

History 9808A Digital History

Fall Term
Wednesdays, 3:30-5:30 pm, Lawson Hall 2270C

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Course website:

<http://williamjturkel.net/teaching/history-9808a-digital-history-fall-2011/>

Course Description

History 9808A is a one-semester graduate course on digital history that emphasizes both the presentation of history on the web, and the use of computational techniques to work with digital resources. It is required for students in the UWO public history program; other graduate students may take it with my permission. Digital history students may also be interested in the companion studio course History 9832B: Interactive Exhibit Design, offered in the winter term.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for the course other than a willingness to learn new things and the perseverance to keep working when you're confused or when you realize that you could spend a lifetime learning about the topics and technologies that we will cover in class, and still not master them all. Students will come into the course with very different levels of experience and expertise. Some, often most, will be familiar only with the rudiments of computer and internet use. A few may already be skilled programmers.

Course Materials

There are two kinds of readings posted on the class website. "Readings for Discussion" must be done in advance by every student in the class, as they will form the basis of our seminar discussions. "Background Readings" provide some of the detail about particular methods, techniques or technologies. You should dip into these if you are especially interested in the week's topic or if you need more information for a particular assignment.

The following texts are required:

Abelson, Hal, Ken Ledeen & Harry Lewis. *Blown to Bits: Your Life, Liberty, and Happiness after the Digital Explosion*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Addison-Wesley, 2008.

Copies available in the UWO Bookstore.

Cohen, Daniel J. & 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/>
If you'd prefer to read a paper copy the book can be ordered inexpensively from Amazon, Chapters, etc.

Witten, Ian H., Marco Gori & Teresa Numerico. *Web Dragons: Inside the Myths of Search Engine Technology*. San Francisco, CA: Morgan-Kaufmann, 2007.

Copies available in the UWO Bookstore.

Evaluation

Since this is a seminar course, careful reading and thoughtful discussion—during every meeting of the class—are essential to success.

You will be graded on your participation in seminar discussions (20%), on your reflective blogging (40%; see below) and on a number of small assignments (40%). Your final grade will reflect how much you've learned or accomplished in this course, rather than any overall level of technical attainment.

There will be no interim or final examinations.

Blogging and Tweeting

Every student in the class will have an academic blog and will be required to make regular posts to it. This use of blogging is to encourage you to engage in 'reflective practice,' that is, to force you to think about your learning and research as you are doing it.

If you have never blogged before, spend some time familiarizing yourself with existing history blogs (there is a list at <http://hnn.us/blogs/entries/9665.html>). In the class you will have to write four blog assignments of about 1000-1500 words each. In addition to these, I will encourage you to post entries to your blog whenever you have something to say about history.

Before the first class you should go to either WordPress or Blogger (not both) and create an account and a blog. If possible, create the blog under your own name; if not, choose something professional sounding. Post an introductory message about

yourself and then send me the URL of your blog so that I can add you to the course blogroll for History 9808A. You should also go to Twitter and create an account under your own name. Send me your Twitter user name.

Wordpress: <http://wordpress.com>

Blogger: <http://www.blogger.com>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com>

Use of Computers and Wikipedia

You will obviously be using computers for this course. If you don't have one of your own, you can use a machine in the department or in one of the campus computing labs. Unlike many other courses, however, I also encourage you to use your own laptop (if you have one) during seminar discussions. Take notes, look things up on the web, blog about the ongoing discussion, send tweets. To get the most out of the course, you will want to experiment with new forms of interaction and learning.

In this class you will be exposed to a lot of technical terms and ideas which may be new to you. You should get in the habit of looking these up in Wikipedia whenever you come across something unfamiliar. You've probably heard that Wikipedia is an unreliable source. That's true, but it's true of any source. In this course we will discuss a number of strategies for reading Wikipedia and other online sources critically. We will also talk about how academics can help to improve the quality of Wikipedia.

Tentative Schedule (Weekly Topics)

1. Going Digital
2. The Infinite Archive
3. Open Source, Open Access and Open Content
4. Search and Information Trapping
5. Social Search
6. Markup Languages
7. Links, Hypertext and Spidering
8. Mashups and Collective Intelligence
9. Digitization and Visualization
10. n-Grams, Text Mining and Machine Learning
11. Locative Technologies and the Internet of Things
12. Histories of the Future

Consult the course website for up-to-date information.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf