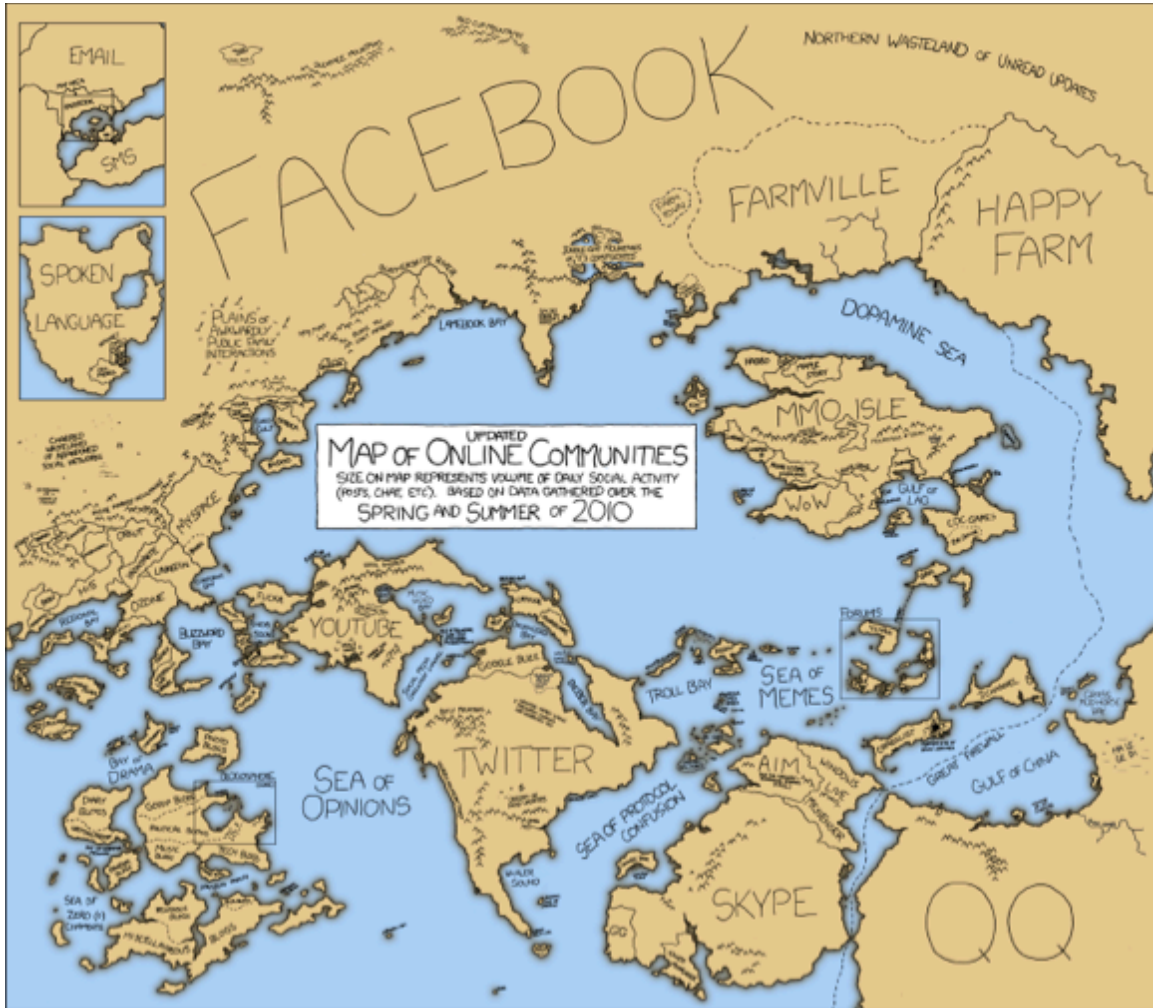


HISTORY 9808a
Digital History
WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Fall 2013 **Draft Syllabus**



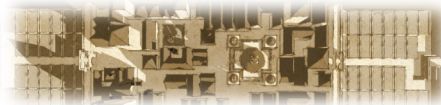
Map of Online Communities, Spring and Summer 2010. Source: <http://xkcd.com/802/>

Instructor:
Dr. Josh MacFadyen
Email: joshmacfadyen@gmail.com
Office: Lawson Hall 2270D
Office Hours: Monday 10-12 am

Course:
Department of History
Time: Monday 3:30-5:30pm
Lawson Hall 2270C
www.joshmacfadyen.com/teaching

Course Description

It is sometimes said that the central function of the digital revolution is increased access to databases; historians are only beginning to realize the extent and implications of this access. Digital history is the use of computers, digital media, and other tools for historical practice, presentation, analysis,



History 9808a – Digital History, 2

and research. This course emphasizes both the presentation of history on the web, and the use of computational techniques to work with digital resources.

This course is required for UWO Public History students; 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.

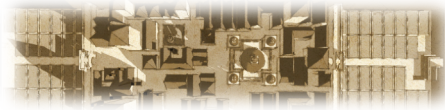
History 9808 is comprised of one seminar and/or workshop on every Monday afternoon. We usually begin by discussing new literature on digital history, and then we put theory into practice by attempting these techniques on personal computers and the machines in the digital history labs (LH 2270B and LH 2270C). There will be some flexibility in readings and topics depending on the interests and skill levels of the class, but some of the key issues we discuss are:

- What is digital history?
- How is historical information stored and retrieved?
- How do public historians use the web?
- How can programming improve historical research?
- How has digital history changed maps, models, and photographs?
- Can we generalize thousands of pages of text without close reading?

Prerequisites and Outcomes

History 9808 is an introduction to digital methods and tools, and since all students will have a range of experience in this area there are no set prerequisites for the course. Evaluation is based on your participation and interaction with the course material, your critical analysis of digital history methods, and your enthusiasm and aptitude for developing new digital research and presentation skills. You must be willing to learn new techniques and whether you are a digital neophyte or an experience programmer, you will hopefully all realize that you could spend a lifetime learning some of these skills without completely mastering them.

Learning outcomes will include a greater awareness of digital history and its role in public history and other historical research. You should all be able to write cogently about the key issues listed above and make a case for, or in some cases against, the development of other digital research methods.



History 9808a – Digital History, 3

You will also come away from the course with a digital portfolio that will showcase your work using some of the following platforms and tools:

- Blog and website creation (Wordpress, Omeka)
- Microblogging (Twitter/Hootsuite)
- 3D Modeling (SketchUp, Google Earth)
- Basic Geographic Information Systems (ArcGIS, Quantum GIS)
- Mobile and web mapping (Google Maps, Open Street Map)
- Basic programming (Python) and data visualization
- Digital video editing and image manipulation (Gimp, HistoryPin)

Evaluation

Rather than an overall level of technical attainment, evaluation in History 9808 is based on your participation and interaction with the course material, your critical analysis of digital history methods, and your enthusiasm and aptitude for developing new digital research and presentation skills.

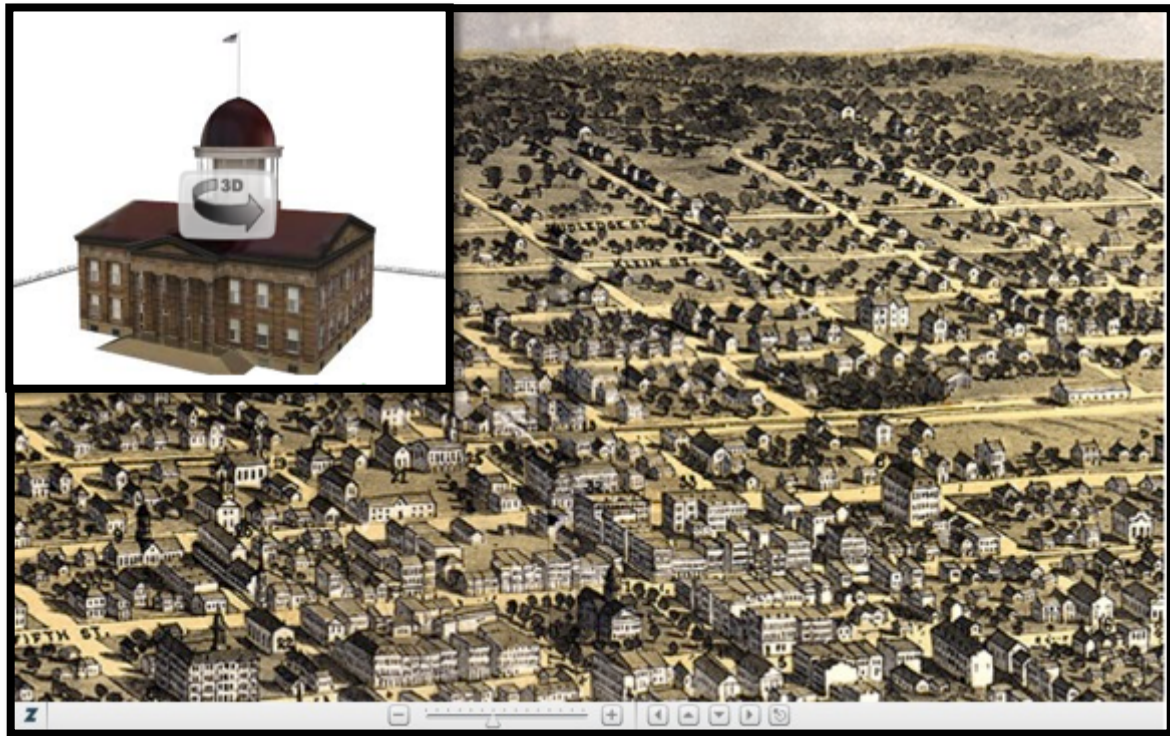
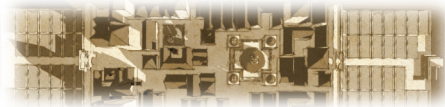
Breakdown

- In-class Participation (Seminars) 20%
- Online Participation (3+ Blog posts) 30%
- Assignments (2 digital research projects) 50%

There will be no interim or final examinations.

In-class Participation (Seminars) 20%

Since this is a seminar course, careful reading and thoughtful discussion—during **every meeting** of the class—are essential to success. Participation will be graded each week based on your evident preparation, initiative, and discussion of the seminar readings, as well as your response to other student comments and their in-class assignment presentations and dry-runs.



Scalable birds-eye map of Springfield, IL (Zoomify); Inset, 3D model of Old State Capitol (Google). Source: JAH [Building the Digital Lincoln](#)

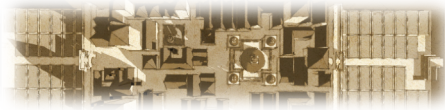
Seminar readings will be finalized in the first week of class and will all be available online. The following texts are optional:

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.

Full text is freely available online at <http://www.bitsbook.com/> If you'd prefer to read a paper copy the book can be ordered inexpensively from Amazon, Chapters, etc.

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.



Online Participation (Blogging and Tweeting) 30%

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 at least **three blog posts** of about **400-800 words** each (topics TBA). In addition to these, I will encourage you to post entries to your blog and Twitter account whenever you have something to say about history.

Blog posts are not essays – they are simply there to show that you've been playing with the material and showing off some of your results. The posts will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- **Clarity:** is it well written? Does the blog post follow proper writing conventions?
- **Engagement:** does the post engage with the week's topic? Does it demonstrate that you have used the tools?
- **Description:** what is the tool?
- **Analysis:** Be critical. If you are frustrated, if you do not think something makes sense, or if a tool does not seem useful, this is OK. If you think it is the best thing since sliced bread, this is OK as well!

Your participation will also increase as you read and leave constructive comments on classmates' blog posts.

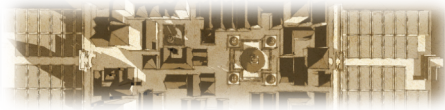
Getting Started

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>



Assignments (2 digital research projects) 50%

These assignments are intended to build **cumulatively** on your blogging and in-class workshops, and assignment 2 may be on the same general topic/location as assignment 1. More detailed assignments will be distributed in class.

Assignment 1 (due 28 October): 25%

Digital landscape

Using a combination of historical aerial photographs, maps, landscape paintings, sketches, and textual descriptions, digitally recreate an interesting or significant North American landscape, national historical site, or survey a historic property. Choose either a site whose features were historically significant, or choose a site whose cover and land use changed demonstrably over time. The landscape or site should be no larger than a few kilometers, but speak to me if you have a larger site in mind. Write **800-1200 words** about the historical or personal significance of this place and the methods you chose to research and recreate it.

-or-

Digital doors open

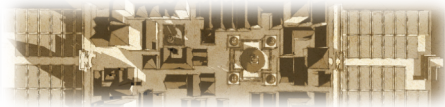
Using a combination of historical floor plans, blueprints, fire insurance maps, photographs, sketches and textual sources, digitally reconstruct a historical building or indoor national historic site. Choose either a building that is historically significant for its architecture and design, or for lesser-known structures, choose a building that changed demonstrably over time. Write **800-1200 words** about the historical or personal significance of this building and the methods you chose to research and recreate it.

Assignment 2 (due 2 December): 25%

Historical website (textual)

Create an appealing html website about a place, person, or topic of your choice, supported by historical research and linked to multiple historical websites. Note this website may feature or build on the place(s) or themes you explored in Assignment 1, but the website should contain **1200-1500 words** of new text, as well as multiple primary sources, links, pages, and images.

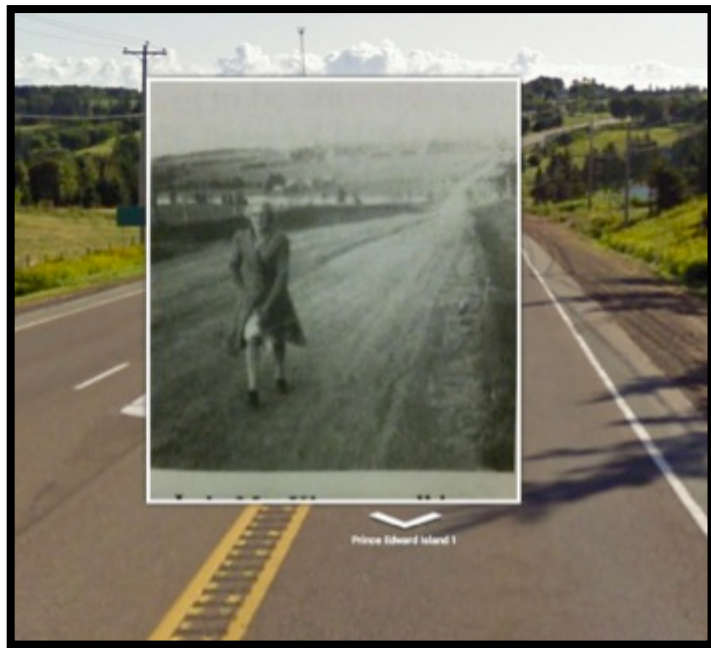
-or-



Modeling historic sites (visual)

Using the place(s) or themes you explored in Assignment 1, create visualizations of your topic of choice showing how it changed over time. Share the visualizations in at least two of the following formats:

- 3D model on SketchUp and Google Earth 3D Warehouse
- Re-photograph(s) on your blog, HistoryPin, etc.
- Before-and-after image on your blog
- A webmap
- Other formats with my approval



HistoryPin photo of Lulu MacKinnon walking on the TCH before pavement, Clyde River PE

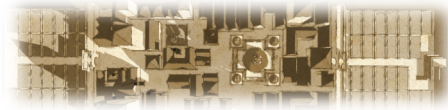
This option focuses primarily on the visual expressions of your work, and only **400-500 words** of new text are necessary. The new text should document how you created and shared the visualizations, and the challenges posed by primary sources.

Submission of Work:

An emailed attachment or link to your assignments and blog posts must be submitted before midnight on the day they are due; otherwise, they will be considered late.

Assignments which do not meet the deadline, or which are submitted late without a formal extension, will have marks deducted at the rate of 2% per day. Weekends count in the calculation of late days. Please do not submit assignments to the History office.

Students must keep an electronic copy of their assignments. It is also a good idea to save a copy of the email containing the submission in the event I do not receive an assignment you believe you have submitted.



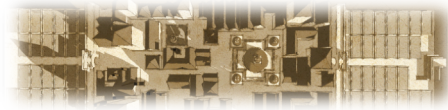
Use of Computers and Wikipedia

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) Outline

What is Digital History? From Wikipedia to the 9/11 Archive	9 Sept
Social Media, Blogging, HTML	16 Sept
Archival: Digitizing Documents, Internet Archive	23 Sept
Textual: OCR, Text Analysis and Topic Modeling	30 Sept
H-Programming, Databases	7 Oct
No class	14 Oct
Don Lafrenier, H-GIS	21 Oct
Visual: Image manipulation, Copyright I	28 Oct (Assignment 1 due)
Audio/Podcasting: file sharing, Copyright II	4 Nov
Rob MacDougall, Gaming the past	11 Nov
Advanced Data Visualizations	18 Nov
3D Modeling, Printing, Flythroughs	25 Nov
William Turkel, Devon Elliott, 3D printing	2 Dec (Assignment 2 due)



The Classroom Environment:

- Students are expected to treat each other respectfully and that should be reflected in both conduct and language.
- In this spirit, students will turn off cell phones and other audible devices when entering the classroom.
- Students are encouraged to use laptops or tablets to take notes and for course-related activities.
- Students who have special needs that will influence in any way their ability to complete the required components of this course must notify the instructor and the Office of the Registrar in a timely manner.

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