

History 595 – Digital Historical Practices

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This course has three main goals: 1) to introduce you to technology relevant to your research; 2) to introduce you to technology that can enrich the undergraduate learning experience; 3) to acquaint you with digital practices adaptable to tasks beyond the academy (alt-ac).

This course provides a foundation for your ongoing development as a digital humanist. The syllabus is constructed in such a manner that we build competency over the course of the quarter. Along the way, we acquire familiarity with new tools and modes of analysis. Our goal is to learn enough about some key tools in order to decide whether to pursue additional training – either formal training or self-training. In this sense, we model what should be a life-long habit of staying abreast of new technologies and developing expertise as appropriate to the task at hand.

Our learning takes advantage of the seminar format in the sense that we teach one another. Most of us come to this course with digital expertise in some area. We want to tap into that expertise.

Our curriculum is structured into three, three-week cycles. In the first two sessions of each cycle, we learn about digital tools and learn how to use them. For the third session, we apply one or more of those tools to a project of our own choosing and report the results to seminar. Along the way, we call upon one another as well as local experts to give us guidance and insight. Each of the three cycles is characterized below.

Course Calendar

Week 1 (3/27) – tools and procedures – what we'll be doing; how and why we are doing it guest: Anne Jenner, UW Libraries Special Collections

Cycle One

Week 2 (4/3) – transcription – human and machine; close readings and distant readings guest: Jonathan Bowdler, Geoff Turnovsky

Most humanists, including those working with visual and cinematic sources, need to be able to work with text. Maybe you are carrying out sophisticated discourse analysis on a body of texts, maybe you just need software that supplements your memory of sources that you've read in the course of your research – either way, it's important to be fluent in the tools of transcription, indexing, and retrieval of text.

Week 3 (4/10) – historical testimony, oral history, the interview, the podcast guests: Lorraine McConaghy

Scholars in many fields create their own sources via interview. Often, the body of interviews they capture will form the basis of their own scholarship, but sometimes they are creating an archive simply to preserve testimony that others might use. Oral history – a form of historical testimony – seeks to capture the experiences and points of view of historical subjects.

Meanwhile, as a continuation of our discussion of textual sources last week, I'll be introducing you to some tools for indexing and searching your research archive.

Week 4 (4/17) – practicum - developing and working with a text corpus; gathering testimony and sharing analysis

Cycle Two

Week 5 (4/24) – database creation, content management guests: Josué Estrada, Jessica Bachmann

Research often involves tracking personalities and interactions over time. Group biography or "prosopography" is a core concept in humanistic research because it helps us track key individuals and to understand the networks in which they operate.

Week 6 (5/1) – mapping and visualization, timeline creation guests: Josh Polansky, Eric Johnson

Mapping interactions as information flows or as visualizations of geotagged data can generate key insights.

Week 7(5/8) – practicum – incorporating visual sources, managing content

Cycle Three

Week 8 (5/15) – going public: digital storytelling; the two faces of social media guests: Elliott Stevens & Perry Yee; Madison Heslop

The socialization of information has always mattered for scholars. We are interested in knowledge for its own sake, but we also seek to share that knowledge. Technology keeps lowering the threshold for the use of video as an outlet for scholarship. We also have technology that points a way beyond the limitations of text.

Week 9 (5/22) – going public: social media harvest, social media presence guest: Elise Perachio

Social media give us a real-time feed about events in parts of the world where we have historical expertise; a digital presence helps those who seek context and historical depth find us.

Week 10 (5/29) – practicum – becoming visible