nov 17	Gaming the past
Nov 24	Project Presentations (in progress)
Dec 1	3D Printing
(Dec 8)	(no class - Assignment #2 due)

E-mail Communication

As per University regulations, all students are required to check their <uwo.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact.

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded in any electronic media without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer.